Recognising the constraints that affect professional women's choices:

How do Australian women develop and grow in their professional lives?

By

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Abstract

This study explored the way women of different age groups experience development and growth in their professional lives and how they made sense of that development and growth. Narrative research methods were used to analyse the dialogue that the women in this study present as significant to their development and growth. Differences and similarities in the ways women of two groups told their stories are analysed based on narrative data and gender literature that provides a basis to understand how women have grown in their careers and work. The findings suggest that women of different life stages emphasise different choices and constraints that relate to the ways they are recognised in their work and each woman in this study was seen to offer a unique story about her experience of development and growth. Behind the dominant narrative of career progression there was a gender-specific counter narrative; that of coming to terms with a male-dominated work culture. This was particularly the case for the older group of women (the senior life stage). The findings indicate that women at different life stages define effectiveness and value differently, and that groups (who belong to a particular professional role and age range) share collective experiences concerning what it means to be effective in their work. The narrative approach used here has highlighted the significance of reflective practice and the important role workplace culture plays in constructing social discourses. Life stage appears to have an effect on the career progression of women and the culture in which stories are constructed affects development and growth of women in the Australian workplace.

Student declaration

This thesis is submitted in accordance with the regulations for the Professional degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

I, Susan Elizabeth Mate, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Recognising the Constraints that affect Professional Women's Choices: How do Australian Women Develop and Grow in their professional lives?' is no more than 100,000 words in length exclusive of tables, figures, appendices and references. This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is given in the text.

Signature   Date

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Prologue

The research approach and findings presented in this thesis involved a 10-year long project and throughout this time I have had the privilege of discussing this work with many people. I have had the opportunity to think critically about how to design, conduct and present the outcomes of this qualitative research project. The narrative method I have selected has been drawn from social science research methods and methods applied in adult learning principles as this was where I acquired grounding in research skills. My work as a consultant in the field of learning and development and in the area of career counselling has also influenced my approach to research.

Over the past decade I have focused on the impact of life stage and I have gained insight about the way women transition to new stages. Listening to stories from women at different life stages provides a way to feel less isolated, understanding that others have a counter story is also very valuable, because it is sometimes difficult to talk about this counter experience in workplace contexts. I have also reflected on how life stage has influenced my own outlook and aspirations concerning work and professional growth. During the development of this thesis the focus has been to refine the argument and emphasise the impact life stage has on women's development. The present research was conducted between 2002 and 2013 the stories presented in this study provide insight into the workplace experience of Australian women at a particular time who work within a professional context. The narrative approach is presented as central to exploring women's experience in a particular workplace context.

The present research has a focus on how women develop and grow in their professional lives, but it is also a reflection of how the researcher understands the participants' experiences. It is possible that the opportunity for reflection creates a richer and more insightful pathway for those who are willing to examine the way they analyse data. It is hard work to reflect on your own approach, it is much easier to point the finger, to examine 'others'. Nevertheless, I hope the approach used here adds some value for those researching the workplace, women's experiences and organisational culture in the future. This approach does not only take into account what is dominant and mainstream, but also considers the counter story.

Chapter 1: Why explore professional women's experiences?

1.1. Introduction

This study explores the way women experience development and growth in their work and professional life. The focus of this study is on how women make sense of their development and growth. In particular, the study examines how choices are made, constraints are worked through, and how opportunities are presented and acted upon by individuals. At the core of the study is a comparison of how women of different age groups experience development and growth. Overall, the study explores how women of different life stages make connections between what is central to their work and other life choices and how they tell their stories about their experiences. Relevant themes are considered in the context of the broader social and cultural influences on women who work in managerial and senior managerial roles in Australia. Finally, this thesis discusses opportunities that may enable working women to engage in effective dialogue and inclusive workplace development strategies.

1.2.   Personal stories about work – a subjective study

This thesis has developed over a 10-year period. During the initial stages of the project I focused on the development of professionals of different generations, concentrating on the individual and also compared the stories of women and men. As the research project developed, however, and I broadened my knowledge base and understanding of methodological approaches, the impacts of gender and life stage became distinguishing themes.

My research has provided the opportunity to learn a great deal about the complex dynamics that influence professional work. My focus in this study is not on policies or structures, but rather on how participants make sense of their choices, opportunities and barriers, and how they experience and reflect on their own development and growth. The distinction people make between development and growth is also considered, as is the divergence of perspectives offered by gender and age. The approach I adopted when interviewing participants was informed by my own experiences. Having worked as a professional during my midlife years, I share many views with the study group of 35–45-year-old women. I began my professional career after completing studies in Social Science and Education. In my first professional role in a secondary school I focused on the craft of being a high school teacher of Psychology. I moved into the field of management consulting, working in a broad

range of service industries before beginning work as a career counsellor. When working in the management development area I often thought that many of the tools for insight into career and development were more suited to men's careers. For example, I observed gender and socio-cultural differences concerning the way women spoke about their career paths, their capability and their leadership and management roles.

In addition to being more attuned to masculine ways of viewing the world, these consulting services also appeared to be mostly attuned to white men from a privileged class with access to certain professional networks. At the time, I was aware that professional men and women tended to talk in different ways about their work life, but I couldn't pinpoint exactly how they were different. I wanted to undertake empirical research to develop a deeper understanding of my observations. I had become disillusioned with consulting work, and the long hours and demanding travel schedule became unsuitable for me when my family required more support. Consequently, I became interested in exploring why different types of work seemed more appealing at different life stages. I wondered whether others experienced a sense of displacement in difficult times or found that their values were not aligned with the types of work they were engaged in, and how they worked through these experiences.

When I began this study in 2003 I was working as a career educator with students and academic staff to consider portfolio approaches to career development. I enrolled in a business faculty that had a particular interest in organisational culture as I had an interest in the area of organisational development that began during my management consultant days.

My research has involved reflective practice and has taken shape at an interesting time in my life. I began writing at about the time my grandmother was showing signs of early dementia. My relationship with her was particularly important as I was not brought up by my birth parents. My grandmother played the role of mother in my life and my grandfather (who passed away during my twenties) played the role of father. In many ways, the research journey assisted me to deal with the grief of no longer being able to share stories with my grandmother concerning what was important in our lives. My grandmother's voice echoes that 'things were different in her day' and the opportunities for women were different. She believed that stories about family were important and told and retold stories about how each member of the family provided an important link, they had unique value and by valuing this unique contribution it was possible for the members of the family to form a bond. She spoke a great deal about her role in her family. I have reflected on her voice as well as the voices of

women who work in professional roles and some of those who have chosen not to seek professional work. I have listened to stories from women who discuss periods when the type of work they undertook seemed displaced in their lives or problematic for them and this has helped me to unravel some of my own personal experiences. Like my grandmother, my mother never took up a professional role. Her disabilities have been a barrier for her in many ways, and if she had been born in more contemporary times she may have had different opportunities. I had my daughter in my late thirties, one year after enrolling in my PhD.

This research project provided me with the privilege and luxury of hearing other people's stories and reflecting on how these stories have relevance to both the present study and my own understanding of the similar themes women discuss when telling a story about their development, but also the variation in emphasis at different life stages. As I collected the data for this study I listened for the themes that were emphasised, but also thought about the context in which the stories were told and what the teller avoided talking about. I identified with many of the women's stories. However, the two age groups of women described different experiences. Specifically, the older women reflected on current issues critical to their development and growth as senior women in a male-dominated culture, but they also talked about what was significant for their development while they were moving into these roles. The younger group of women focused on challenges around juggling their work and life demands.

Overall, my personal experience demonstrates that over time the role of professional women has changed in some ways and not in others. This study highlights that women experience the workplace differently at different life stages. It is unclear if it is the individual's perception of their work at these different stages or the workplace culture that imposes expectations on individuals or groups of people as they enter a new stage. The contribution this study makes to knowledge about the development and growth of women at different life stages will be examined. Variations in stories of individual participants and groups of participants from varied life stages will be analysed.

1.3. What is the focus of this research?

This study compares the experiences of two age groups of professional women in Australia – those in senior management roles in the age bracket of 46–56 and those in middle management roles in the age bracket of 35–45. In this study, I explore how women of different ages and levels within an organisation create narratives about their development and

growth in their work and life. The ways in which work–life stories have a gendered significance are rarely compared within different age groups. In this study, I undertake a gender analysis of professional development and growth perception involving 17 women from different generations, seven belong to a senior group and seven belong to a midlife group. In addition to these two groups that were the central focus, I also spoke with one woman who was semi-retired and two who had just started work after completing university. The original intention of this study was to develop insights into the way women and men draw on varied narrative strategies and talk about how they experience workplace culture, therefore I also interviewed some men to contrast the stories, but these interviews are not included in the study as the research is grounded in the experience of women. I was interested in how the women voiced their experiences and how they recognised and expressed their own value in the workplace. As I explored this further I became interested in the way professional identity is understood. A significant feature of this study is an exploration of the process through which people gain insight into their professional identity, as distinct from other aspects of their lives. In the present study, I explore the scholarship of narrative and how this can be utilised to gain insight into self and or professional identity as a narrative creation.

Professional identities develop through the stories we tell others, and ourselves, so they can be explored as a narrative project. In this study, I examine how different narrative approaches – the stories we tell about our lives and work – make meaning and create our sense of self.

Hence, the focus is not on what happened, but rather on the variation in how people narrated their personal and professional identities. In considering what varied, it was important to consider how dialogue influences a person. A key theorist in the narrative field who has also made a significant contribution in feminist studies is Cavarero (2000), who essentially explores Italian perspectives on feminist theory and argues that there are differences in the way women and men narrate their experiences, and that these differences are learnt through language. Cavarero (2000) argues that uniqueness has a meaning that is revealed through the narration of that person's life story, but the story is influenced by the cultural experiences of an individual. Cavarero (2000) places emphasis on the way that stories are formed with particular attention to the pre-existence of meanings that circulate when the stories are told. Cavarero's (2000) work raises some interesting questions about narrative identity creation. For example, she asks if identity exists without a dialogue through which to describe experience?

Within this thesis there is an exploration of the degree to which being a woman of a certain age, in a particular life stages, in a senior or managerial role influence the way the narrator talks about their professional identity? In other words how does experience influence the stories participants have to tell? The key research question posed in this thesis is: how do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages?

Narrative theorists, such as Cavarero (2000), explore identity development and suggest development can be analysed through exploring stories. In Chapter 2 there is an exploration of the way narrative identity theory provides insight into the choices women make at different life stages and how the dialogue that the women draw upon to describe experience is an expression of the culture experienced by women who work within the Australian workplace. Andrew's (2007) highlights that an analysis of personal narratives provides insights into culture and this study explores how individual narratives provide insight into work culture. This thesis intends to build on this body of knowledge that explores women's career narratives. The way in which narratives are gendered and constructed in a particular cultural context with shared dialogical meaning is considered.

1.4. Women, constraints and choices

Women in Western nations have equal opportunity legislation, contraception and access to education and healthcare. The working environment for women in the workplace in general and in management and senior management roles has changed a great deal in the past 50 years (Faludi 1992; Summers 2003; Strachan 2010). However, there is evidence that subtle discrimination still exists in current workplaces (Rudman 1998; Rudman and Glick 1999; Rudman and Kilianski 2000; Sinclair and Lun 2006; Fine 2010). Fine (2010) argues that gender inequalities cannot be explained by biological differences in men and women; instead, Fine asserts that fewer women are in managerial or senior managerial roles because social stereotypes are embedded in organisational cultures. For example, psychology studies have indicated certain favourable biases towards male applicants (Rudman 1998; Rudman and Glick 1999; Rudman and Kilianski 2000). Fine (2010) suggests that we can be prejudiced even though we do not intend to be, because it is hard to shift attitudes that are recognised and sanctioned as acceptable:

> *'When we categorise someone as male or female, as we inevitably do, gender associations are automatically activated and we perceive them through the filter of*

cultural beliefs and norms. This is sexism gone underground – unconscious and unintended – and social psychologists and lawyers are becoming very interested in how this now, covert and unintended form of sexism disadvantages women (as well as non whites) in the workplace' (Fine 2010: 66).

This is not just the case concerning how women and men see others, but also, Hardin and Conley (2001) suggest that the way women see themselves in particular is influenced by significant others in their lives and by the culture in which they work and live. Sinclair and Lun (2006) tested the degree to which cultural stereotypes impact on cognitive functioning. They found that women shift their self-view to correspond with the perceived views of a significant other but not those of an unimportant other. Perceptions of self may influence negotiation style and possibly even career aspirations.

Piterman (2008) suggests that women and men negotiate their career development in different ways:

'An examination of the complexities of incorporating gender equity into corporate culture reveals organization dynamics and patterns of behaviour that result in men and women negotiating the career ladder to radically different effect' (Piterman 2008: 32).

Piterman (2008) suggests that many organisations are attempting to encourage gender diversity in various workplace roles; the dominant culture is distinctively geared towards the career progression of men.

Women are sometimes also hard on each other. This is apparent when we look at Mia Freedman's website. Freedman, the popular Melbourne editor and publisher of women's website mamamia.com.au, and popular writer about women's experiences has numerous posts on her blog about motherhood. Freedman encourages dinner party etiquette when writing on her blog, but these posts often attract inflammatory comments from those who have decided to exit the workplace and become stay-at-home mums (commonly labelled SAHM) and those who work in paid positions outside the home. Mums who work outside the home cite the capacity to be a role model for their children and the financial constraints impacting on their decisions. Those who don't work outside the home talk about the value of being available to their children, the inflexibility of the work they undertook to meet the demands of their role of mother and limitations of childcare services. Women may seem to

have more equality in terms of career advancement and freedom, but Pocock (1998, 2005) suggests this is not so.

The notion of choice and constraint is a key issue for professionals, in particular, the areas in which the constraints have flow-on effects for families and workplace effectiveness (Frone et al 1992; Bardoel et al 2000; Allard et al 2011). The choices women make about their professional lives may be influenced by many factors including their self-perceptions, the messages they receive through popular media, or the way they negotiate roles.

There is compelling evidence that although there have been undeniable advancements in terms of professional women's equality, in significant but subtle ways they are still discriminated against (Pocock 1998, 2005). The initial focus of the present study is to look at the individual stories of women to understand how their personal and collective experiences are different.

1.5. Why study women of different ages?

The two age groups in this study could be described as 'Baby Boomers' and 'Generation Xers'. The midlife group share a similar age range to the Generation Xers and the women of the senior life phase share a similar demographic to the Baby Boomers (this statement is based on demographics provided by McCrindle and Wolfinger's 2010). However, it is not generational values that are the focus here, but rather the experiences individuals perceive as problematic or constraining of their choices and what they emphasise in their stories about their professional development and growth.

In this thesis I examine whether there is a collective experience within the groups and whether there is a relationship between stages of career and particular experiences. For example, do groups of people think about their careers in particular ways? Do they have similar or different subjective processes? Exploring different age groups has methodological significance for this study because there is an interest in the stories different groups have to tell. It is possible that members of a group have shared social experiences that affect expectations about professional development and growth, but variations could also exist within a group. It is possible that there may be more subjective patterns evident in groups at different life stages – subjective patterns place more emphasis on the personal, and inter-subjective patterns on relations with others. I explore the way stories can be unravelled to identify significant decisions and turning points in a person's life. Bruner (1987) suggests that

people construct language by engaging in social interactions with others and learning how to interpret meanings through interactions. The interactions between people of different groups are important, but also the way patterns of interactions are understood and interpreted by individuals (and groups of women) within a particular age group.

One way of grouping age groups is to label them, for instance as 'Boomers' and 'Generation Xers', to explore whether the groups differ in terms of their subjective and inter-subjective patterns. Boomers are usually considered to be those born between 1946 and 1964 (Roberts and Manolis 2000; O'Bannon 2001; Smola and Sutton 2002), while Generation Xers are considered to be those born between 1965 and 1976 (Roberts and Manolis 2000; Smola and Sutton 2002). There is some variation in the date ranges of the generational groupings and also variation in the attitudes attributed to each generational group. McCrindle and Wolfinger (2010) define the Baby Boomer generation as those born between 1946 and 1966, and Generation X as those born between 1965 and 1979. McCrindle and Wolfinger's (2010) label will be used in this thesis to describe the different groups of women and refer to the way groups make sense of their development and growth, not to explore the validity of the terminology of generational difference. Although the influence of generational features is considered in chapter 4 of this thesis as relevant to the construction of stories, the key focus that is explored in the way life stage influences the way in which dialogue is constructed.

Researchers have suggested that different groups with similar social experiences may develop similar values, but this does not necessarily substantiate the claim that different generations have different values (Macky et al 2008; Parry and Urwin 2011). Parry and Urwin (2011) argue that people within particular groups remember similar events but may value these events in different ways. Benson and Brown (2011) suggest that different generational groups have different social experiences that affect attitudes regarding work and relationships formed at work. Macky et al (2008) propose that age, maturity, life stage or career stage and socio-cultural experiences are more likely to influence attitudes to work than the generation in which groups of people are placed.

There are contrary views concerning the degree to which generation, and life stages and stages impact on professional choice. The unique social events that occur during each generation's formative years are thought to shape the attitudes and values of a generational group, including their views on gender roles (Forret et al 2010).

> *'The Baby Boomers came of age during a time of political upheaval (eg: Vietnam War and Watergate), the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the sexual revolution. They believe in working hard to achieve their goals, and appreciate the value of working in teams. While the Baby Boomers are said to "live to work," Gen Xers are said to 'work to live" Gen Xers grew up in a time of high divorce rates and were often latchkey children. They witnessed their parents putting in long hours at work only to be downsized by their employers. Gen Xers tend to emphasize flexibility and autonomy, and place a high value on work-family balance" (Forret et al 2010: 651).*

Forret et al (2010) suggests that gender and the way in which women and men perceive and conceptualise their career has greater impact on choices about career than gender differences, however some generational values may impact on different generations. There is scope to explore the way in which different of women at different life stages tell their story about their professional choice and their gendered roles within the context of their working lives.

The present study has a focus on what the participants say is significant for them in their development and growth and the degree to which patterns can be identified as similar or different among the two generational groups. The focus groups are the Baby Boomers and the Generation Xers. Based on the available research, my premise has been that a group of similar-aged people who work in a similar profession may share some common threads in their stories about effectiveness and constraint. Rhodes (1983) completed a conceptual analysis that indicated a relationship between age and life phase and a subsequent impact on occupational choice; however, this theory applies to the experience of varied groups of people.

Different generations are simply at different stages of their lives and careers and it is not clear whether age is a factor that impacts on development and values. Josselson (2006) undertook a longitudinal study that followed the life pattern of women of a similar age over a 20-year period (beginning when they left college in 1972). Josselson (2006) explored what happened to them as they continued their lives into adulthood, and found that at different stages the group in the study were challenged by varying life events and these events shared some common elements. It is not known whether a group of people of the same gender but differing in age experience development and growth in similar ways or whether this impacts on the way they identify with their age group.

Here, by focusing on the variation in the way stories are told I explore how people develop within their workplaces and how they make sense of this development. There may be a relationship between ages and what is remembered as significant to development and growth, but this may also be dependent on the degree of homogeneity between members of a group.

1.6. A way of understanding the experiences of different age groups

Exploring memory has both theoretical and methodological implications; however, it is important to emphasise that memory is considered to be socially learnt and developed through engaging in language and stories with others (Ryan 2009b). Halbwachs and Coser (1992), social theorists who published a study many years ago on 'The Social Frameworks of Memory', suggests that memory is learnt through social engagement in collective experience.

> *'It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (Halbwachs and Coser 1992: 38).*

Halbwachs and Coser (1992) thus argue that it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent or persistent fashion outside their group context.

More contemporary research highlights that people who have worked in a similar environment and who are a similar age share similar memories. Memory work is a method that is summarised as:

> *'Embodied in women's social location and social experience, as constructed in community and as a site through which to begin inquiry' (Naples 2007: 582).*

Kaufman et al (2006) provide the view that memories work, which has developed a particular branch of narrative research, can be explored through an individual or collective lens. Widerberg (2008) states that when people asked to tell a story about a particular theme, for example 'fatherhood', they have the opportunity to discuss both individual and collective memories.

> *'Within social science research memories are used to substantiate an experience (or set of experiences), to pin down descriptively so as to make the retold experience as contextually rich as possible' (Widerberg 2008: 2).*

Widerberg (2008) argues that the telling of stories provides an outline of individual and collective identities and provides an avenue to explore themes other than those that dominate popular cultures. Widerberg (2008) primarily analyses gender themes in collective groups.

> *'It is a method where the self is not the focus but rather the situation – the relations in the situation – that makes up the experience. This means interpreting the relations forming the causes in the experience, rather than looking for the experiences 'in' the individual. That is, memories are written and interpreted in order to see all levels which form the experience in question' (Widerberg 1998: 196).*

In this thesis I discuss how women talk about their experiences and I examine the common threads and patterns, but also highlight variations in the way that women of different ages or different life stages reflect on and make sense of their professional lives.

Rogers (1951) proposes that moving from one phase to another is dependent on the influence of psychosocial conditions that limit or inhibit growth and movement. The participants in this study are of different ages, and it is probable that they are at different life stages. Rogers (1951) considers the terms 'congruence' and 'incongruence' to be crucial to the development of the 'real self'. Rogers' (1951) phenomenological approach explores the actualising tendency and the gestalt perspective on the concept of 'I' and 'me'. Rogers (1951) sees development as dependent on psychological functioning and social conditions that facilitate opportunity for growth. It is possible that development is very personal and therefore the variation within groups may limit the opportunity to draw collective conclusions. Rogers (1951) proposes that people experience similar phases of development with inter-subjective significance, in that they are shared by a group of similar-aged participants. Erikson (1979) discussed psychosocial stages and proposed that in later life (65+) people move through a stage called 'ego integrity verses despair' and this is a stage where they reflect back and make sense of their development and of their life. Of interest in this thesis is the way in which people make sense of their lives at different stages and the way the relationships they develop enable them or restrict them from making sense of their professional life.

Inter-subjectivity has been defined as a relationship of mutual recognition (Benjamin 1998a 1998b); processes by which people learn through others. The wholeness of inter-subjectivity theory is attractive, because the concept means that recognition of self is not 'owned' by self or 'other' but stems from an interaction that creates a process of learning. Benjamin (1988b) provides a comprehensive perspective on inter-subjectivity, and proposes that through

asserting oneself and being recognised by the 'other' the self is affirmed – a reciprocal or mutual process. Inter-subjective requires recognition of reliance on others and simultaneous recognition of our own distinctiveness (Benjamin 2005). Inherent in the theory are paradoxes: connection and difference; assertion and accommodation; dependence and separation; and recognition and destruction (Benjamin 2005). This conflict is thought to give rise to transformation (Stacey 2003). Benjamin (2005) provides a relational perspective of the self; the notion of inter-subjective is seen as the field of intersection between two subjectivities.

> *'Inter-subjective theory postulates that the other must be recognised as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence' (Benjamin 2005: 10).*

Benjamin (2005) defines a distinct feature of the separation-individuation theory, it is seen as a theory that provides the opportunity to apply an inter-subjective lens. In the separation-individuation theory, the individual is moving towards autonomy and separateness, 'the process is the creation of a psychic structure through internalisation of the object in the service of greater independence' (Benjamin 2005: 2); however, inter-subjective theory asks how a person becomes capable of enjoying recognition with another. The present study questions whether groups of women are recognised by themselves and others in different ways. There is an exploration of women's narratives to gain insight into how they believe they are recognised in the workplace and constrained by it.

This study compares how two age groups of women at different life stages tell their stories and re-construct their narratives and potentially their memories of their experiences. The nature of storytelling relies on the subjective memories of the participants and their inter-subjective relationships with others. The present study also explores the way women from different age groups talk about their experiences and their interactions in the workplace and identifies what is emphasised in these spheres.

1.7. Why study the experiences of professionals?

In this study, 'professionals' are considered to be 'white collar' workers who perform managerial or senior managerial work within the production and service industries, including consultants, chief executive officers (CEOs), human resource workers, business people, senior academics, managers and senior managers. These professionals are not homogeneous and their professional lives are not experienced in equivalent ways. The word 'professional'

traditionally means a person with particular learnt abilities (Macquarie 2006); however, it may also mean people who have attained experience in a specialised field and who recognise themselves as professionals and are recognised by others in a professional capacity.

Professional work has been understood through varying analytical perspectives and is seen to have different meaning in our lives at different times. This study explores how varying groups of professionals perceive constraints to their development and how they feel they are recognised by others in their workplace. Career can be defined as a person's life work (Macquarie 2006), as opposed to a job that has a specified focus and outcome. Career for many professionals is seen as fluid and an ongoing process throughout their lives (Defillippi and Arthur 1994; Weick 2001). Boundaries may shift to re-form professional roles or career directions, and these new boundaries, according to Whitchurch (2008), influence a person's notion of their professional identity. Handy (1994) uses the phrase 'portfolio approach to career' to describe how people often bring together an array of different jobs, working part-time or in consulting or project capacities, writing books, taking on family responsibilities or learning a language, and this collective portfolio assists them to make sense of their professional identity. Do people with more fragmented portfolios find it more challenging to identify with a professional group? Here, I consider whether women identify with their professional roles in varying ways during different life stages.

1.8. Framing the problem

Forming and sustaining a sense of professional identity is seen as more problematic in contemporary society, because people play more roles than they once did and roles are less clearly defined by social standards than they were in the past (Cote and Levine 2003). A key issue to be explored in this thesis is the way women identify themselves in their professional roles at different life stages. This raises questions about collective experiences and the degree to which women share collective experiences at different life stages. In this thesis, the way narrative is used by different groups of women at different life stages is considered to have relevance to the development and growth of their professional identity.

The way the production of story connects with professional identity construction is also explored in this thesis. Professional identity development is considered to be problematic and at the centre of the analytic concept of narrative identities. Specifically, narrative identity is researched here within the framework of the interactions that the participants revealed. Within the narrative field of inquiry there are multiple perspectives on the way narratives

play a role in the formation of identity (Freeman 1993; Georgakopoulou 2006; Tamboukou 2008). This thesis aims to contribute to understanding of the way professional identities are formed and considers how gender and life stage affect the development of professional narratives.

1.9. Aims

The aim of this research is to develop an overall narrative that highlights how professional women experience being effective in the workplace as well as capturing what constrains their development and growth. This overarching aim provides a basis to explore how women experience development and growth and to identify patterns in the stories from women at different life stages.

By exploring how women identify themselves in their professional lives through the stories they tell it may be possible to gain deeper insight into the way in which they are recognised and constrained. The aim is to identity patterns that are similar and different within the stories of women from different life stages.

1.10. The research question

The key research question of this thesis is: How do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages?

1.11 Concluding comments

In this chapter, I have introduced the thesis as a narrative inquiry into the way professional women experience development and growth. I argue that a comparison of the experiences of different age groups may provide a richer understanding of how professional identities are developed, along with the way professional women in Australia overcome some of the constraints in their working lives. By exploring the stories of women at varied life stage it may be possible to gain greater insight into the way women make choices about their professional development and growth. In Chapter 2 I explore the relevant literature in the field and discuss the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study. Chapter 3 then provides an overview of the narrative approach used to analyse the data. Chapters 4 and 5 are data chapters that present the findings of the study. Chapter 6 discusses the key findings and the implications of the findings. Finally, Chapter 7 provides interpretations and conclusions about the findings.

Chapter 2: The development and growth of women in the workplace

2.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the aims of this study and highlighted that this study explores how women make sense of their workplace experiences and whether the way they make sense of their experiences is different at different life stages. In this study there is an exploration of the way women develop insight into what is considered effective professional development and growth and what is considered to be ineffective. The construction of effectiveness as defined by the storytelling process of participants is explored. Chapter 1 also highlighted that the workplace has changed for professional women and this may impact on their stories about development and growth and the way they tell their stories at different life stages. There have been significant improvements in the workplace for women in terms of career opportunity; however, despite these improvements constraints continue to be recognised. Knowledge obtained through gender research is presented in this chapter to provide insight into the way women make choices at different life stage. The way women make choices is considered problematic because the choices made are seen to relate to the way women identify themselves and experience a sense of recognition as well as constraint in their place of work. What is considered effective may be unique to individuals and groups who carry out professional work. This thesis has an interest in exploring how individuals understand the experience of effectiveness and what has worked for them and what they believe is valued in their work. In this chapter, key elements of narrative theory are discussed and the relationship this theory has to identity, agency and gender research is analysed. Gendered forms of narratives are discussed as an area that has provided considerable insight into the experience of women, this is the area of knowledge that this thesis aims to contribute to. By drawing on narrative theory, new insights into the experience of women at different life stage are considered. The significance of a narrative approach for exploring development and growth of women at different life stages is presented as a way to address the aims and the primary research question.

2.2. How does the workplace influence the choices made by women at different life stages?

Women have described organisational cultures as having mechanisms that block career opportunities (Kolb et al 2010). Workplace cultures (or what is sometimes referred to as organisational issues) may present barriers for women and therefore limit or constrain the choices that women can make at different stages of their lives. Organisational issues may

include, cultural change, flexible work options, implementation of childcare strategies, professional development and training, mentoring and promotional opportunities. Women have rated strategies such as cultural change, flexible work options and mentoring as beneficial to increase participation rates of women in managerial and senior managerial roles as opposed to men who rarely rate these strategies as beneficial (Finsa 2012).

De Vries (2010) suggests that social learning programs (for example, mentoring) provide a means to facilitate the cultural change required for women to effectively succeed in senior and middle management roles as this provides an opportunity to network and progress in their work. De Vries (2010) acknowledges the gendered nature of the workplace and suggests that social learning may provide a means to avoid perpetuating the status quo of workplace culture and discrimination patterns. Mentoring has become a key strategy to develop people in their work (Erford and Crockett 2012).

There has been very little research exploring how women experience their careers at different life stages and the degree to which cultural changes implemented in organisations impact on how women experience their careers. The following review of relevant literature presents some of the empirical research on those changes, and interprets some of the approaches used to provide insight into organisational change and women's careers.

2.2.1. Gender and career constraints

Women of different generations may have been influenced by different constraints. Indeed, organisational support and development of employees has changed markedly over the past few decades. There is extensive evidence that opportunities for women in general and professional women in particular have grown significantly since the 1950s in Australia and barriers have diminished (Pocock 2003; Peetz et al 2007; Sheridan et al 2009; Ross-Smith and McGraw 2010; Strachan and Burgess 2000). Some of the improvements include access to contraception, healthcare, education, equal opportunity legislation and greater supports for working mothers. However, despite this growth of opportunity women remain in the minority in senior managerial and senior professional roles (Ross-Smith and McGraw 2010). Several studies indicate how constraint factors in women's personal lives can prevent them from taking up the demands of senior roles (Bardoel et al 2007). Ashcraft and Blithe (2009) found that 56 per cent of women leave midway through their career, around the time they begin having children. Jacobs (1999) found that women's careers are affected by discontinuity and part-time employment; women often opt for part-time employment due to family care

responsibilities. It seems that at midlife, personal and professional demands often collide for women, which impacts on the choices they make about their career. Why and how professional women continue working beyond midlife is a topic full of contradictions. To provide a comprehensive picture of the obstacles that affect women's choices it is important to first explore the changes in the Australian workplace context that may have influenced the way professionals develop. Women that entered the workplace in the 1960s experienced a different workplace demographic than women entering in the 1990s, as legislation has influenced workplace demographics (Strachan 2010).

2.2.1. Changing workplace demographics

Compared with the 1950s there are now far more women in the workplace and far more flexible arrangements that enable women to participate in paid work; however, during their middle years women often take up part-time work (Bardoel et al 2007). Over the past 30–50 years, there have been changing patterns in the proportion of males and females employed, and the proportion of women has increased in every age group (Evans and Kelley 2008; ABS 2006). While the proportion of men in employment has declined from 74 per cent in 1979 to 69 per cent in 2011, men continue to be represented as the dominant group, in full-time employment and in senior roles (ABS 2006, 2011). A recent study of women in leadership roles in Australia found that representation remains very low (EOWA 2006). In 2006, only 8.7 per cent of directorship positions were held by women in ASX200 companies (EOWA 2006). In a slightly better ratio, women held 12 per cent of senior management positions in the same companies, although only three per cent occupied chief executive officer (CEO) positions.

The key growth area in Australia in which women have been represented is junior roles in the service sector (ABS 2006). There have been shifts in the gender composition and the types of work available, but also it appears that there has been a shift in the number of mothers of young children that participate in the workforce. The main growth in women's employment has been in part-time work for women, more women of the midlife age bracket work part-time than any other age bracket and the number of women in their midlife working part-time is in Australia than the per cent of most other countries (ABS 2006). One way to account for this trend is that women in Australia are tending to have their children later in life (Campbell and Charlesworth (2004). Australian women are having children in their thirties through to their early forties), having fewer children, spending less time out of the workforce, and often

taking up casual positions when they return to the workplace (Campbell and Charlesworth 2004). Women's work in the early 21st century has been characterised by changes in the way families participate in work. Australia, like many other developed nations, has experienced a decline in the fertility rate (ABS 2011). During the 20th century Australia's total fertility rate peaked at 3.5 in 1961, and fell to 1.73 in 2011 (Department of Family and Community Services 2011). These changing demographics highlight a variance in social choice, that is, individuals and groups are making different choices about work and having children.

These changing trends highlight that more women are working after they have children, but often working in part-time or casual roles that require them to manage their family and workplace responsibilities. Generally it is women who 'juggle' these responsibilities:

> *'The predominant family pattern (44 per cent of families is two parents with two incomes while about 23 per cent of families have a single parent. In 2000 51 per cent of couple families had both partners employed. The husband was employed in 89 per cent of all couple families with dependants with 95 per cent working full time. The wife was employed in 61 per cent of couple families with dependants, 26 per cent on full time basis, a rise from 20 percent in the early 1980's. The majority of one-parent families with dependants (86 per cent) were headed by women, 49 per cent of whom were employed' (Strachan 2010: 125).*

Women taking up more senior roles have generally had their children younger or do not take up these roles while their children are young. Educated women working in more prestigious occupations have higher rates of childlessness (Miranti et al 2008). The increase in participation rates for women aged 45 years or older has been greater than for younger women, the average age that women have children is continuing to increase (Laws and Sullivan 2010). The participation rate of women in employment has increased from 47 to 78 per cent for women aged 45–54 years; however, there has been little change to their 'average' working hours (Gilfillan and Andrews 2011).

It is not clear from the empirical research what the social and financial factors are that encourage women's choices to take up part-time work; however, it is clear that more are working part-time. The increase in part-time workers has not only been seen in Australia, but also in many other Western countries over the past 20–35 years (Bardoel et al 2007). Bardoel et al (2007) studied the dimensions of quality part-time work, including: the first dimension relates to work–time arrangements and includes flexibility around schedules; the second

dimension relates to job variables and includes wages, employee benefits, employment security, access to training, employee voice and high skill and task autonomy. Bardoel et al (2007) suggests that a mutual gain approach is required to further explore how part-time workers and employers of part-time workers benefit from offering the dimensions of quality part-time work. The increase in women working and these demographic features could also be described as a social feature – it is a change in the workplace demographic and a choice that women of earlier generations did not make, that is, the choice to take up part-time work.

The demographic data suggest that when women have children and move to part-time employment they may be less likely to develop in their professional lives because human resource departments focus more on full-time employees when implementing quality improvements (Charlesworth et al 2002; Burgess 2005). Bardoel (2003, 2004) indicates that part-time workers are less likely to have access to development opportunities, particularly in the Australian service sector, the area of work that attracts more women than men. One of the barriers for women to develop in the workforce could be the nature of the employment they engage in, but also unpaid work they undertake, for example, care of children and broader family members and domestic work may limit the time they are available for paid employment.

The demographic data suggest that more women in their midlife engage with part-time work and work that does not provide an employee voice or high skill and task autonomy (Bardoel et al 2007). The concept of 'equal opportunity' holds that citizens should be equally placed to obtain social and political benefits (Scruton 2007). Engaging in part-time work does not necessarily lead to reduced access to the workplace institution or equal opportunity; however, it is important to recognise that women remain a minority in senior managerial roles and women in their midlife are more likely to be engaged in part-time employment which often does not allow for managerial or senior managerial responsibility.

2.2.3. Changing workplace legislation

There is substantial evidence to suggest that women of different generations may have been influenced by different workplace legislation as well as different work values (Wetlesen 2013). Achieving equality at work for women has undergone several stages of legislative change across three generations of women in Australia (Strachan 2010). National policy as defined through legislation has had an impact on women's participation in the workforce. Strachan (2010) argues that in the 1950s there was legally sanctioned discrimination against

women – women's paid work was subsidiary to men, and full employment was a notion privileged to men (Firth 2004). The 21st century in Australia, equality between the sexes is a national goal. Equal opportunity legislation is designed to promote women's participation in all sectors of paid employment (Burgess et al 2007). Strachan (2010) outlines three stages of change in the Australian workplace since the 1950s: the first phase began in the 1950s, and privileged men. The second phase, from around the 1970s, started to address overt discrimination against women; and the third phase, which focused more on equal opportunity, started around the mid 1980s.

> *'In the 1950s and 1960s men were regarded as the wage earners and women the homemakers, with women barred from some jobs and paid less than men. In the 1970s legislation and equal pay cases removed overt discrimination against women; from the mid 1980s the complexity of achieving equality for women at work was recognised through equal opportunity legislation, work and family policies and equal pay inquiries. In 2010 the "good life" for women is having the same opportunities and outcomes in employment as men'* (Strachan 2010: 117).

Strachan (2010) highlights that the reality of achieving the 'good life' – described as having the same opportunities as men – is difficult, despite profound advancement since the 1950s, arguing that women only held 45 per cent of managerial and professional roles in 2008 and 10.7 per cent of senior roles. Strachan (2010) indicates that the choices women make may be constrained by hostile organisational cultures and a lack of practices that assist with managing paid work and family care. However, major changes have occurred in the conditions for women, for instance anti-discrimination legislation requires equal opportunity in regards to conditions and rewards, although most women's opportunity to move to the managerial or senior ranks of organisations may be limited (Strachan 2010).

Equal opportunity studies have found that women in leadership roles in Australia are paid significantly less than their male counterparts (EOWA 2008). Recent estimates by the Equal Opportunity for Women Agency suggest that women earn only 58 per cent of the average wage of men in the same group of 'top earners' (EOWA 2008). Global studies have found differences concerning work patterns for women and men; men earn more than women, work less and occupy more of the top jobs; but women live longer, are better educated and retire younger (OEDC 2010). The gender pay gap (also known as the gender wage gap) is the difference between male and female earnings expressed as a percentage of male earnings

(OECD 2010). Inequality exists when there are no policies to enable economies to make the most of the talent pool and ensure that men and women have a fair chance to contribute both at home and in the workplace (OECD 2010). The OECD's gender initiative is a measure of the importance of the human element in creating better policies for better lives. There is debate as to what extent this is the result of gender differences, implicit discrimination due to lifestyle choices (e.g. number of hours worked, need for maternity leave), or because of explicit discrimination. Buttigieg and Gahan (2011) suggest that any modelling of pay discrimination needs to take into account the endogeneity (the fact that correlations arise from varied forms of measurement) of wage and non-wage awards. By exploring the varied modelling approaches it is suggested that we may enhance our understanding of workplace discrimination (Buttigieg and Gahan 2011).

Much of the gender research is grounded in gender theory. Gender theory is based on the assumption that the biological differences between men and women do not account for the gender differences between masculine and feminine. These differences need to be understood by exploring the way social structures operate, structures described as having an exogenous origin (Scruton 2007). Gender studies exploring cultural–national elements that impact on women's careers tend to highlight variations in pay and career opportunity (Koskina 2009; Banks and Milestone 2011). A number of features are attributed to exogenous parameters (originating from outside the women), for example, institutional frameworks are identified as impacting on career opportunities and the pay associated with particular careers that attract a higher concentration of women (Koskina 2009; Ryan 2009a; Banks and Milestone 2011; Hawarden and Marsland 2011).

Occupational gender segmentation or segregation refers to the way women or men dominate particular jobs and occupations. The reasons why gender-based wage inequalities persist are often explained by human capital theory, which is based on the notion that women have a different capacity for productivity and may even reflect personality traits (Becker 1964, 1993). The exogenous explanation is that patriarchal social structures create these differences together with stereotyped views about productivity and effectiveness. Although there have been significant legislative changes over the past 60 years, the issue of constraint and opportunity is complicated by the different choices that women and men may make about the importance of professional work in their lives, along with other exogenous factors. Wage differentiation and changing legislative practices may influence the constraints women experience; however, throughout history women have experienced a different range of

obstacles to men. It is not clear whether the social experiences women have affect their experiences and expectations concerning development and growth in their working lives. Social and cultural factors influence choice, behaviour and expectations and these can be seen to have gender significance (Barrett 2009). Barrett (2009) found that women and men in Australian workplaces have a different understanding of what constitutes effective workplace communication. Gender research provides a basis to understand some of the changes that women have experienced in their work and some of the ways in which women who were employed in the 1950's may be different from people who were employed in the 1980's. It is possible that women who experience a different workplace tell different stories about their experiences because they recall being constrained by varied cultural or organisational barriers.

2.2.4. Changing perceptions of women's careers

The key research question for this thesis is: How do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages? It is possible that women of different life stages and even generations have made different choices because the barriers reduced as they moved into senior roles and also the legislation has changed and consequently provided opportunity for greater choice. It is also possible that women understand or conceptualise their career differently than they once did and that provides opportunity for greater choice. There is substantial evidence to suggest that careers are now defined more broadly and in a more complex way than the previous linear models (Forret et al 2010). There is a decade of research from scholars preoccupied with questions about boundaries and the boundless career concept (De Fillippi and Arthur 1994; Guest et al 1996; Weick 1995; Bagdadli et al 2003; Sullivan and Arthur 2006). Quesenbury and Trauth (2012) suggest that more flexible organisational interventions that account for diversity and variation among women, and move away from stereotypes about 'one size fits all' are more likely to be effective.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) provide a way to understand the working lives of people that 'juggle' multiple roles and who are required to make choices about balancing competing demands; they suggest a kaleidoscope model of career development as opposed to a lifecycle approach. Kaleidoscope models fit workers' concerns for authenticity, balance and challenge, vis a vis the demands of their careers in this new millennium. This kaleidoscope model may

be useful in this research as generational and gender differences and similarities are considered to encompass a range of complexities in professionals' lives.

> *'Like a kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements, women shift the patterns of their careers by rotating different aspects in their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways' (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005: 1).*

Women's careers may be characterised not only by diffusion and empowerment but also by flexibility (Inkson 2008). Varied organisational mechanisms have been identified that discriminate against women these include lack of flexibility, opportunity for career development and child care facilities (Powell and Mainiero 1992; Calas and Smircich 1996).

Wetlesen (2013) explored the work values of second generation equity; she asked whether people who had grown up in families that made a choice to share family responsibility and paid work also practiced gender equity and shared responsibilities. Wetlesen (2013) found that the equity pattern was rarely reproduced. Instead, a number of factors influenced the choice to share paid work and family responsibilities.

There is empirical evidence that, despite changes in organisational cultures and concepts of career, women often choose to sacrifice their career in preference for family (Lovejoy and Stone 2012; Cahusac and Kanji 2013). Cahusac and Kanji (2013) explored the experiences of mothers in professional and managerial roles and found that organisational cultures that do not have flexible working arrangements tend to push this group out of the workforce. Lovejoy and Stone (2011) interviewed women to identify career experiences after having children. Their study was based on 54 in-depth interviews with stay-at-home mothers and found that after women took time out of their careers (so-called 'opting out') to look after children their workplace aspirations often changed. Women who 'opted out' were often drawn towards new, lower paid and lower status roles so they could continue to manage family responsibilities whilst working in some capacity.

Kolb et al (2010) used interviews and discussions with more than 100 women across a wide spectrum of leadership positions to examine the key challenges and probable traps along career pathways, and the strategic moves required to achieve success. A key finding was that:

> *'a woman seeking to establish herself at the leadership table ... must negotiate her way through a number of tests that her male colleagues often bypass' (Kolb et al 2010: 3).*

Kolb et al (2010) highlight that understanding these gender hurdles forms the important context for understanding strategies for negotiation. In other words, the way a woman understands her choices and negotiates these is important to the way she develops in her profession.

Further research into the way in which women make sense of their experiences and of their choices about their career may focus more on how they understand their development and growth as opposed to how they understand their career because this may address the existing gaps in theoretical understanding between professional choice, professional identity and how women believe they are recognised and constrained in their professional work cultures. Sullivan and Arthur (2006) proposed that psychological mobility, that is an individual's capacity for movement as perceived through the mind of the career actor, is influenced by gender. It is possible that psychological mobility is gendered and it may also be influence by phase of career or stage of life, the degree to which these features impact may be explored through narrative theory concerning identity development. The relational features that may impact on psychological mobility are discussed below by drawing on research that provide insight into development of a professional identity, a narrative identity and gender workplace identity.

2.3. Women developing a professional identity

It is possible that the strength of a women's quest or aspiration to pursue her career identity may impact on her choices. Lobel and Clair (1992) explored the extent to which individuals identified with family as opposed to career (that is, the degree to which their salient identities were oriented to work or family) increased the performance of employees.

> *'Our results indicate that the salience of an individual's career identity, for both men and women, is an important variable for researchers to consider when assessing determinants of work effort and the sizes of merit increases. The effects of career identity salience, through modest, were stronger than the effects associated with gender or family responsibility' (Lobel and Clair 1992: 1066).*

Identifying with a professional role may be stronger in some individual than others and the degree to which one identifies with their profession may in part determine their success and/ or effectiveness in their profession.

Trethewey (2012) found that professional service firms play a role in defining the legitimacy of certain types of embodied identities and gendered perceptions of the self. Trethewey (2012) research highlights that implications for equality and diversity continue to be prevalent because women that 'fit' the profile for professional service firms are more likely to be accepted and socialised into a firm than women who do not have the 'fit'.

Hakim (2008) contends that not all women wish to aspire to higher levels within an organisation and those that do chose to remain childless and therefore may not be interested in balancing work and family life. Hakim (2008) developed a typology grounded in preference theory, proposing that it provides some explanation of the way women make choices about engaging in paid work and/or home duties and family life. Hakim (2008) explored the various preferences women have for work and found that there are three groups: women who prioritise career over family; women who prioritise family life over work; and a group called 'adaptive', who prioritise neither work nor family life. This suggests that women are most effective if they make the right choice for their personal priorities about how to 'fit' work into their lives; however, it does not provide an understanding of the struggles women experience in balancing their work and family life or some of the challenges associated with the development of women's career pathways (Koskina 2009; Smith et al 2010; Jogulu and Wood 2011; Theunissen et al 2011). Walsh (2012) found that despite an aspiration to progress in a law firm, women experience fewer opportunities to progress in their careers and the nature of the culture as well as the availability of flexible working options were the key barriers for progression. Despite some evidence to suggest that it is the way a women identifies with her work that influences her aspirations and opportunities, there is enough evidence to suggest that it is not entirely the way a women identifies with her work that impact on her quest to succeed. The aspiration and the culture in which the aspiration is formed appear to be integral features that impact on choice. Therefore research approaches that explore how the aspiration and the culture impact on choices seem most appropriate to gain insight into the key research question posed in this thesis. By exploring aspirations it is also possible to explore the way identify themselves in their professional lives. Interviews obtained from narrative can be found to demonstrate the way in which storytellers generate knowledge about their career, their narrative identity and their knowledge about the gendered

nature of work (Johnson 2009). Johnson (2008) explores how the discursive elements of story provide insight into the ways in which identity is agentive and constructed through engagement in social practice. The following section explores how stories are used to make sense of our lives generally and more specifically the gendered nature of narratives focused on working lives.

2.3.1. Narrative: positioned identity

Positioning analysis provides a means to explore how women's stories reflect their 'socially situated identity'. Socially situated identity theory (Gee 2010) has a focus on the way discursive forms of language are constructed. Positioning analysis is based on an interaction's approach with origins in social psychology (Harré and van Langenhove 1999). In social psychology, the concept of positioning was used by Walkerdine (1984) to highlight that an analysis of discursive positions provides insight into interpersonal communication. In particular the way interpersonal communication is constructed to form sometimes constraining rather than liberating practices. Walkerdine (1984) highlighted that this form of analysis provides a way for professionals whose concern is with facilitation of personal and social change. The personal narratives group (1989) and Riessman (2001) highlight the significance of positioning analysis to narrative methods of analysis. Particularly when drawing on analysis of personal narratives as a positioning analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning.

> 'Narratives are a particularly significant genre for representing and analysing identity in its multiple guises in different contexts. The methods allow for systematic study of experience and (for feminist researchers) the changing meaning of conditions that affect women disproportionately' (Riessman 2001: 23).

A positioning analysis begins with attention to the overall form of an oral interview narrative to explore the temporal structure of a narrative, whereas 'socially situated identity theory' (for example, women may make reference to how equal opportunity legislation or their notion of what effectiveness means as a way to describe their choices). Socially situated identity theory and positioning analysis are relevant to this thesis because there is an interest in exploring how women identity themselves but also how they believe they are recognised and constrained in their place of work. Positioning analysis has focus on analysing the position that the storyteller constructs.

Somers (1994) argued that bringing the rich dimensions of ontological narrative to the new identity approaches in social theory is one way to reconceptualise social agency. However, she does not suggest that there is no place for social categories or constructions but highlights that a relational processes to explore narrative identity will depend on epistemological principles and categories being informed by time, space and narrative.

> *'The "narrative" dimension of identity presumes that action can only be intelligible if we recognize the various ontological and public narrative in which actors are emplotted. Narrative identities are constituted by a person's temporally and spatially variable place in culturally constructed stories composed of (break-able) rules, (variable) practices, binding (and unbinding) institutions, and the multiple plots of family, nation, or economic life. Most important however, narratives are not incorporated into the self in any direct way; rather they are mediated through the enormous spectrum of social and political institutions and practices that constitute our social world '(Somers 1994: 625).*

Narrative inquiry provides a means to explore the narrative identity theories because participants in narrative interviews provide stories that are endlessly retold tales (Mishler 2004) and stories are cultural reproductions where agency is played out (Andrews et al 2000, Denzin 2000). Within the narrative field of enquiry there are multiple perspectives on the role narratives play in the formation of identity (Freeman 1993, 2011; Zimmerman 1998; Georgakopoulou 2006; Tamboukou 2008). Bamberg (2003) proposed that narrative inquiry provides an avenue to undertake 'positioning analysis', in other word explore how people construct identities through their talk in interaction with others. Bamberg's (2003) empirically grounded approach provides a way to explore how women identify themselves in their professional lives. By drawing on the concept of 'positioning analysis' the narrative approach will be further discuss in the following chapter (Chapter 3). The theoretical foundation of identity positioning can be further explored by drawing on the work of Ricoeur (1992) and Gee (2000). Ricoeur (1992) and Gee (2000) present the view that identity is (re)constructed through language. A key difference between the two theorists is that Gee (2000) presents narrative as a practice that can shift across a person's 'internal states', which are located methodologically through discourse analysis. Ricoeur (1992) describes identity as a concept that can be understood through the study of language theory and explored through the analysis of narratives.

Ricoeur (1992) illustrates how language theory provides an avenue to gain insight into the process through which identity is constructed. Identity in Ricoeur's (1992) theory is viewed as socially (re)constructed. Therefore any discursive exchange could be seen to facilitate possibilities for changing identity. Ricoeur's principal work on narratives is the monumental *Time and Narrative* (1984–88). Ricoeur's later work, titled *Life: a Story in Search of a Narrator* (Ricoeur 1986), provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which the study of language is theoretically relevant to the study of narrative identity. Ricoeur (1992) proposes that a narrative analysis provides a way of exploring identity because the analysis of narratives are involve an exploration of the dialogue between one's history, present beliefs, values, and the social, cultural, historical and political forces that surround an individual or group at any given time and place. Thus, the philosophical problems inherent in static conceptualisations of the self are overt when a narrative form of analysis is used because the 'self' (in narrative forms of analysis) is portrayed as the subject of myriad experiences; it is not consistent or continuing. Ricoeur (1992) uses the term 'discordant concordance' to illustrate how we relate aspects of our stories and experiences to one another. The focus on language offers insight into a nuanced interweaving of a counter narrative with the more dominant story, but also provides insight into an identity quest.

Ricoeur (1984) discussed the view that the heroic narrative is a romance plot, and to reach their quest people tell a story about how they strive for a quest and once attained they are redeemed in some form. This 'quest story' is a discourse that is developed through many social exchanges. Campbell (2008) draws from religion, anthropology, literature and film studies to illustrate that there is an inherent human need to tell stories that have a theme underpinned by a story about a hero. Campbell (2008) illustrates that all heroes undergo extreme ordeal to gain reward. He believes that the story about the hero's quest is developed so that people can gain insight into the way they understand themselves. Campbell (2008) draws on what Jung (1959) called 'archetypes of the collective unconscious' and a process known through Buddhist philosophy as 'discrimination' to suggest that people are inspired throughout the annals of human culture, ritual, mythology and vision to develop a story about the hero's quest. According to Campbell (2008):

> *'The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's vision, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present,*

disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which
society is reborn' (Campbell 2008: 14).

Unlike Campbell (2008) who explores what identity may encompass, Ricoeur (1992) provides a theory of language for exploring relational aspects of identity formation providing insight into ways of understanding how interactions are formed and analysed. Ricoeur (1992) characterises the self as a 'narrative project' through which individuals interpretively weave a story uniting the disparate events, actions and motivations of their life experiences. According to Ricoeur (1992), individual patterns of variance exist within each person when we analyse language and how language connects to context. Ricoeur (1991) describes the process relationship of the narrative approach as a means to construct consciousness – 'we learn to become the narrator and the hero of our own story, without actually becoming the author of our own life' (Ricoeur 1991: 51). The problems or constraints people experience, and the way they unfold is dependent on who hears the narrator's story and what opportunities they have within their work culture to change the pattern of the story. Narrative theory provides a way to explore how story helps people make sense of their contributions in cultural contexts. Ochs and Capps (1996) describe the process narratives play in identity development; they are described as a fundamental means of making sense of experience.

> *'Narrative and self are inseparable in that narrative is simultaneously born out of*
> *experience and gives shape to experience … Narrative also interfaces self and society,*
> *constituting a crucial resource for socializing emotions, attitudes and identities,*
> *developing interpersonal relationships, and constituting membership in a community'*
> *(Ochs and Capps 1996: 19).*

Ochs and Capps (1996) describe various modes, for example, discourse modes and collaborative authorship as a means to bring partial selves to life.

Contemporary understanding of identity development and narrative identity in particular highlights that identity is accomplished discursively through engagement in the telling of a story (Johnson 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009). Gender may therefore be represented through the cultural reproductions and talk drawn upon when a woman tells her story about her development and growth as a professional (Riessman 2000).

Gee (2000) provides a multi-theoretical perspective of identity construction based on a theoretical premise that identity is an interactional achievement. Johnson and Watson (2004)

draws on Gee's (2000) notion of discourse identity and demonstrates how students' perceptions and practices of their success at university are discursively constructed; her study provides empirical evidence to suggest that constituted identities are achieved through informal study groups. Johnson's (2004) approach could be drawn on and have relevance for this current theses as it demonstrates a practical approach to explore how the experience of individuals and groups are reflected in the stories they share with an interviewer. Beattie (2009) reinforces Johnson's argument and suggests that narrative inquiry has ontological value in the exploration of stories.

> *'Through inquiry, dialogue and interaction, we engage in the exploration of the stories that have formed us, we explore beneath the surface of those stories, and learn to create and re-create new narratives for our lives. This process of creating and recreating our identities is one of continuous exploration, and of reconstructing and re-forming the existing patterns of our lives into new configurations in the light of new insights, understanding and of the ever-changing circumstances around us (Beattie 2009: 4).*

According to Beattie (2009), the understanding of identity is a continual quest that is constructed through inquiry, dialogue and interaction.

The way women identify themselves in their professional lives may be further explored by drawing on the concepts discussed above (in particular narrative and positioned identities). The concept of positioned identity that is analysed through narrative and or discursive forms of analysis has relevance to this thesis as these forms of analysis provide theoretical and practical means to analyse women's experiences in their place of work. The approaches may provide a basis to explore how women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages. An analysis that explores how women's stories reflect the way in which they are recognised and constrained may highlight how the experience of the workplace affects development and growth.

2.3.2. Gender and agency: how is choice understood?

Within the present thesis, 'agency theory' is considered as a theory that has application to narrative methods of analysis, because narrative methods will be drawn upon to explore how women experience their work and balance work with other demands. Many feminist theorists refer to agency as the capacity of women to make independent choices (Acker 1990; Butler

1993, 1990; Bourdieu 2000; McNay 2003b). How women make choices about their development and growth is a central theme of this thesis that may be explored by developing a fuller picture of the concept of agency.

Agency and the determinants and consequences of gender inequalities have been debated by those interested in feminist studies (Wharton 1991). 'Feminism' is sometimes described as a complex historical genealogy which explores the rights of women to act as independent agents (McRobbie 2009). Feminism has also been described in terms of 'waves'. The wave model has been criticised as concentrating more on periods of visible activism among white, middle-class, Western feminists, obscuring the sex-based inequalities (Haslanger and Tuana 2003). First wave feminism generally focused on achieving legal and political rights as well as seeking economic improvements, and is believed to have originated in the mid-1800s (Grace 2012). Second wave feminism is thought to have emerged in the 1960s and generally focused on achieving gender equity through paid employment (Everingham 1994). There was no focus on recognition for domestic work and there were many important concerns, including violence against women, pornography, reproductive rights and childcare (Bulbeck 1998). Third wave feminism criticised the second wave for not taking into account the differences between women due to race ethnicity, class, geography and religion (Zack 2005). Third wave feminism was seen to be influenced my post-colonialism and postmodern theories (Yeatman 1994). The issues associated with the different waves focus on collectivism, individuality and the identity of women with varied concepts including power and epistemology (McRobbie 2009). Wharton (1991) refers to presupposition as the non-empirical aspects of theory sometimes known as 'metatheory'.

This research study explores how women make choices about their work and how they experience constraints and overcome barriers in the workplace. How women make choices may be seen as the degree of independent agency they have in varied contexts. Feminist theory provides a context within which some of the choices women make about work and life can be understood.

It has been argued that one feature of agency is the involvement of intention and the analysis of the intentions of individuals and groups (Scruton 2007). Shapiro (2005) argues that agency theory is important to sociology because agency relationships are omnipresent.

> *'under cover of other aliases – bureaucracy, organizations, professions, roles, markets, labour, government, family, trust, social exchange, and so on – "a neat kind of social plumbing"' (Shapiro 2005: 282).*

Shapiro's (2005) definition of agency suggests that social structures can be seen as agents. Berger and Luckmann (1966) have argued that agency and structures have a dialectical relationship, that is, society forms individuals who act independently and individuals act independently within social structures. Berger and Luckmann (1966) present a view on the 'social construction of reality', that is, they describe the subjective role individuals play in creating their own social world. Social norms have been seen as subject to ongoing re-constructions (see Bryant and Higgins 2010). The way individuals act as agents of change may be viewed as subjective, however subjective experience may be shared by groups through social experiences.

McNay (2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2008) attributes changing relations between women and men to changes in the way in which agency and gender identity theories are understood in contemporary societies. McNay (2000) argues that recent thought on the formation of the modern subject offers a one-sided or negative account of agency that underplays the creative dimension present in the responses of individuals to changing social relations. An understanding of this creative element is central to a theory of autonomous agency, and also to an explanation of the ways in which women negotiate changes within gender relations and organisational effectiveness. McNay (2003b) argues that contemporary feminist work on agency offers only a partial account of what remains an essentially negative understanding of a woman's choice to act as an independent agent. McNay (2003c) draws on a psychoanalytic paradigm to discuss the dimensions of subjectivity, and argues that this paradigm considers language as a form of agency but does not provide a means to account for the complex dimensions of contemporary gender relations.

> *'Language is understood as situated in a two-fold sense; it is a mode of social interaction and, therefore, a type of agency, and it is system of symbolic power that interacts, in a variable fashion, with other distinct systems of power' (McNay 2003c: 139).*

McNay (2003c) argues that the way we analyse language is important in understanding the concept of agency, and effective approaches to analysis of language offer an in-depth understanding of language as a situated medium, that is, that the analysis of language

reconnects ideas of agency and experience to the context of social interaction and explores gender relations and power relations. McNay (2009) describes feminism as an 'embodied' experience and recognition of choice is seen to be 'embedded' in the social interactions of language. What is seen to be recognised as effective development and growth within a workplace maybe be rather subjective and embedded within the culture in which a woman works.

The way women of different generational cohorts tell their story about development and growth may highlight variation in the way that groups discursively and agentively (meaning how the participants construct their agentive interactions) experience work and choice. Identity can be defined as different ways of being in the world at different times and places and for different purposes (Gee 2010). A discourse analyst such as Gee (2010) interchanges the word 'identity' with 'socially situated identity' and this has implications for agency. Gee (2010) emphasises that discourse analysis focuses on how we recognise and act out our different social roles or different social positions in society, how as social agents construct our identity. Ibarra (2004) supports this notion proposed by Gee (2010) suggesting that people develop many notions of their professional identity and the development of a professional identity is dependent on social interactions. Workplace interactions are impacted by equal opportunity legislation.

2.3.3. Gender, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination in the workplace

Australia has a mosaic of anti-discrimination laws designed to protect against direct and indirect discrimination, and other legislation designed to promote equal career opportunities for working women (Burgess et al 2009). Despite these legislative requirements for equal employment opportunity (EEO) many Australian organisations are undertaking a minimalist approach towards implementing equity programs within their organisations (French 2001).

> *'Australia has a mix of legislated standards and voluntary codes that support EEO in the workplace. The EEO regime is largely a reporting one. From the 1980's the main concern with directly addressing discrimination in the workplace and later with promoting EEO for women employees. Over the past decade the emphasis has shifted more towards corporate responsibility and organisations doing the right thing in terms of broader equity objectives' (Burgess et al 2009:38).*

The business case approach to EEO and the managing diversity approach have different guiding principles for implementation of EEO legislation (Burgess et al 2009). The business case approach provides examples of best practice and recommendations for practice, but these are not always the same. Despite the legislative requirements many people continue to experience inequality in the workplace. Therefore, discrimination is explored as a phenomenon that affects individuals and collective groups and provides challenges for individuals and organisational culture and practice. Different equity management strategies are increasingly recommended (Sheridan 1998; French 2005). French (2005) recommends a strategic approach to effectively implement equal opportunities that educate employees about forms of indirect discrimination.

Discrimination is understood through a combination of theoretical perspectives that include economic, sociological and organisational perspectives. Richardson and Robinson (2007) comments on the challenges associated with the exploration of discrimination:

> *'there are few texts that demonstrate a method through which the feminist qualitative researcher can make visible her own slippery subjectivity, power interests and limitations – the recognition that her knowledge is partial, contextual and inevitably flawed' (Richardson and Robinson 2007: 459).*

Durbin (2011) found that gender and knowledge are constituted and reconstituted in networks and that knowledge of gendered networks is essential to navigate organisational culture. People form groups or networks in organisations and learn about how to make choices and work through challenges:

> *'a gender lens is useful to explore the role of senior female managers as knowledge creators participating in networks with different configurations and characteristics, usually in a male-dominated environment' (Durbin 2011: 91).*

Durbin (2011) argues that women excluded from informal systems where strategic tacit knowledge is generated means that women are potentially denied access to a gateway network that ultimately controls resources. Limited access to critical knowledge and resources has been cited as having a critical impact on how effective women can be in the workplace.

> *'Boards of directors are primarily male; globally, only 5–20 per cent of directors are women and change is described as glacially slow' (Hawarden and Marsland 2011: 532).*

There is a large body of research into social networks that has developed over a 50-year period (Blau 1967, 1977; Lin and Lin 2001; Hawarden 2010). The 'old boys' network' has been described as a network for men that provides a forum where informal decisions are made within businesses (Durbin 2011). This old boys' network is a form of social network in which senior women are under-represented, these informal networks are sometimes cited as avenues to develop career opportunities in the workplace.

The workplace culture of academics has been found to undermine the opportunities women have to implement equal opportunity practice and therefore limit the choices women can make (Van den Brink and Benschop 2012).

> *If we really want to bring about change, the system itself must change and gender must be practiced differently. In other words, gender inequality practices need to be undone. Academics ought therefore to reflect on why these gender imbalances persist in higher positions, how they come about and who benefits from keeping them in place (Van den Brink and Benschop 2012: 87).*

Van den Brink and Benschop (2012) suggest that equal opportunity interventions are not enough to change the workplace culture and structures that discriminate against women. They recommend gender awareness training along with understanding the rational or quest for gender change is imperative to prevent 'old' structures that are culturally engrained continuing to provide constraint. Practices such as mentoring and coaching, greater transparency in the promotion and recruitment practice and the introduction of support networks are thought to only provide support if they are practiced within a culture that is prepared to practice equal opportunity. Van den Brink and Benschop (2012) propose that understanding and changing discriminatory behaviour involves changing social practice. The way women identify themselves in their professional lives may be influenced by the context in which they tell their professional story. Below, the ways in which social identity and narrative theory provide insight into social practices are explored. These theories provide a framework to explore the primary research question that seeks to gain insight into the way women make choices about their professional development and growth at different life stages.

2.4. How are the theoretical positions discussed relevant to this thesis?

Socially situated identity theory has been explored by drawing on narrative forms of analysis in particular a positioning analysis has been used to qualitatively interpret stories (Riessman 2008; Johnson 2009; Gee 2010; Bamberg 2011). Socially situated identity theory and positioning analysis is relevant to this thesis as the approach can potentially provide insight into how women experience their work at different life stages. Socially situated identity theory provides a framework to explore how women develop through association and in particular context discursive forms of narratives and a positioning analysis begins with attention to the overall form of an oral interview narrative to explore the temporal structure of a narrative, whereas socially situated identity theory focuses on the discursive forms of language.

The research question explored within thesis is: How do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages? Both positioning analysis and socially situated identity theory are relevant to this question as they provide a means to explore how women make choices about development and growth at different life stages and identify themselves in their professional lives. In other words, how they position or identify themselves in work and also how they situate other influences or draw on other discursive structures to explain the constrains they may experience within the workplace culture. By providing case study data that represents the experiences of women it may be possible to provide some insight into the way women identify themselves and what impact this has on their development and growth and how the constraints experienced are managed.

By exploring how women's stories reflect the ways in which they are recognised and constrained, it is possible to examine the role of narrative in gender constructions. The degree to which the stories told affect development may be dependent on the way in which narrative is theorised as a psychosocial representation of experience. The theoretical relationship between stories and the way in which they are told represents an individual understanding of their development. Development and growth may be understood as a way of making sense of narratives.

The study of personal narrative is a form of case-centred research building on a tradition of sociological intersections of biography, history and society (Riessman 2000). The perspectives of both the narrator and analyst can come into view when drawing on a narrative theory to analyse narratives (Personal Narrative Group 1989).

Positioning analysis of and socially situated identity theory provide a means to explore the key question posed above (Gee 2010).

2.4.1. Gender and constructed workplace discourses

This thesis explores the narratives of women of different life stages. How women identify with their professional lives and what is significant for them when they discursively construct events about how they have developed and grown in their work. Within the field of psychology, narrative has been theorised from both cognitive and discursive perspectives. Narrative has been used to throw light on how individuals structure their thinking. Bruner (1990) describes how the structures of language can be explored to identify the way in which children learn new forms of language. In contrast to the cognitive approach is the discursive approach. For example, Weatherall (2000) provides insight into the way in which stories are socially constructed.

> *'The essential difference between cognitive and discursive approaches to narrative is that cognitive approaches treat them as expressions of how people understand things whereas discursive approaches treat them as interaction oriented productions' (Weatherall 2000:288).*

Weatherall (2000) suggests that there has been a sharp difference between studying the way women and men use language, and studying their representation in language and text. Cameron (1998) refers to 'discourse' as a framework and meaning system that guides social interaction and social action. Social interactions are often seen as the context or locus for the construction of gendered and sexist meanings. Language and the study of representation of language are not always the study of 'discourse' and are seen to be different from the study of language and stories told in organisations. The dominance of a particular groups may influence the voice we hear most (it may be we hear discord rather than harmonious convergence) and potentially become the dominant discourse. The way we unravel what this voice has to say may influence what we recognise to be effective or ineffective professional interaction (Hohne and Wussow 1994). Thus, the way women embed their language in the workplace context suggests they draw upon different discourses than men. This difference may be further identified by drawing on a feminist framework to explore language and discourse modes.

> *'While feminism could be said, broadly, to be about collectivism, social equity and social change, the genesis of management in both its theory and practice tends to represent the opposite in its focus on control, authority relations and conservatism' (Broadbridge and Kerfoot 2010: 475).*

Broadbridge and Kerfoot (2010) argue that feminist management involves an explicit attempt to challenge the unequal distribution of power, hierarchical structures and decision-making processes in organisations through a critique of the existing structures.

Smithson and Stoke (2005) contrasted organisational discourses of flexible working arrangements with the discourses used by managers and leaders and found that despite the increasing gender neutral language used to describe flexible working arrangements the policies associated with flexibility were viewed as favouring women or parents. Implications for feminists researchers are that the popularity of gender neutral terms in organisations has at times assist women to minimise charges of a backlash.

> *"Women feel compelled to work like me to succeed, to the extent of doing 'macho maternity.' These practices are seen by many women as essential both to be accepted as a core member of the organization (rather than being relegated to the 'mommy track'), and to minimize charges of backlash' (Smithson and Stoke 2005: 164)*

There may be specific dominant discourses within organisations that mean that women do not feel they can take up opportunities for flexible work arrangements and equal opportunity. Discourse and narrative theory have both been used to explore the way women talk about their experiences in their work.

Although there are different perspectives on the avenues through which narrative theory represents feminine identity, they share a belief in the significance of experiential evidence. Wengraf (2004) suggests that it is possible to analyse narratives to gain insight into the:

> *'potentially symptomatic and revelatory expressions of historically evolving psychologies' (Wengraf 2004: 117).*

Mackinlay (2002) discusses the significance of giving and receiving voice and the gendered features inherent in utterances, which is closely linked to 'counter narratives'. Hohne and Wussow (1994) observe that feminism is often focused on listening only for a distinguishable female voice; the dialogic is not intended as a monologic discourse that emphasises the

female voice to the exclusion of other social utterances. McConnell-Ginet (2003) discusses the important role the researcher plays in looking locally and being practical when examining gender and language. Weatherall (2007) emphasises that:

> *'expressions of gender will vary depending on the interpersonal and social context, as well as the function of the communicative event' (Weatherall 2007: 43).*

These researchers share the concern that the way gender is voiced and theorised is significant to the representation of women in the context of feminist debates.

Cole (2009) considers how narrative theory applies to gender studies.

> *'The "storying" of lived experience is examined as a means of challenging dominant discourses which can construct and other individuals and groups in relation to many aspects of gender and education' (Cole 2009: 561).*

Cole (2009) discusses the function of stories in our lives and their place in composing collective affairs (also see Clandinin and Connelly 2004):

> *'… re-presenting lived experience as counter to dominant and discriminatory discourses, and also as a way of disseminating both transgression and transformation' (Cole 2009: 571).*

Cole (2009) stresses the importance of women individually and collectively telling their story, in all its complexity, diversity, incompleteness and inequality. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) re-enforces Cole's (2009) argument and discusses the methodological contribution of narrative to feminist enquiry.

> *'In the social sciences today there is no longer a God's eye view which guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory or value-free knowledge. The days of naïve realism and naïve positivism are over' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 245).*

Walkerdine et al (2002) argue that there are differing forms of regulation that impact on women and these are in the form of language. Walkerdine (1990) explores how gendered roles are taken up and what can be spoken about in particular contexts, but also how particular forms of language support particular notions of truth.

> *'This provides a framework for examining how particular forms of language, supporting particular notions of truth come to be produced. This, in turn provides a framework for examining how speaking and silence, and the production of language itself, become objects of regulation' (Walkerdine 1990: 31).*

Socially situated identity theory takes into account the way we develop through association with others. In particular, the way others reinforce and value our identity tends to influence development and growth. This present research project highlights how a narrative approach can be drawn on to analyse the way professionals develop and grow, but also how professionals identify themselves through gendered constructions. Psychosocial approaches to narrative explore the relationship between cognitive, social and cultural constructions (see Andrews et al 2000).

2.4.2. Gender and narratives-Stories about recognition

From a narrative interaction perspective, narrators 'agentively construct their situated positions, and in the process both normative discourse as well as their individual sense of self are called into being' (Bamberg 2003: 12). It is possible that a gendered discourse has become the 'norm' within the workplace; however, it is not clear how women make sense of the workplace culture and how they recognise the way in which this constrains their development and growth. Andrews et al (2000) argue that one way of conceptualising the different applications of narrative theory is drawn upon is by exploring narrative through the concept of agency. Therefore, it is possible that narrative theory may provide a way to explore whether women of different life stages draw on varied discourses to tell their story about the way they make choices about their professional development and growth. By exploring this possibility, this thesis will contribute to the knowledge about gendered narratives and gender theory. Gendered narratives are explored in this thesis as a construction that highlights the gendered dialogue that women draw upon when talking about their experience of development and growth.

2.4.3. Narrative approaches to explore workplace experiences

Jorgenson (2002) explores the construction of professional identities and women leaders in non-traditional roles by drawing on stories collated from female engineers in managerial roles. Jorgenson (2002) analysed the dialogic performance of women engineers and managerial roles and found the women adopt a variety of distinct and sometimes

contradictory ways to present themselves as qualified professionals. Jorgenson (2002) observed the 'small stories' and the dialogue drawn upon by women in science and engineering to negotiate everyday interactions, she found discourses of gender and technical work. Women in technical managerial roles constructed a story about themselves self with reference to pre-existing master narratives (Jorgenson 2000, 2002). Women's identities are constituted by applying narrative strategies to negotiate their professional identities, which are shaded by ironies and contradictions, and effective and ineffective behaviour is judged by the participant's perception of the circumstance (Jorgenson 2002). Jorgensen's (2002) approach might be described by Riessman (2008) as a dialogical or performative approach to the analysis of narrative.

Riessman (2008) has described different ways of analysing stories including dialogical or performative, visual, thematic and structural approaches. Mate (2010) highlights that women draw on varied dialogue to men when telling a story about their professional experience. This is further discussed in the following chapter, which highlights the relevance of a dialogical approach to exploring data. Apter (1993, 1995) explores variation in midlife women and presents a thematic approach, as does Josselson (1996). Chase (1995) and Mishler (1999) explore variation within a group of professional people drawing on structural and thematic examples to present the dialogue that participants use when presenting their stories. Josselson (2006) suggests that one of the important issues for contemporary narrative inquiry is the 'challenge of accumulating knowledge' (Josselson 2006: 8). Chase (2011) argues that a meta-analysis has not yet been developed for narrative inquiry; however, the breadth in ranges of approaches that have been developed invite opportunities for conversation among narrative researchers.

Apter (1993, 1994, 1995) specifically discusses the experience of women in midlife, pointing to the deep conflicts inherent in this group, and also to the ways in which women manage anxiety and stress during midlife. Professional women deal with the challenges that confront them in midlife by reframing themselves, often in ways very different from those imagined at the beginning of their career journey (Apter 1995). Older women can only reflect on the way they made these midlife decisions about juggling work and family demands and are likely to, with the benefit of hindsight, tell a different story, potentially about how they have made sense of conflicts.

Apter (1995) studied mothers who were also professional women, most between the ages of 28 and 37. The research participants often sustained themselves with the belief that things could be better, or even perfect.

> '*While often suffering great stress, they used whatever mental energy was left over to control their awareness of just how deep their conflicts were, such awareness would give rise to regret, anger, anxiety and more stress, which, mentally, they could not afford' (Apter 1995: 20).*

The work of these two US researchers (Chase 1995; Apter 1995) is significant for this present study, and, notably, there is very little contemporary Australian literature that analyses the experiences of midlife professional women. The work of Apter (1995) is particularly relevant to the present study as it highlights the ways in which professional women deal with the challenges that confront them in their midlife stage and demonstrates the relevance of drawing on a thematic approach to analysis. Apter (1995) suggests that women have varied experiences and there are distinguishable varied categories of experience.

Apter (1995) describes the crisis of the 'new breed' (we can assume that this 'new breed' refers to the Baby Boomer Generation, women in their forties and fifties during the mid-1990s). Apter (1995) explores the markers of women's lives – including marriage, motherhood, fertility and sexuality – and how they were informed or transformed compared with previous generations.

Within a sample of 80 women between the ages of 39 and 55, Apter (1995) identified four categories that described the experiences of these women: traditional, innovative, and expansive or protestors. Traditional women conformed or stayed within the conventional feminine framework that their mothers or grandmothers modelled. Innovators set out to be career women and found ways to work career into their family life or chose not to have children. Expansive types spoke about upheaval that forced them to break with past patterns they had established. Protesters were labelled so because they protested midlife in some way, for example, they did something completely different than they had embarked on previously during this stage. Apter (1995) highlights that the stories were constructed around some key concepts and meanings.

> '*They spoke first and foremost about power, effectiveness and influence versus impotence, usefulness, or insignificance' (Apter 1995: 42).*

Apter's (1995) analysis of where women situate work in their lives highlights midlife as a stage of re-identification and reflection. Psychological exploration of the use of dialogue helped to make sense of the experiences of American women in the mid-1990s, which had very different lives to generations of women before them.

In a similar examination of the way dialogue is used within the workplace and the use of dominant and counter narratives, Chase (1995) draws on stories from professionals that had risen to influential positions. Specifically, women working as school superintendents (known in Australia as school principals) who told about rising to leadership positions, developing confidence in their authority and ability, and confronting the challenges of gender and racial inequalities (Chase 1995). Chase's (1995) work highlights cultural tensions between the discourses of work and gender, describing a:

> *'tension between discourse about professional work (with its emphasis on gender and race neutral individuals) and discourse about inequality (with its emphasis on gendered and radicalised groups)' (Chase 1995: 6).*

The women reflected this cultural tension within their individual stories of success and achievement, but also of inequality, in what Chase calls their:

> *'ambiguous empowerment in white and male dominated professions' (Chase 1995: 6).*

Less socially acceptable discourses (struggles between power and subjugation) are woven into the dominant story of development, forming a discursive disjunction, a clash between two ways of telling one's story (Chase 1995).

Working with men, as well as women, Mishler's (1999) interviews with craft artists illustrates how identity is represented in the stories we all tell about our lives and how these stories are situated in the dominant narrative of a profession. Exploration of what 'hand-made' means for each craft artists and the way in which they identify with their work uncovered variance between individuals, but also similarities, which provided an impression of the changing culture of the craft artists (Mishler 1999).

Each of the narrative approaches outlined above explored how individuals made sense of their experiences in a particular time and also how their identity in their professional work and experiences of work had some relationship to their life stage and the social context

through which they worked, their narratives could be described as psychosocial constructions.

2.5. Narratives: cultural narratives

In this thesis the aim is to develop an overall narrative that highlights how professional women experience being effective in the workplace as well as capturing what constrains their development and growth. This overarching aim provides a basis to explore how women experience development and growth and to identify patterns in the stories from women at different life stages. There is an exploration of a gendered narrative that is embedded within the culture in which women work. The way women develop a sense of their agency is important as this is seen to have a relationship to the way effectiveness is experienced. This study explores what works for individual women, but how their story is situated in a specified workplace experience.

By exploring how women identify themselves in their professional lives through the stories they tell it may be possible to gain deeper insight into the way in which they are recognised and constrained and how they experience agency. The aim is to identity patterns that are similar and different within the stories of women from different life stages. It is possible that women at different life stages describe their agency in similar ways. For example they women in the more senior group have experienced a workplace with different legislative boundaries because they entered the workforce at a different time to the younger women that are to be interviewed in this study.

2.5.1. What is effectiveness?

Any story about development and growth may inadvertently present a perspective on what it means to develop effectively within an organisation and to be effective as a professional. Effectiveness is described in this section as a term that has socially situated and gender significance. Gee (2010) suggests that certain social languages develop around particular practices associated with development of an identity and to be recognised for the contribution made it is necessary to engage with these discourses. What does it mean to say someone is effective in their work, in their organisation or in their personal life? Are the measures for effectiveness different in different contexts? Is workplace and personal effectiveness understood by women and men of different generational cohorts in the same way? These key

considerations are discussed below and the literature that informs these questions is considered.

Effectiveness has been described as a term with situational meaning. Alvesson and Karreman (2000) indicate that 'discursive meaning' is generally illustrated to have temporarily connected meaning to specific cultural context. Clegg and Bailey (2007) provide an definition of effectiveness that reinforces the notion that effectiveness in understood differently in different workplace contexts.

> *'Effectiveness is the capability to produce or bring about a desired outcome or result. It is contingent upon goals and the agent, method, process or 'way' the goal is achieved as well as the context and circumstance in which achievement is reached. Its usefulness as a concept is situationally specific ... how effectiveness is defined has important implications for how organizations measure success and for the development of useful models of organizational theory' (Clegg and Bailey 2007: 422).*

Personal effectiveness has been defined as having knowledge of boundaries between self and others, but also a willingness to develop and grow. *De Board (1978) provides a definition of effectiveness that emphasises the way individual effectiveness has a varied discursive meaning than organisational effectiveness.*

> *'The effectiveness of the individual lies in knowing the boundary between the self and the outside world and perceiving what is inside and what is outside. Projection blurs this boundary and distorts reality by making what is inside (within the self) appearing to be outside. As long as this happens not only is energy wasted but the internal state of the individual remains unaffected. Action is based on unreality and facts are distorted' (De Board 1978: 116).*

The definitions provided here for personal and organisational effectiveness have a varied emphasis, but it may not be possible to have one without the other. That is, to be effective in carrying out organisational goals it is important to have a sense of boundaries between personal choices, values and beliefs and organisational goals and objectives along with an understanding of how each is evaluated.

Organisational effectiveness is a multidimensional concept and different models shed light on different aspects of what it means to be effective at the organisational level (Mourik 2008).

'Integrated, multi-dimensional models recognise that overall effectiveness is about the interaction of many performance-related indicators and draws together goal orientation, internal process and systems, and stakeholder perspectives. They also use objective and perceptual measurement, thus mitigating the possibility that an object measure may suggest one thing and a perceptual measure something else' (Mourik 2008: 2).

Mourik (2008) defines effectiveness as a model that can be measured, but this approach to understanding effectiveness and/or leadership neglects the gendered perspective, because multidimensional models generally portray the dominant perspective on effectiveness. Swan et al (2009) argue that there is a limited empirical base through which to understand women's leadership development and learning and that there is a dominant story about leadership that is part of a process of engaging with ways in which individuals consume, draw upon and resit leadership representations. The approach is applied to explore how women experience effectiveness and ineffectiveness.

By exploring the empirical research that recognises the impact that masculine organisational cultures have on the career development it may be possible to gain a gendered perceptive on effectiveness (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010). Effectiveness may be interpreted and defined through a gendered lens. Swan et al (2009) suggests that gender creates a core part of management interactions for women.

'Gender permeates organizational practices, cultures, structures and processes. No longer understood as private issues, gender relations are a core part of organizational and work life. And yet, very little of these debates have been extended to management learning theorizing or practices' (Swan et al 2009: 434).

Examining the discourses that convey our understanding of women's effectiveness in the workplace may provide a deeper understanding of what being an effectiveness woman in a leadership or managerial role entails.

Effectiveness and ineffectiveness are a form of discourse people use to describe how they experience their work and how they are recognised in their work. Gee (2010) defines 'recognition work' as:

'The work we humans do through talk and interaction to seek to get recognised as having a specific socially situated identity ... All the contestation, negotiation and

ambiguities round such identities and the ways in which we humans "bid" for them (try to get them recognised and accepted) and relate to and contest with each other over them' (Gee 2010: 210).

One of the challenges for managers and leaders in contemporary workplaces is to understand and develop organisations that are not only effective in meeting their bottom line objectives but that are also effective in developing and sustaining professional employees who can negotiate barriers and obstacles to contribute effectively (Sinclair and Wilson 1999; Sinclair 1994, 2005, 2007; de Vries 2006; Chandler 2010; Piterman 2010; Strachan 2010). The barriers women experience in relation to progress is explored from a breadth of perspectives and each perspective can be seen to make different assumptions about the degree to which women have the capacity to exercise discretion in the choices they make about their work and how effective the choices they make about their work are.

Powell (2011) draws on preference theory to suggest some groups in organisations prefer men in leadership roles and this is grounded in their stereotypical view about what effective leadership involves. Powell (2011) defines effectiveness as a concept that is malleable, that is, it is dependent on the stereotypes that are developed. Powell (2011) acknowledges that a combination of factors that relate to changing perceptions need to be considered when exploring the status of women in the workplace. Eagly (2007) and Gherardi (1994, 2003) share the view that perception impacts on effectiveness. Stereotypes are deeply engrained in the fabric of the workplace and the way people reproduce 'socially constructed' rules (Gherardi 1996).

Eagly and Carli (2007) discuss the stereotypes that arise when certain groups of people have characteristics and behaviours expected in senior managers or leaders. Women are thought to face a double bind in senior leadership roles as they are expected to work in collaborative ways (for example, be sensitive and foster relationship-building), but to be perceived as good managers they are expected to possess masculine traits (for example, dominance, aggression and individualism) (Eagly and Carli 2007). Eagly and Carli (2007) present the barriers women may experience in organisations as a labyrinth, and describe women's career trajectories as 'the sum of many obstacles along the way'.

Sinclair (2000) demonstrates an interest in leadership and effectiveness, and in research known as 'trials at the top' explored why women sometimes do not progress into senior leadership roles. Sinclair (1994) explored the constraints experienced by women by

identifying the variation between the way men and women experience workplace culture. Piterman's (2008) research supports Sinclair's findings that there are taboos surrounding the notion of 'challenging the culture' as well as some key strategies for change including: building a case for greater diversity; extending mentoring and networking initiatives; addressing childcare limitations; providing supports for parents; and providing flexible work and leave entitlements. These suggestions have been reiterated by other more recent researchers (Bardoel 2003; Bendl and Schmidt 2010; Hawarden and Marsland 2011; Eikhoff 2012).

The work of Sinclair (1994) explores the constraints impacting on women within the Australian executive culture, but takes this a step further by also attending to what counts as success in this culture. Sinclair (1994) defines a number of emerging key ingredients for executive success, with the support of a steering committee of women and men top executives. The reasons for continued exclusion of women from executive cultures were explored together with capabilities considered essential to be successful. Sinclair's work artfully unpacks how historical cultural forces have shaped the traditional masculine executive culture around values of solitary toughness, and how emerging values relevant to both sexes were becoming prevalent in the early 1990s.

> *'Values emerging as increasingly important in the successful executive are: a capacity for self inspection; maintaining a "wide" view of life; recognizing personal and family issues as ingredients of productivity; and building relationships by being accessible and understanding what is important to others. These stages are offered not as a retreat to feminine or being "soft", but as a central ingredient of being effective as an executive' (Sinclair 1994: x).*

Sinclair (2000, 2005) provides insight into the way women and men talk about the Australian professional context, acknowledging that masculine discourse dominates the culture of business. Sinclair (2000) argues for the need to hear masculine and feminine discourses to foster understanding of the qualities women bring to the corporate culture. Sinclair (2000) advocates the need for further studies focused on the varied structure of the language of men and women to gain insight into the degree to which the masculine culture dominates.

In later work, Sinclair (2007) provides insights into different types of leaders, particularly tracing what it means to be a transformational leader in the 21st century.

> *'Only by challenging the assumptions on which leadership is based will we be equipped to seriously anticipate the "transformation" so often promised by leadership … We need to bring into the study of leadership more insight about power, gender and the systemic forces that prefigure power relations ... We need also to look at how leadership and the study of leadership are processes of construction of identity and reputation' (Sinclair 2007: 33).*

Sheridan et al (2009) discuss the importance of workplace culture and how it affects the way women and men identify themselves in their work. They advocate that Sinclair's (2007) work provides an example of the cross-fertilisation of ideas and acknowledge that disciplines are not always easy to transverse and that discrimination is a culturally complex phenomenon. The way a group makes sense of workplace effectiveness can also be explored by identifying what has changed in the workplace, such as the changing regulatory features that impact on work. It may also be evaluated from the perspective of the way people make sense of the change (Parker 2007; Walsh and Gordon 2008).

2.5.2. Metaphors for ineffectiveness

There are some established terms that relate to metaphors for ineffective workplace experiences, for example, 'glass ceiling' (Burke and Vinnicombe 2005) and 'firewalls' (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000) describe discrimination in the workplace (Bendl and Schmidt 2010). The glass ceiling metaphor is frequently used to describe the obstacles and barriers women experience when seeking promotions to the top levels of organisations (Burke and Vinnicombe 2005; McLeod 2008). O'Conner (2001) hypothesises that the existence of a glass ceiling is largely due to the different needs of women and men: women prefer career trees while men are more likely to climb ladders. Hakim (2006) proposes a preference theory, citing differences in life goals, values, abilities and competitive behaviour as a way to explore the glass ceiling metaphor. Olsson (2002) suggests that transformative narrative, where women are able to explore the female archetype and identify with the heroic masculine notions, enables women to work through the cultural and political realities of organisational life; the way women experience discrimination has historical significance. The term 'firewall' is often used to describe systemic forms of discrimination that women experience:

> *'It's not the ceiling that's holding women back; it's the whole structure of the organization in which we work: the foundations, the beams, the walls, and the very*

air. The barriers to advancement are not just above women, they are all around them'
(Meyerson and Fletcher 2000: 136).

The firewall metaphor has more of a focus on the process of discrimination and not just the structures (Zaugg 2003). Barreto et al (2009) propose that beliefs about glass ceilings may be based on stereotypical thoughts. Others have similarly proposed that:

'the firewall metaphor seems to have an even higher heuristic value that the glass ceiling metaphor for pointing at discrimination in organizations because it reflects the complimentarily of structure and process in discrimination, whereas the glass ceiling metaphor offers insights only to structural aspects of discrimination' (Bendl and Schmidt 2010: 628).

The ways in which discrimination, barriers and obstacles are understood may have an impact on workplace experiences. The glass ceiling debate tends to draw on ways of exploring the interaction between qualities or characteristics of individuals and those features in the work environment that form barriers (Kanter 1977). The idea of a 'pipeline' is a way of characterising women's advancement into upper management as a process of moving through the ranks. Pipeline theories make possible an exploration of gendered organisational cultures. The analysis using pipeline theory proposes that women are less likely to reach senior management roles in organisations because of their commitments outside work (Broadbridge 2008; Simpson 2011).

The pipeline and glass ceiling concepts focus on the characteristics of individuals and work environments (Carter and Silva 2010). LaPierre and Zimmerman (2010) propose that conditions for career advancement of women involve analysis of the impact of individual, organisational and family variables, examining how discrimination is understood and also exploring aspirations for advancement. They found that cross-cultural comparisons that identity the relative importance of individual, organisational and family level factors in explaining the gender gap in senior management benefit from cross-national comparisons and longitudinal analyses, and offer the potential to demonstrate the complex dynamics that influence the under-representation of women in senior management roles.

A discourse has been established that explores how women experience their work in different ways to men and how barriers exist for women that provide challenges to their progression (Sinclair 1994, 2005, 2007; Chandler 2010; Piterman 2010; Strachan 2010; de Vries 2010).

This discourse about the barriers that create challenges can be seen as counter to the grand discourse about being successful and effective in the workplace. It could also be described as a 'story schema', a term defined by Georgakopoulou (1997) as mental processes that contain culturally specific information. A key discourse or body of research work that focuses on the experiences of women in the workplace is known as the area of work–life balance.

2.5.3. Work and life balance as an elusive construct

Much of the literature that surrounds the work–life balance debate suggests that choices for women and men are driven by compliance to work within company legislation, commitment to work, life and family balance and limited for some who require the flexibility to juggle competing demands (Bardoel 2003, Pocock 2005, Pocock et al 2010; Emslie and Hunt 2009; Gregory and Milner 2009). Work–life or work family balance has come to the forefront of policy discourse, against a backdrop of globalisation and concerns about labour market participation rates (Gregory and Milner 2009). The term work–life balance has been defined as:

> '… the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labour markets' (Felstead et al 2002: 56).

The term 'work–life balance' generally enables a wider understanding of non-work concerns to be encompassed in employment (Gregory and Milner 2009), but it has also been argued that the term can be understood as a trade-off between two spheres (Burke 2004). It has been argued that this thinking does not address the fundamental inequalities associated with the balance and can sometimes shift responsibility for management from the organisation to the individual (Burke 2004). According to Gregory and Milner (2009) the work–life interface can be cast into three issues: time management, inter-role conflict and care arrangements for dependants; however, they also explore the degree to which the choice and constraints are associated with the micro (individual), meso (organisational) and macro (national level).

The notion of choice and constraint may be part of the concern in the work–life balance debate, but also where the constraints have flow-on effects for families and workplace effectiveness and the recognition for women's unpaid labour are addressed by those entering this debate (Frone et al 1992; Bardoel and De Cieri 2009; McRobbie 2009; Allard et al 2011). The interface between work and life spheres is considered to overlap and/or interact. Work

and family has been explored as a concept that has displaced the goal of women's equality because a significant amount of the work that women do is unpaid and unrecognised (Charlesworth 2004, 2007). McRobbie (2009) argues that a focus on work–life balance simply reinforces the gender norms prevalent in heterosexual households.

Pocock et al (2010) have undertaken surveys over the past four years to compile *The Australian Work and Life Index*, which indicates that more than one-fifth of Australians spend 48 hours or more at work each week, and 60 per cent do not take regular holidays. Long working hours are a persistent problem for men. Pocock et al (2010) discusses the negative impacts of long working hours on health, and claims that productivity is lower and absenteeism is higher for people who work long hours. Pocock et al (2010) espouses the benefits of improved support for work flexibility.

Pocock et al (2010) discuss significant changes in the way work is organised in people's lives. This can also be considered a feature that impacts on professional choices. *The Australian Work and Life Index 2010* suggests that there are demographic variances in how much people are working and the degree to which people's work and life is interrupted, with varying intersections and demands. Generation X men are believed to work longer hours than any other group of people, and Generation X and Y women have been found to have significantly higher levels of intersection and fragmentation in their working lives.

Pocock's (2003) work is significant to this research as it highlights some of the challenges for professional women and the complexities of the terminology associated with work and life balance, along with the various ways in which the notion of work and life balance can be understood by organisations. Pocock (2005) discusses use of the term 'work and life' and notes that this encompasses the care responsibilities of those who live in family contexts. Pocock (2003) defines boundaries as porous in work and life, rather than two-dimensional with harmony between the spheres. Pocock (2003) argues against the common use of notions of balancing or 'juggling' work and family and argues that the aim of these definitions is to find harmony rather than collision.

Pocock et al (2010) suggest that women are acting as shock absorbers for the increasing reach of work into our lives and communities. Strachan (2010) suggests that juggling demands and flexibility needs to take into account the relationship women and men have with their work and the culture of Australian workplaces. By exploring some of the broader seismic changes

women have faced at different times in the workplace it becomes possible to identify some of the constraints and opportunities that women in Australia are influenced by in their work.

For over a decade, an increasing number of professional women have shared dual-career status with partners (Smith 2009). When one or both partners pursue a managerial career, important differences between partners emerge, especially when the couple has children. Smith (2009) argues that multiple career demands frequently generate role conflict and at times conflict with professional identity; women with children are especially prone to tensions between career demands and family responsibilities, which may adversely affect their work performance and career progression (Smith 2009).

Emslie and Hunt (2009) found that women (aged 50–52) are affected by the problems of juggling a variety of roles (even if they do not have young children at home), while men are generally more affected when children are young. The researchers found that there are gender constructions between men and women; for example, some men are more inclined to 'work to live' while others 'live to work', and some women construct their identity as part of a family while others define themselves as independent women. The degree to which men and women talk about their gendered roles and attitudes to work and life is important, as is the introduction of more gender-neutral ways of exploring the debate (Emslie and Hunt 2009).

Bardoel (2003, 2006) builds a fuller picture concerning the importance of cultural context when exploring how the competing global and local demands for work and life are managed. Bardoel (2003) explores institutional and resource-dependant factors that impact on the work–life balance debate – efficiency gains can be made by adopting work–life balance and family-friendly policies. Watts (2013) explores how subcultures and dominant values of professional identity impact on opportunities for career progression and global changes impact on the environment of the workplace, and this is seen to have flow-on implications for families. The approaches of Bardoel (2003) and Watts (2013) take into account the structures organisations provide to enhance the opportunities for women to develop work–life balance practices within their lives.

Eikhoff (2012) discusses the hidden gender consequences of trends in the workplace in the 21st century around communication technology, knowledge work and work–life balance policies. 'Intersections of gender and class, but also of race, require further research and discussion in regard to socioeconomic background and capacity to access childcare options or other domestic help. The work–life balance debate most significantly affects women with

children; it has been described above as a discourse that affects choice and constraint, a political and policy discourse.

The concept of work–life and family balance has been discussed above and varied ways of exploring this concept are presented to highlight the range of empirical evidence that frames this construct. Some countries have been more successful than others in redefining work-life balance discourses around public and private spheres (Nyberg 2003). Parenting and childhood is not always viewed as a highly personal choice. Nyberg (2003)argues that western countries tend to view childhood and parenting as a individual choice rather than as a social issue. The notion of work–life balance could be described as somewhat elusive for some women as they are expected to make a personal choice to leave their work because they do not have the support or option to access child care or flexible arrangements. Evidence suggests that women in particular experience a collision between work and family as opposed to balance and organisations take varied levels of responsibility for facilitating opportunities for women to balance work in their life. Favero and Heath (2012) assert that a generational perspective that draws on generational cohort theory attends to the differences among women at different life stages, particularly in regards to the way in which varied generational groups make sense of the way in which work is constructed in their lives. Favero and Heath (2012) argue that generational cohort theory highlights that women of different generations draw on different discourses to discuss issues of work/life conflict and that the stage of life theory does not fully explain women's needs in the workplace. Favero and Heath (2012) found that different groups of women, from different generational cohorts emphasise how values and attitudes are communicatively constructed and discussed how different groups pay more attention to organisation face-time (as opposed to working in more flexible ways) and paying your dues (put in the long hours to get recognised and rewarded). Favero and Heath (2012) study highlights that the discourses that constitute how women from different generational cohorts interpret and navigate work–life issues varies and that generational groups bring to the work environment a different perspective grounded in unique demographic and social experiences that define success and security.

This current study explores the way in which different groups of women from different generational cohorts tell a narrative about their experience of work and life and the collisions and or balances between these spheres.

2.6. Concluding comments

In summary, this chapter presented the background to changes in Australian workplace culture over the past 50 years and highlighted gaps in the understanding of development and growth of women at different life stages. By exploring changes in the workplace it becomes clear that women of different life stages would have experienced a different workplace culture. Additionally, empirical evidence highlighted that women experience a number of constraints within their work and that the nature of these constraints has changed over time, which may have influenced subjective experience and stories about experience. Evidence from the literature highlighted changes in perception regarding the concept of career and the effects these changes have had on the choices made by women. This chapter explored how narrative theory is relevant to the research question of this study. Narrative theory explains that life is constructed through story. Gender narratives and professional identity are also constructed through stories, which explain the significance of stories in this study. The way women of different life stages develop their quest for meaning in their work and life will be further explored in this thesis and the following chapter provides a framework within which to explore this field.

Chapter 3: A narrative framework

3.1. Introduction

Considering the research question for this study (how do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages?) there is clearly a need to look at what women consider to be 'effective' professional development and growth. In other words, how do they experience recognition and constraint in the workplace and gain insight into their value as professionals. Understandings of effectiveness in the workplace are important for this study, as groups of people may define effectiveness differently at different life stages. The choices women make in their work may also be influenced by the degree to which they perceive that they achieve a sense of work–life balance. The relationship between workplace experiences, narratives and identity also requires further exploration. Narrative identity is described as a process that is developed through interactions within the workplace, but also through the act of telling stories. In this thesis, the way story is used by different groups of women at different life stages is considered to have relevance to the development and growth of their professional identity.

Chapter 2 introduced narrative theory and explored how narrative inquiry has gendered features. Women may change their perceptions of the concept of career at different life stages or in different contexts. This change in perception may temporarily or permanently alter the aspirations of working women, and inform the choices they make. Narrative identity theory has been presented as a way to explore the way women of different generations experience effectiveness in their work and maintenance of work–life balance. Bamberg (2003) highlights that narrators construct situated positions that provide insight into the choices they make. This chapter (Chapter 3) focuses on the way narrative theory and methodologies are drawn on to analyse the stories of the participants. This chapter also describes the way in which narrative theory is applied and how it is used to address the research question. An analytical framework is presented that outlines how relational processes a drawn upon to provide a narrative analysis in this study.

Narrative analysis has been described as 'a field in the making' (Chase 2005: 651). A narrative approach has been used as an epistemology (Jalongo and Isenberg 1995; Costa 2001), a methodological perspective (Bamberg 1997; Chase 2005; Riessman 2008), an antidote to positivist research (Sparrowe 2005), a communication mode (Squire 2005; Green

2006; Gee 2010) and, more modestly, as an approach to analyse themes and variations within the stories of a group (Patterson 2002). Patterson (2002) defines narrative theory as:

> *'text which brings stories of personal experience into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience' (Patterson 2002: 128).*

Andrews (2007) provides and enriching view on narrative theory and suggests that theory provides an avenue for cultural expression. Indeed, narrative theory could be a way to analyse personal experiences and cultural expression as well as expression of a story uniting disparate events, actions and motivations (Ricoeur 1992). Narrative theory is also used as a tool to organise methodology (Riessman 2008), that is, the steps taken to collate and analyse data. The analysis of narratives also provides a means to explore social time and space (Bruner 1990), to explore the way in which stories are told and to whom they are told.

> *'A culturally sensitive psychology ... is and must be based not only upon what people actually do, but what they say they do and what they say causes them to do what they did' (Bruner 1990: 16).*

Narrative theory provides a framework to explore how women make choices about their professional development and growth at different life stages and a way to explore how women identify themselves through the construction of story. There are distinctions between different branches of narrative theory (Andrews et al 2008). Narrative theory has been considered to encompass a broad range of perspectives; therefore, it is important to clarify how it is applied in this study. These distinctions concerning how narrative is understood have a methodological significance that will be further explored in the following section. A dialogical approach provides an opportunity to explore narrative meaning by paying attention to intersections of social discourse, but can also have a focus on the patterns within stories. The research question (how do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages?) is explored in this thesis by drawing on a dialogical approach and exploring patterns in stories. The research question has a focus on personal, social and cultural themes and therefore the dialogical approach provides the most appropriate narrative frame through which to inspect this question.

Narrative theory can be described as a theory that integrates personal, social and cultural levels of analysis. It has been argued that the way we make sense of our life as human beings

is through narrative, that is, we weave a story out of events and experiences and this story informs who we are and how we might change (Andrews et al 2008).

Precisely how the theory and method provide a framework to answer the research question is further considered below. The form of analysis applied is outlined towards the end of this chapter (section 3.5).

3.2. Personal stories from women

Riessman (1987, 1993, 2002 and 2008) argues that narrative theory has developed over time and has been interpreted in a variety of ways by different researchers. Narrative analysis and theory is generally applied to explore the experiences of individuals and groups of individuals. In this study it will be applied to individuals from two groups of women from different age groups. Narrative theory will be used in this study; two varied forms of analysis will be used to explore the theory.

The first level of analysis will focus on attention to the overall form of an oral interview to explore how women from varied life stages tell a story about their identity as a women developing in a professional context. Because narrative theory includes identity development as negotiated through relational and emergent stories (Riessman 2008; Bell 2009) the theory will be relevant to explore the 'positioned identity' (Riessman 2002) of women from two life stages. Narrative theory provides a means to explore the structure of language, to explore stories. Personal narratives can be explored as discursive constructions (Gee 2010). Narrative theory will be drawn on to explore how two groups of women display aspects of development and how these aspects are seen to be cultural and discursively re-constructed and display gender or life stage variations. The way women identify themselves through their stories can be seen to have a 'collective' form. Anderson (2005) suggests that narrative theory provides an avenue to explore cultural and political expression. The second level of analysis will take a collective form.

The two approaches drawn on in this study to analyse the stories of women draw on two slightly different ways of exploring identity and narrative theory. The first account is based on Bamber's (2003) concept of 'positioned analysis':

> 'Positioning analysis avoids the view of subjects as simply acting out their pre-
> established selves and identities. It also escapes from viewing selves and identities as
> taken off the shelf of pre-existing discourses. Rather subjects are argued to agentively

construct their situated positions (through talk and action), and in the process both normative discourses as well as their id\individual sense of self are called into being' (Bamberg 2003:12).

In other words, women construct identities through their talk in interaction with others. This empirically grounded approach will be used to present how women at varied life stages construct their gendered narrative through their talk in interaction with the interviewer.

A different method to explore narrative theory (particularly the dialogical significance of the theory), that is empirically grounded in what Gee (2000) defines as a multi-theoretical perspective on identity formation, will also be explored within the data analysis. Gee (2000) defines the 'kind of person' one is recognised as 'being' at a given time and place from moment to moment in interaction. Gee (2000) defines four types of identity: natural identity, institution identity, discourse identity and affinity identity. This study is particularity interested in what Gee (2000) terms natural or N-identity (e.g. stage of life), institutional affiliations or I-identity (e.g. professional women manager or senior manager), discourse or D-identity (e.g. assertive, reserved) and their way of showing association and affinity or A-identity (e.g. member of a professional group). It is important to note that identities are ambiguous and unstable and can shift across a person's internal state and the four perspectives are interrelated (Gee 2000). In the analysis (section 3.5) of this chapter the four identity perspectives will be further discussed and the exploration approach examined. Prior to exploring the specific approach adopted it is important to discuss how the narrative approach adopted in this thesis varies from other narrative approaches.

3.2.1. Approaches to analysing personal narratives

As mentioned above two forms of analysis are drawn on in this study. The form of analysis has an impact on the interview approach, but also how the stories are interpreted and analysed. Riessman (2008) provides a comprehensive discussion of narratives and distinguishes between forms of narrative analysis. Riessman (2008) provides examples of the way varied narrative methods have a different emphasis and investigates how particular methodological features draw on four distinct approaches: thematic, structural, dialogic/performative analysis and visual analysis. Each of these methodological approaches has features that vary, including: the definition of what narrative is; the degree of attention paid to transforming talk into text; the degree of attention to the language of participants; and the way attention is paid to the context of the narratives (i.e. the researcher may pay attention

to the local or societal features of the narrative). The analysis of stories is seen as critical to the narrative approach.

> *'... through our presence, and by our listening and questioning in particular ways, we critically shape the stories participants choose to tell' (Riessman 2008: 50).*

The thematic approach, broadly speaking, involves asking participants to tell a story around a particular subject and identifying key themes. For example, Riessman (2008) demonstrates how narrative scholars identify themes in particular participants stories, focusing on the content of communication within the thematic approach and identifying recurrent patterns within the way a particular group tell their story about an event or experience. In the thematic approach, Riessman (2008) highlights that analysis often places greater emphasis on the dominant narrative, that is, the story provided by society about the way people behave, or a socially prevalent story. Yarhouse (2008) argues that dominant narratives can be identified by individuals and, once identified in a therapeutic situation; provide a strong basis from which to explore expectations of individuals and groups.

> *'Once the dominant narrative has been identified, it can be helpful to explore ways in which the dominant narrative came to be communicated to the client through groups they engage with' (Yarhouse 2008: 205).*

A form of thematic analysis will be applied in this study that has a focus on patterns inherent in the stories of the two groups otherwise known as generational groups of women that are the of interest. The dominant and counter story that the two groups identified will be interpreted. Another approach to narrative analysis involves the structural approach (Riessman 2008). The focus of those who analyse the structure of narratives involves attention to the way the narratives are organised and how they are recognised as stories. For example:

> *'These questions shift attention from the "told" to the "telling" and from exclusive focus on a narrator's experience to the narrative self. Like the thematic analysis, structural approaches are concerned with content, but attention to narrative form adds insight beyond what can be learned from referential meanings alone' (Riessman 2008: 77).*

Riessman (2008) defines a third approach to analysis as dialogic performance.

> *'Simply put, if thematic and structural approaches interrogate "what" is spoken and "how", the dialogic/performative approach asks "who" an utterance may be directed to "when", and "why", that is, for what purpose?' (Riessman 2008: 105).*

The dialogic approach is most relevant to this thesis as there is an interest in making sense of how women make choices about their experience as opposed to what choices they make at different life stages. The process of decision making is significant in this particular study.

A further approach described by Riessman (2008) is visual analysis that explores images from different visual genres (photographs, paintings, collages or video diaries). Each approach described by Riessman (2008) has a different form and collection of methods that provide a way to gain an understanding of a story generated from a participants or an image presented by a participant.

Stories may be viewed as what the 'other' has to tell the researcher and are their subjective interpretations of professional work; narrative analysis is considered to be the way the stories are made sense of:

> *'Storytelling, to put the argument simply, is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us. Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself' (Riessman 1993: 1).*

Riessman (1993) discusses the breadth of methodological approaches in the narrative field and notes that to adopt an approach that is sociologically orientated is useful. Narrative methodologies provide a means to reveal the experience of participant's social life and insight into the culture that is experienced. The experience participants have of the culture of their work is explored through an analysis stories. It is possible to examine gender inequalities, and other practices of power that may be taken for granted by the storyteller.

Narratives can be seen as 'topic-centred' around a story about development and growth in work, for example, narratives:

> *'... are snapshots of past events that are linked thematically. Genres of narrative, with their distinctive styles and structures are modes of representation that tellers choose (in concert with listeners' expectations, of course) just as filmmakers decide, based on their intentions and markets, what form the script will take, and what conventions will*

be used to represent character and action. Different genres persuade differently; they make us care about a situation to varying degrees as they pull us into the teller's point of view' (Riessman 1993: 18).

Recurring themes and 'collective memory' work can be used as a method to explore the links between what is identified as chronological age, life stage and ways of narrating stories (Ryan 2009b). Particularly if dominant and counter discursive themes are identified in the way the women talk about their experience (Chase 1995). Crawford et al (1992) describes memory work as a development of new theories around the process of social construction. Memories are not interpreted from some predetermined theoretical base; the memories of groups can be explored by identifying what members of a group consider significant and the social aspects of group's memories (Crawford et al 1992). The significance of the social aspects of the two groups of participants that are the focus of this study will be further explored during the data analysis stage (see Chapter 5).

3.2.2. The approach adopted in this study

This present research focuses on how women experience their development and growth. The research question (how do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages?) will be explored by drawing on a dialogic and thematic form of analysis; firstly how women identify their choices will be explored by contrasting participants' examples and drawing on a dialogical analysis. The way women identify themselves in their professional lives will be answered by exploring the way two women 'position' their story and identify themself as women in a professional context. The participant's case examples will be drawn from women of different life stages. Identity is explored as a feature of choice. The second level of analysis will draw on the stories from women of two groups and involve a discursive form of analysis to explore how the stories from women of different life stages reflect the way they are recognised and constrained.

In Chapter 1 the key question was presented: how do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages? The key question will be explored in Chapter 4 by analysing how women identify themselves in their professional lives? And in the second data chapter (Chapter 5) how women's stories reflect the way in which they are recognised and constrained and the degree to which this affects their development and growth is considered. The exploration and reflection on stories and identities of women at different life stages provides insight into the research question.

The way in which stories are told and analysed are also thought to be enmeshed in what is known as big and small story telling techniques. The first level of analysis in this thesis will focus on a synthesis of the way in which the stories are positioned, the degree to which the stories are seen as big stories as opposed to small is significant, the focus will be on what the women define as critical to their development in their career and their role as effective professionals. The women's careers will be explored in the first level of analysis by comparing how participants from different life stages position their story this is defined as a relational processes to analyse narratives. Positioning of stories is explored as relationally significant to life stage and workplace experience, but the way stories are told is also explored to identify if the women draw on different discursive strategies at different life stages. The second level will be focused more on dominant and counter narratives and how the women of different life stages discursively construct their story in their working lives. The two levels of analysis will seek to reflect the identity quest the women of the two life stage's experience.

The notion of aspirations and career quest are explored as part of a process that women tell a story scheme around when developing a notion of their professional identity. The notion of identity quest is explored as a broader concept than career quest, because career quest is seen to be woven within a story around how work is positioned in a women's life and the women's aspirations. It is important to note in this thesis that aspirations are considered to be goals towards a career and also an expression of career values and a quest is the way goals and values are expressed in a given context. Aspirations may be more likely to be articulated through big stories about career when a women is reflecting back on her life and career and a quest is more likely to be highlighted in a small story analysis because the way a women tells her story about being effective or ineffective may become apparent when she talks about how her quest can become actualised or constrained within her place of work.

3.2.3. Big and small stories

Watson (2007) analysed the 'small stories' of a group of professionals and concluded that professional identity can be explored through analysis of portions of conversations. Small stories are exchanged in everyday conversation and can be told in 'joint constructions' and produced through conversation (Georgakopoulou 2007). In contrast, 'big stories' make reference to the larger events in a person's life (Bamberg 2006). Bamberg (2011) defines small stories as the language used in everyday exchange, local issues that provide an inroad

to the way people talk about themselves and their identity in a particular context. 'Big stories' focus on how individuals take stock of larger segments of their life (e.g. autobiographies) (Bamberg 2011; Freeman 2011). Stories about development and growth in a person's professional life can draw on big or small stories. It may be possible to analyse the relationship between the strategies people employ when telling the story of their growth and development (Bell 2009). The application of narrative is useful in this thesis as it provides a way to explore how individuals and groups experience development, but can also be used to explore social constructions that are inherent in the gendered identities of the women who share their story about development and growth.

3.3. Relational processes to exploring narrative theory

The present study explores relational processes within narratives to address the research questions and this approach involves an analysis of the position of stories, how they are big and/or small stories, but also how they encompass a dominant and counter forms of narratives. It draws on elements of methods that have been applied over the past 30 years in the narrative research field and involves elements from each of the three stages or waves of narrative theory. The approach adopted involves a dialogical approach to exploring narrative theory. The approach provides a way to analyse dialogical and discursive constructs.

Georgakopoulou (2006) suggests that narrative research has undergone three waves of change. The first wave focused on key events and the structure of speech or socio-cultural linguistic analysis (Labov 1972). Labov (1997, 2001) sees narrative as a theory of causality, describing analysis as an approach to investigate the way language is structured, as a window into the way people make sense of their world and as a way to understand how people are affected by their world.

Labov's (1997) attention to language itself provides a theoretical foundation that is a critical starting point for defining what 'stories' are, theorising that stories are made up of key elements that can be analysed on a micro level. This first wave focused on studying text in context (centred on particular events) and was popular through the 1980s and 1990s (see Gee 2000 on discourse analysis). During this period stanzas of speech were sometimes analysed. This approach was distinguishably different from the early Labovian (1972) approach, which explored narrative in text and context. Gee (2010) subsequently provided a more contemporary form of analysis that transcends earlier notion of analysis of speech and text in context. This more contemporary analysis emphasises that discourse is a form of narrative

that provides people with the capacity to recognise and act our different social roles or different social positions in society (Gee 2010).

Second wave could be categorised as the study of narrative in context, whereas the first wave was more focused on text and context. In this second wave, Ochs and Capps (2001) highlighted some significant issues within the study of narratives. Narratives that departed from telling 'life story' were sometimes dismissed or considered to be a result of bad interviewing because these more fragmented aspects of the stories were not seen to follow the structure of a beginning, middle and end, and therefore not follow convention (see Ochs and Capps 2001). This second wave was essentially categorised as having an interest in the overall meaning of the story.

Patterson (2002), a narrative theorist, makes a distinction between narrative theory and story, and presents story as an example of second wave narrative theory. According to Patterson (2002) all stories have a raison d'être and this is not the case for all narratives. Patterson (2002) points out that when we make the assumption that narratives are strategic in nature then we can often draw on the semantic field that strategy itself belongs, which includes:

> *'words like plan, scheme, intention, contrivance, expedient, resource, device, campaign, trick and artifice. Strategic and strategically are defined in the Oxford dictionary as "dictated by" or "serving the ends of" a strategy:*

> *I will call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as a base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets and threats … can be managed'* *(Paterson 2002: 35).*

Patterson's (2002) definition of story is one that makes sense of the context of the telling by exploring the underlying strategy or intent of the storyteller.

The third wave is sometimes referred to as the 'age of identity' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 605). Georgakopoulou (2006) suggests that the emergence of third wave narrative analysis has consequence for the style of analysis that contemporary analysts draw upon when questioning issues of identity.

> *'Importantly, for narrative, it has come with an extra consideration: an increasingly apparent need for the two camps of narrative analysis and narrative inquiry that have more or less happily lived apart to work together and cross-talk. The expressivists ... the narrative inquiry scholars, use narrative as a means to an end (in my terms as a method) and on that basis their interest lies in the about, the what and the who of narrative: what stories tell us about the teller's self ... for the other camp, the narrative analysts, those who prioritise the how of narrative telling's and for whom the study of narrative can be an end in itself' (Georgakopoulou 2006: 125).*

Georgakopoulou's (2006) point is an important one, it highlights that through the process of analysing talk, the narrator presents an identity that can be inflected, reworked and subtly affected.

This third wave provides the opportunity to extend analyses to multiple levels and is sometimes described as the 'narrative turn' (Gee 2010); for example, analysis of how individuals make meaning within and across cultural groups. Gee (2010) provides example of how language is tied to the world and to culture, and units of language can relate to a particular scheme or theme of ideas within a larger story. There is attention to the structures of the language, but also to the context of the storytelling. Stories may also be seen to have political or historical significance. For example, Squire (2005) defines the dimensions of story from a third wave perspective.

> *'What a story says and does can be taken as cognitive or aesthetic re-enactment, an effort at personal understanding or social inscription, or emotional defence. A story can be read as addressed to its present audience or to a much broader audience of past, present and future figures, real and imagined' (Squire 2005: 103).*

The third wave may draw on earlier approaches, but essentially adopts an eclectic perspective. Freeman (2003) suggests that a common thread in the various theoretical approaches is the preoccupation with the politics of voice. For example, how there is variation in what different groups describe as important in their story and to whom they ascribe authority in the way they direct their talk about authority.

The research questions identified above will be explored through an analytical framework (defined below) that utilises a relational method of analysis. The relational processes is categorised as dialogical (Riessman 2008). A dialogical approach takes into account the

historical moment of the telling, but also who is doing the telling (women may work within different gendered systems in the way they tell their story) there is also a focus on social discourses that influence the telling and the change that the teller may experience that influences their story (Riessman 1993). The dialogical approach explores multilayer levels of analysis, for example Riessman (1990) discusses how women made sense of their divorce in narratives that contained assumptions about how marital interactions are supposed to occur in late 20th century America; however, the men did not draw on this contextually relevant information. Dominant and counter narratives will be explored through this relational analytical framework as will the strategies the participants draw on to tell big and small stories.

Riessman (2008) highlights that a dialogic approach is not equivalent to a thematic and structural analysis, but relies on a broad interpretative approach to oral narratives and has a tendency to focus on who participants in a study tend to direct their communication towards; another way to put this is 'to whom do they give voice'. During the analysis of narratives an investigator may put meaning into a participant's or group's stories. In the present study, this is explained in the section titled 'Narrative Analysis'. For example, in the dialogic approach:

> *'the voice of the investigator who speculates openly about the participant's narrative may be included … the investigator adapts an active voice (although she is never the only voice). More in the direction of first person research than is typical in thematic and structural traditions; the investigator joins a chorus of voices, which the reader can also join. To put it differently, inter-subjective and reflexivity come to the fore as there is a dialogue between research and researched, text and reader, knower and known' (Riessman 2008: 137).*

In the present study the way the individual participants express their professional experience will be analysed by drawing on personal data, exploring and patterns in the discursive constructs between women who are at different life stage. The context in which the story is told is also interpreted as having relevance to the participants meaning.

3.3.1. Relations between levels of analysis

The juncture between big stories (the overall development of a professional identity) and small stories (the analysis of how people connect to the dominant and counter themes within an organisational culture) is analysed in the present study. Bell (2009) provides a theoretical

basis to inform the analytical framework, developed in this study. Bell (2009) suggests that much can be learnt about narrative identity processes by exploring the relationships between stories and in particular how people work through problems in their narratives. Bell (2009) recommends an approach that considers identity to be seen as an ongoing project that shifts and changes and is fluid and develops through narratives. The juncture between work and other aspects of a person's life may shift as they come to make sense of their experiences in different ways, tell their story in different ways, or have their story heard by different listeners.

This study incorporates dominant and counter processes as a way to build a fuller picture of the narrative strategies employed (application of the analysis is more fully explained in section 4 of this chapter, titled 'Narrative analysis'). The quote below provides an outline of how the procedures are integrated and how trustworthiness of this work meets ethical parameters of the inquiry.

> *'Some interrogate the trustworthiness of data, others the investigator's analysis, and few cross borders of the two of validity' (Riessman 2008: 185).*

The validity and reliability of this approach is explored by paying close attention to the way the researcher made sense of the data. The stories participants tell are considered to be a reliable reflections of the experiences they had in their work at a particular point in time (Riessman 2008). This is explained further below (under the heading narrative truth, section 3.8). It is important to note here that a dialogical analysis draws more on "positioning analysis' (Bamberg 2003) where as small story analysis has more of a focus on the multiple identity theory derived from an analysis of themes or stanza's (Gee 2000). Stanza's explore patterns in the narratives (Gee 2000). Themes also explore patterns but have a focus on patterns evident across a group where stanzas have a focus on individual narratives. In this thesis there is an interest in the pattern or themes evident in two groups at varied life stages. The analysis of stories can be more deeply explored and made sense of by drawing on identity theory, dialogical analysis and interpretation of the gendered context in which stories are told. The gendered story will be highlighted by exploring the relational processes that are embedded within the participant's stories. In telling a narrative about their development and growth (storying their narrative identity) the women in this study are presumed to draw on varied techniques to tell their story. The relational processes drawn upon will be highlighted within the analysis and interpret.

3.3.2. The narrative approach

The approach to collecting and interpreting the data adopted here relies on eliciting an in-depth, experience-centred story from each participant. Stories were collected from participants who reflected on their experiences concerning how they had developed and grown in their professional lives. Each interview involved the participant discussing their interactions in their working lives for approximately 90–120 minutes. Some interviews were conducted over two sessions to a total of 120 minutes.

The telling and the interpretation of the telling is significant in the methodological framework. The way the participants spoke about their choices in relation to their working lives was seen to have temporal significance, that is, the way information was understood and talked about was influenced by the culture in which the information was presented (Ricoeur 1984, 1991; Bakhtin 1986; Riessman 2003, 2008; Chase 2005; Mishler 1999; Squire 2005). There was attention to the way the story was told but also an analysis of the themes within the story and the structure through which the stories were told. Finally, a more reflective level of analysis was offered that focused on the 'praxis' (Mishler 1999) – the way women's narratives are storied and the way broader narratives that frame the stories are interpreted. The interview and transcription approach provides a means to analyse the participants' experiences and to compare and contrast the way each individual and each group reflects on their development and growth in the workplace.

3.3.3. Approach to interviewing

Participants were asked to tell a particular story about the way they had developed and grown in their professional life. All participants spoke about opportunities to make choices. The women in this study were considered to be privileged because they were in a position to make some choices about their career.

Narrative interview techniques were applied, involving prompts to encourage reflection. Riessman (2002) defines narrative interviews as a discursive accomplishment where participants engage in an evolving conversation that is collaboratively produced. Holstein and Gubrium (2001) describe the narrative interview as a process that involves facilitating the respondent's story. There are differences between in-depth interviewing techniques, which seek to elicit descriptive information, and what is known as a narrative interview, which is designed to generate stories of a person's experiences. In the present study, prompts were

provided prior to the interview to give participants an indication of what they would be asked, to give them time to reflect before the meeting. An example of a prompt is 'How did you recall feeling when that occurred?'

As the sole interviewer I drew on prior experience of narrative interviewing. My experience in teaching and in undertaking narrative forms of career counselling and teaching narrative methods of career counselling provided a basis for the approach. When drawing on a narrative approach in career counselling, the counsellor focuses on the client's resources and what they bring to their understanding of their lives. Narrative career theorists describe the development of their clients as a process, whereas narrative methods are seen to assist the clients fit work into their lives, rather than fit themselves to jobs. This process evolves and is thought by some career theorists to be more suited to the diverse range of careers and experiences of contemporary professionals than previous approaches. The narrative career counselling approach is explored by numerous researchers (see Savickas 1997, 2001, 2008; Saviackas et al 2009, Campbell and Ungar 2004a, 2004b). The approach is described as one that provides opportunity for reflection on career resources. Narrative approaches adopted by career counsellors generally explore how dominant stories are interpreted and transformed during the relationship exchange between the counsellor and the person being counselled. The approach adopted in this study drew on some counselling strategies. For example, I the researcher would provide a prompt to ask the interviewee to reflect further on a particular statement they made. The interviewee then may have provided a statement about their experience managing a particularly challenging event or stage in their career. I would rephrase or summarise what I/she heard and ask the participant if I/she had heard what was said correctly. These techniques could be described as summarising the client's story (Campbell and Ungar 2004a, 2004b) and also as a narrative interviewing technique.

3.3.4. Transcription of digitally recorded interviews

Before each interview, permission was sought to digitally record the conversation. Participants were sent consent forms that explained the research purposes, outlined the procedures and stipulated confidentiality. (See details of consent in Appendix 1 along with information provided to participants about this study.) Procedures outlined to the participants were passed through the university's ethics committee. (See procedures outlined to participants in Appendix 2.) The procedures for digitally recording conversations included a transcription of each interview in full including attention to

language, notes about pauses and the interviewer's questions and prompts. Each transcript included the participant's age range, gender and profession and a pseudonym. The responses were transcribed verbatim. In the transcripts, each question asked was bolded, and prompts or additional questions were also included. The language used by the participant was captured in as much detail as possible. For example, if an incorrect word was used the English was not changed to reflect 'correct grammar' but rather the actual words chosen in their speech. Furthermore, where a participant paused or indicated hesitation and reflection, their silence was recorded as an ellipsis ('…') and notes were made concerning how long the pause was.

The method for transcribing audio material was based on the procedures outlined by Mishler (1991), who argues that transcribing leads to the theoretical discovery of the 'dialogic' or 'narrativised self'. The way the participants express their experiences of how they work and live can be explored by drawing on narrative interviewing and transcribing methods.

3.4. Narrative procedures

The choices women make about their professional development and growth during different life stages is explored by drawing on a relational and dialogical approach (in section 3.5 that follows the approach to analysis is outlined, however this current section focus on the procedural steps. The variation in the way individual women and groups of women in this study talk about their development and growth is sought out and compared. The way women narrate their story is interpreted through an examination of how the women position their story but also through an exploration of what is considered dominant discourses in workplace culture. The features of the narration are also examined to highlight how the different groups understand effectiveness in their work and contextualise their story within their work history.

A dialogical analysis requires a close reading of narratives, this puts real limits on the amount of material that can be examined in this way. Hence careful selection is critical to shaping interpretations that can be related to the research question. Single narrative vignettes are offered to demonstrate that value of this analytical approach to illuminating aspects of gendered context in which stories of the women in this study are told. Each data chapter will focus on the relational processes that are embedded within the participant's stories. This form of analysis is drawn upon to highlight the gendered nature of the participant's narratives.

The initial approach has a focus on the relationship between big and small stories and the second approach will focus more on the dialogue and the patterns (the dominant and the counter narrative), therefore at one level the study has a dialogical approach, but there is essentially an exploration of how the women position their narratives by drawing on techniques that illuminate the way the narratives are positioned. The analysis moves from a detailed analysis of what each participant says to a general comparison of themes and patterns across the interviews. However, the overall method used is essentially a dialogical approach that includes exploring themes and patterns in the dialogue (see Riessman 2008). In addition, an interpretation is made of how the context in which the story is told impacts on the telling. Riessman (2008) suggests that the dialogic mode of analysis regards how participants present information and interact with others. The approach:

> '*examines how talk among speakers is interactively produced and performed as narrative. Here the investigator becomes an active and visible presence in data gathering, analysis and the written report' (Riessman 2008: 19).*

The present study provides an analyse of who the participants consider to be 'other', that is, either inside or outside their professional sphere but in some way relevant to their professional development and growth. The way they wove their story about what assisted them to grow or what created conflict was an essential consideration. The interviews were analysed to question whether the challenges or constraints were considered to be 'outside the individual' or part of their own interpretation of their experience.

3.4.1. The participants in this study

The representative sample is summarised in Table 2 below and eight groups are identified in this table. The groups are labelled by age but also by generation. The generational group theory was developed by Inglehart (1977), and later this theory was made popular by Strauss and Howe (1991) and posits that a generation is a social construction in which individuals of varied generations experience social contexts that differentiates their generation. The labels formed in the generational group theory are drawn on below to distinguish the age groupings.

Table 3.1: Participant groups

Age group	Sample no. of women	Life stage	Generation cohort
1. 46–56 years	7	Senior women	Boomer Generation
2. 35–45 years	7	Midlife women	Generation X
3. 65+ years	1	Semi-retired women	Builders
4. 20–30 years	2	Young women	Generation Y
Total	**17**		

In total, 17 women participated in this study. Age group 1 women (46–56 years old) were labelled the Boomer Generation group; (in a more senior stage of their careers) they had passed through the midlife stage and were in senior managerial roles at the time of the interviews. Age group 2 women (35–45 years old) were labelled the Generation X group, were situated in their midlife stage and were in middle management roles at the time of the interview. Age group 3 (65+ years old) included a semi-retired participant labelled Builder Generation who reflected back on managerial roles she had during her working life. Age group 4 (20–30 years old) included two professionals who had recently graduated from university and entered professional roles. All participants were working in Melbourne, Australia at the time of interview (many had worked in different states and countries at other times in their professional lives). During the data collection stage interviews also took place with 12 men (in similar age groups), it was decided that these interviews would not be included in the major analysis, but the interviews provided a basis to compare and contrast the way in which women's stories were different from men's stories. This also helped to identify the gendered nature that women present when talking about their development and growth and about what it means to be effective. By undertaking interviews with men and women it became clear that gender is socially constructed in relationships, rather than a fixed and binary category. Following West and Zimmerman (1987) gender is best understood as a verb 'an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction' (West and Zimmerman 1987: 130).

The focus of the initial level of analysis is on the relational features that woman from age group 1 and age group 2 present (the midlife group or group 2 and the senior group also known as group 1). Five stories are analysed, two from women in the senior life stage and two from the midlife stage group, these stories are contrasted to explore how these women

tell their story about their career and their career aspirations. These two groups' stories are contrasted with a woman from the young women's group. The stories are then analysed drawing on the themes that the women in the varied groups discuss. Variations in the way the women tell their story about how they are effective in their work and sometimes experience constraint and an experience of being ineffective are highlighted and how these variations relate to gendered research is considered.

The initial focus is on the gendered narratives and variation in the way the different groups tells and contextualise their story in the workplace. The second level of analysis compares the dialogical aspects of the women's stories. Table 3 outlines the details of each participant, and their title and position in the organisational hierarchy. The participants' identities have been disguised in various ways, pseudonyms are used and potentially identifying themes have been altered by drawing on broad categories to describe their position and potentially the multiple identities they draw on when telling a story about how they are effective and sometimes ineffective in the organisation they work within.

Table 3.2: Participant particulars

Older group of women (Boomer Generation)	Professional role/title	Level within the organisation
Betty	Pro-vice chancellor – Academia	Senior manager
Sandra	Senior academic – Academia	Senior manager
Margaret	Senior academic – Academia	Senior manager
Marie	Learning and development manager Telecommunications industry	Senior manager
Mary	Human resource manager – Financial Services industry	Senior manager
Lou	People manager – Academia	Senior manager
Edna	Executive – Financial services industry	Senior manager
Midlife group of women (Generation X)	**Professional role/title**	**Level within the organisation**
Ginny	Manager – Financial Services industry	Middle manager
Molly	Manager – Community Development Industry	Middle manager
Melanie	Career consultant – within a univeristy	Middle manager

Paula	Management consultant – Private Business consultant	Middle manager
Penny	Management consultant – Business consultant at a large firm	Middle manager
Nancy	Manager – Financial services	Middle manager
Lara	Manager – Financial services	Middle manager
Other generations of women	**Professional role/title**	**Level within the organisation**
Jan (Builder Generation)	Office manager	Manager
Connie (Generation Y)	Junior solicitor	Junior professional
Rachel (Generation Y)	Junior solicitor	Junior professional

The role categories and levels within organisations were assessed by asking participants about their level of experience and level of responsibility within the organisation. They were asked what roles they perform and at what level they work within the organisation.

3.4.2. The selection of a sample group

The professionals in this study have been selected because they have considerable work autonomy, a comfortable salary and are commonly engaged in creative and intellectually challenging work. Their peers may see them as having impressive abilities in particular aspects of their work.

The sample group was semi-random; they were identified through professional networks accessible to the researcher. To begin the process, an adaptive form of sampling was applied, members that were in senior managerial and managerial roles within the Melbourne professional sector were targeted, then a snowball technique was used to find other members within this network (see Nueman 2011) for definitions of adaptive and snowball sampling). Participants were contacted by telephone and asked whether they would meet at a location that they selected. They were asked to participate in an interview that involved gaining insight into their experience of growth and development in their work.

At the time of interview, all participants from the midlife group were in managerial roles and all from the senior group were in senior managerial roles. However, the roles varied, for

example, representatives were sought from management consulting, human resources, marketing, legal, clergy, hospitality, business management, public service, education and financial services professions. Important factors in selection included gender and age, as these were key variables thought to have an effect on experience. The selection of participants and the information they provided clearly had some bearing on the results obtained.

3.4.3. What were participants asked?

Participants were emailed a set of prompts to consider prior to the meeting (see interview prompts in Appendix 2). The key question they were asked to think about was: How have you developed and grown in your professional life?

Prompts used to explore this question included:
- When do you consider your career journey began?
- What are some of the significant highs and lows in your work and life, constraints and challenges?
- What has been critical to your development and growth?
- What was happening in your life at the time?
- What happened?
- How did that happen?
- How did you feel during the stage or event?

The data gathering in this research took place largely over a two-year period. I met with each participant in the study and asked the same set of semi-structured questions to each participant. Some participants were interviewed twice because they did not have time to finish their story during one meeting or because some elected to have time to reflect before finishing the interview. It was the interviewee's choice to have one or two meetings. There was not a comparison between the interview meetings but rather data from each participant were compiled as one transcript.

The stories were interpreted to search for common threads concerning the way the individuals within varied life stages talked about their development and growth in their professional work. Each professional talked about varied experiences and each group had variation, but there were also similarities.

3.5. A narrative analysis

Women in this study told stories about the ways they have overcome barriers. They presented narratives about their identities as professionals – stories about the struggle to develop and grow in the context of their work. The stories participants told were dependent on their life experiences and a reflection of their interactions at work.

The notion of barriers that regulate available choice is both subjective and inter-subjective. The way people recognise their strengths and constraints and perceive others to recognise these are also subjective (personal reflections) and inter-subjective or to put it another way discursively constructed through talk with others. The divisions between big stories, small stories and midlevel stories are important to this study because this highlights where the participants position their stories in their life. An analysis of the dominant and counter narratives are important in this study because the interweaving between a dominant and counter narrative highlights the strategy that the women in this study employ when talking about their experience in their professional work. Within small and big stories there are threads of dominant and counter narratives. The dialogical performative approach involves a complex weaving.

3.5.1. An analysis of relational constructions

There are facets of professional identity that are particularly important for the current study and these are analysed by examining the findings derived from two forms of narrative analysis that are empirically grounded in varied theoretical definitions of narrative identity.

Freeman (2011) suggests that a key element of exploration of 'big stories' is an interest in the way individuals or members of a particular group take stock of larger segments of life (e.g. their understanding about family relationships or work). There are a broad range of approaches to analysing 'big stories'; nevertheless, a common feature may be how these connect to other bodies of knowledge. For example, Freeman (2003) explores how narrative theories concerning identity and difference apply in the field of psychology. A number of scholars have questioned the degree to which language provides insight into 'psychic realities' (Scalter 2003: 3), the construction of identity (Crossley 2003) and an exploration of personal and social experience (Burman 2003). The way big stories are analysed in this study draws on Freeman's (2011) definition, in that the way participants reflect on how their work 'fits' within their lives is considered an important feature and how the different groups describe the way work is situated in their life is seen as part of the 'big story'.

Boucher (1997) identified how a group of female leaders, collaboratively explored their memories of leadership using a memory work method. Boucher (1997) described memory work as an excellent tool for doing feminist research and collaboration along with an exploration of components of experience and consciousness and provides a tool for exploring socially constructed phenomena. The memories of the participants at different life stages are important in this study, but also their personal reflections and ways of making sense of are explored.

For scholars interested in narrative memory there is often a focus on a political agenda that has changed through time (Ryan 2009a). The way participants in this study were asked to reflect on their experience and their reflections were analysed, however the effects of perceptual memory have not been explored. For example, many psychologists explore personal memory to identify the affect memory has on adult social development (Thorne 2000; Gergen 1994). This study focuses on the role of narratives and the role they play in recollection of experience is an area of research that is in its infancy (Bruner 1987; Nelson 1993), Quas and Fivush (2009) present compelling evidence to suggest that narratives play a role in personality development, coping strategies and the acquisition of memories and memories are responsive to culturally constructed personal interactions. This research explored how the stories of the different groups were positioned, provided an analysis that highlights relational processes. Perceptual memory is not the focus; however the data analysis relies on the memories of the participants. The present study explores how the participant's memories of their experiences are embedded within forms of discourse and socially constructed meanings as opposed to the way in which memories form a therapeutic tool or basis for empowerment.

An analysis of the relational processes relies on definitions of what small, midlevel and big stories involve. Small stories have sometimes been described as personal variations within a group. The variations in a group of midlife women were discussed by Apter (1995) and Josselson (2006), in which the overall narrative that binds the group's experience is about the struggle to develop a cohesive identity at midlife, but the variation in the way individuals make sense of conflict is explored as a small story that connects to a larger theme. The larger theme is about development and growth and about gender differences and the smaller theme is about stage of life, experience, and how life stage affects experience.

In the current analysis neither small nor big stories dominate, they are seen to interweave and to form what Bell (2009) has called a middle-level story, termed in this thesis a relational processes to analysis. There is an interest in the variation within groups and between groups. For the purpose of this study big stories are understood to be those that have a more autobiographical nature and relate to entire lives and the entire career of an individual as opposed to smaller segments of specific situational events or aspects of everyday conversation. Both are viewed as integral to exploring development of professional identity. An analytical framework is proposed, grounded in relational analysis. Bell (2009) proposes that a third analytical level, the middle story or relational analysis, provides a bridge between big and small stories.

An analysis of relational processes can provide a framework for connecting levels of theory relevant to narrative identity (Bell 2009).

> *'Narrative identity scholarship addresses the broad question of how selves are created through narrative. The shared, underlying assumptions are that self/identity is a narrative creation; that it is to be regarded as a dynamic process rather than a static entity; and that it must be seen in relation to its historical and cultural contexts' (Bell 2009: 281).*

Bell (2009) analyses the stories of ten participants to explore how they employ varying strategies to position their story about their career identity. Her findings conclude that when telling a career story most participants position their story predominantly at a midlevel (that is they draw on larger life experiences and smaller elements of their everyday lives to highlight their career aspirations. Bell's (2009) study relied on participants who were at university. This study relies on stories from participants at different life stages and explores if the women at these different life stages position their story differently.

Bell (2009) questions the strategies her participants used to maintain identity a sense of their career identity, for example, if they acknowledged a problem it was noted and the way participants referred to this in consecutive interviews was explored. This was seen as a stable component of their identity, for example, if they referred back to a problem forming relationships. If they did not identify any problems, Bell (2009) questioned what strategies they used to avoid problems and how this became a component of their career identity.

Georgakopoulou (2006) suggests that small stories are aspects of everyday conversation and are not necessarily fragmented. There are numerous and significant differences between the way big and small stories are analysed and understood, so their inclusion in narrative identity analysis is important. A midlevel or relational form of narrative analysis provides a theoretical approach that enriches narrative inquiry and an important framework to explore the research questions proposed for the current study. The question of how people identify themselves in their professional lives will be explored by undertaking a relational form of analysis. The dominant and counter narratives in this study are seen to rest within the small story analysis and in the relationships between big and small stories; this is explained further in the section below.

3.5.2 An approach that explores dialogical constructions

The present study analyses what constitutes the dominant story about professional development and the story that is emergent, or counter to this, it then explores how these stories inform professional practice. For the purpose of this research the dominant career story is thought to have a particular purpose, which is to communicate the story of success or effectiveness, and the counter story, which is to communicate certain emotional and social features in the work culture that influence the way women experience their work or potential constraints and experience of ineffectiveness. Problems may be seen as enmeshed in the teller's experience as well as in their story about how they are overcome. Here, counter narratives are viewed as having equal significance as the dominant narrative. The dominant and counter narratives will be explored to identify themes within the structures of the language that are apparent across the participant sample. These dominant and counter narratives were labelled 'relational interactions'.

Counter narratives are sometimes described as having a different form and are posed against the dominant narratives (see Bamberg and Andrews 2004). Bamberg and Andrews (2004) argue that we develop our identities as women (an understanding of self) by telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell. In the present study, counter narratives were identified by drawing on definitions of what is considered a counter story, these definitions are provided by Bamberg and Andrews (2004) and Chase (1995). Theorists who draw on collective themes to analyse data (see Bamberg and Andrews 2004; Chase 2005) establish trends between groups of participants that illustrate the political and cultural significance of the stories participants tell. Bamberg and Andrews (2004) provides a collection of papers on

counter narratives arising from interview material and demonstrates how these are posed against dominant narratives. Andrews (2009) further suggests we must have multiple ways of listening to diversity and of hearing the narratives of successful ageing.

> *'An individual's experience of aging is integrally bound to questions of culture-particularly the system of meaning within culture-and context ... But, narratives of successful aging, like all narratives, are never told in a vacuum. Rather, there must be those who are able to hear them, often stretching themselves beyond their own experiences, even beyond their own cultural frameworks (Andrews 2009: 81).*

Both Andrews (2009, 2010) and Chase (1995) highlight the cultural significance of counter narratives. Chase's (1995) work highlights cultural tensions between the dominant discourses of work and gender, describing a:

> *'tension between discourse about professional work (with its emphasis on gender and race neutral individuals) and discourse about inequality (with its emphasis on gendered and radicalised groups)' (Chase 1995: 6).*

Chase (1995) highlights how women reflect this cultural tension within their individual stories of success and achievement – their dominant of success and gendered story of inequality their counter story. Chase (1995) illustrates how the less socially acceptable discourses – those seen as counter, for example, struggles between power and subjugation – are woven into the dominant story of development and how they also form a discursive disjunction, a clash between two ways of telling one's story.

The present study the dominant story was explored through an analysis of the structure of the language and an analysis of what was seen to be important to the participant in their professional lives. The counter story took into account the elements of the story that the participant saw as having some effect on their professional lives in a less direct way, in a way that was not core to their success and effectiveness. There is also an interpretation of what is considered significant to the dialogical theoretical framework in which this thesis is constructed. Narrative meaning emerges from an analysis of the social discourses. Narrating can reveal tensions experienced when participants have a desire to construct a coherent explanatory framework (Ochs and Capps 2001).

Figure 3.1 provides a summation of the way the narrating of problems, others' voices and commitments are analysed. This analysis has a focus on the relationship between big stories and small stories and dominant and counter stories.

Narrative identity theory

Level 1 Positioning analysis

Relational approach to explore aspirations of professional women and gendered constructions

Narrative Analysis

Dialogical approach to explore quest evident in stories and the dominant and counter narrative.

Level 2 positioning analysis
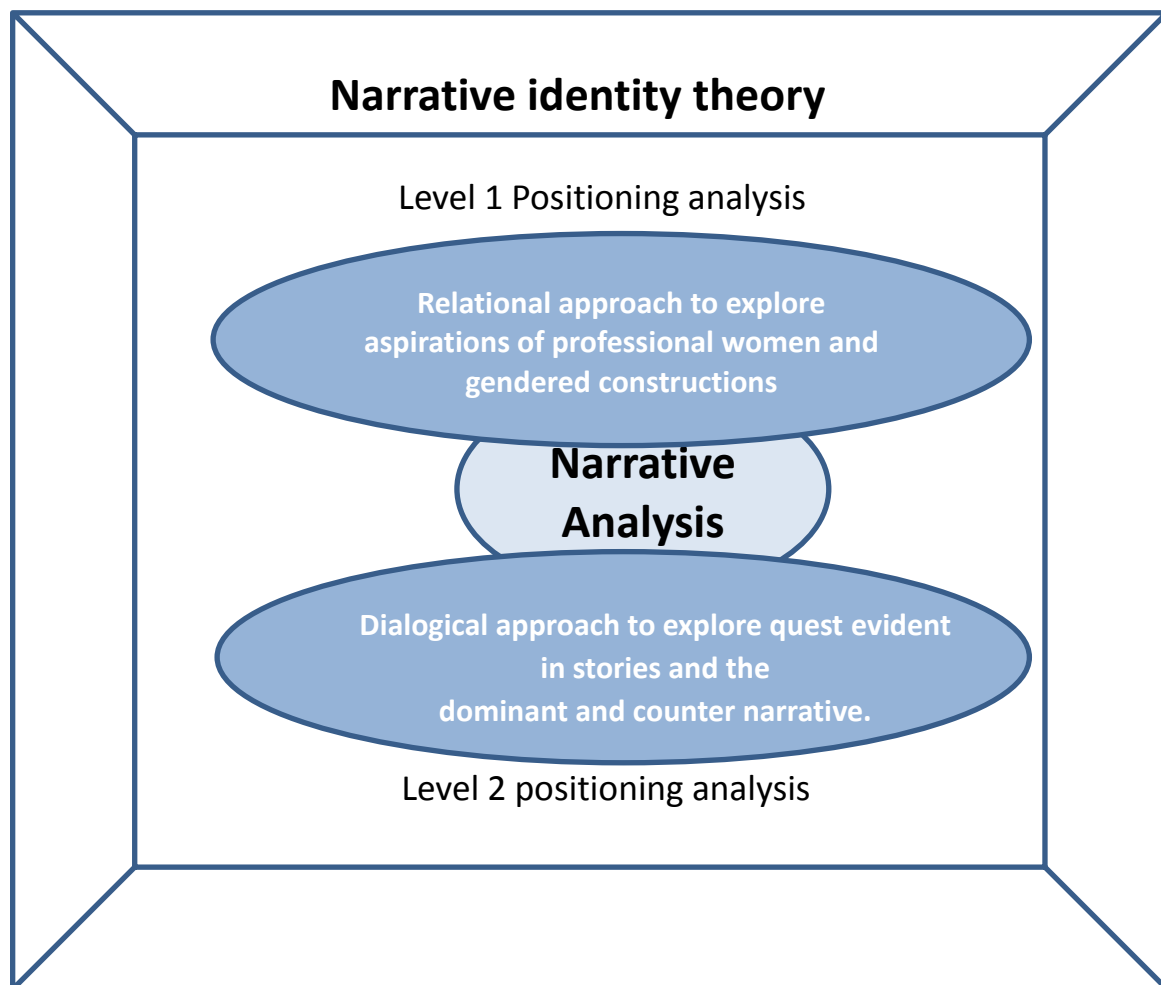
Figure 3.1: The analytical framework.

Figure 3.1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the two levels of analysis target varied approaches; both approaches seek to explore the research question and narrative identity theory. This analysis is conducted on an individual and a group level. The framework provides a way to explore relational and dialogical that influence narrative identity.

This framework provides a way to explore if and how women of varied life stages and or generation cohorts identify themselves differently when talking about their career aspirations and identity quest and consequently provides a means to explore how the women in the study tell a story about being effective and or ineffective in their work and make choices about their development and growth.

The analytical framework depicted in Figure 3.1 discusses two levels of analysis and highlights that within these levels different strategies are employed to explore the stories of the women, including the way women narrate choices, constraints and how they perceive they are recognised. This form of relational analysis explores how the stories are embedded. Are they largely embedded in the culture and what particular elements of the culture (level two analysis has more of a focus on the quest and how this story is embedded in the cultural in which they work. There is an exploration of variation in the patterns in the way different groups reflect on their experiences. These patterns will be explored by drawing on what will be referred to as an analysis of relational processes.

3.5.3. The significance of the approach as a narrative inquiry

An analysis of relational processes provides a means to explore the personal, social and the cultural significance of women's stories and how women make sense of their experience at different life stages. It provides a means to explore how dialogue affects the choices professional women make and potentially how professionals develop a narrative identity. This study explores the strategies participants employ to tell embodied stories about their experiences.

Many theorists have proposed that learning is a body–mind experience and that there is interconnection between our learning, not only on an intellectual level, but also on an experiential level (Dewey 1929, 1958; Bruner 1996; Bowman 1998, 2004; Bowman and Powell 2007). An analytical framework that explores the relations between stories individuals and groups tell provides a means to explore the 'site', if you like, where people translate 'big' and 'small' stories, where they translate their learning from their external world to their internal world. Menary (2008) argues that narratives can be embodied in the consciousness of individuals and groups. The strategies that participants use to tell their story may depict their embodied experience.

This study proposes to explore where language and talk is embodied in women of different generations, and if it is embodied in differing ways, for men and women of varied age groups. The theoretical significance of positioning analysis was discussed in Chapter 2; a positioning analysis was presented as a way to explore language and narrative identity. Chapter 2 highlighted that gendered narratives have situated significance and significance in terms of the way individuals identify themselves through discursive constructs. Narrative identity theories are situated in the discursive and dialogical branch of narrative theory

(Andrews et al 2008). Indeed, it may be that narrative theory and analysis can be drawn upon to address the aim of this research, that is develop an overall narrative that highlights how professional women experience being effective as well as capturing what constrains their development and growth.

Bell (2009) proposes a number of connecting questions that can be raised when exploring relational processes for example, asking what matters at the small story level for big story transformation or stability. To undergo a transformation it is assumed that participants work through conflicts and challenges. The process of weighing up options involves considering relational factors in their experiences, both short term past experiences and life experiences, the notion of mid-level experiences is somewhere between what happened more recently and what happened many years ago. In a similar way, this research asks: what levels of recognition matter to the participants at the big story level and how does this recognition affect the choices that are made? The big story involves things that happened in their life that have had an impact on their outlook and their identity. It is assumed that to undergo a transformation or development stage, conflicts and constraint are overcome. Also, in some situations a high degree of conflict may create a situation for participants where they stop working in a profession, seek alternative forms or take up other opportunities. There may be different patterns in the way different groups work through conflict. Therefore an analysis that involves exploring relational processes is thought to be appropriate to address the aims of this research. The research project seeks to explore how the stories of professional women of different ages are told and understood in the context of the Australian work culture and to identify aspects of the participants' work and life that are considered to impact on career development and professional identity. The degree to which a gendered form of narrative exists is explored.

The way conflict is managed and the way stories of professional women of different life stages are gendered is explored through the data first chapter (Chapter 4) and the way that stories from professional women reflect varied life stages are explored further in the second data chapter (Chapter 5).

3.6. Method of analysis

Each participant's narrative was analysed to explore how they described their development as a professional and what features were significant, along with what they saw as obstacles or

challenges that inhibited their development and growth. There were several steps in the method of analysis.

The initial focus was to explore the relational aspects of the stories, the way the stories were told. The second level of analysis has a focus on the telling of stories, the process of exchange and the way the women made sense of their experiences.

Level one analysis will involve a positioning analysis with attention to the overall form of the oral interview to show the spatial and temporal order ordering of the story (following Labov 1972).

> 'The structural ordering creates an initial narrative platform for the characters inside the stories to display how they position themselves in relation to one another as story-agents and identities in a recognisable plot.'' (Johnson 2009: 272)

The point of this first part of the analysis is to draw on a few women stories from the different life stage group to illustrate the way the position their story about their career aspiration and to highlight variation in the way the women tell their story about the gendered nature of their development experience. This first level of analysis highlights the big story about developing as women in a professional context.

The second focus is to highlight variation in the themes that the women of the varied life stages draw upon and seeks to illustrate that there are multiple identities that women perform when telling their story about developing as an effective women (a dominant story). There are also constraints that need to be managed (experiencing ineffectiveness or the counter story).

The second level of analysis was undertaken by building a chain of evidence (Gall et al 1996) in other words the perceptions of the stories were analysed in a systematic manner over an eight year period by paying close attention to the themes that were spoken about and this long term involvement with the analysis enabled the researcher to distinguish the themes evident in the stories of the group, but also systematic steps were applied. The way the participants responded to the key question (how have you developed and grown in your professional life) was answered individually, yet the research question had a plural focus (how do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life stages?) therefore it was an objective to explore patterns in the responses in order to take the individual response and analyse variation and similarity across the set of transcripts. The themes evident in the stories were initially assessed by listening to the digitally recorded

interviews on several occasions, and reading and rereading the transcribed data. The key themes of the dominant and counter narratives were labelled and then checked for consistency. The dominant and counter themes were at times appearing to weave between the story lines, in that the themes were sometimes discussed in one sentence and not always obvious, they overlap. The counter stories included themes that related to the way participants were affected by the constraints that their professional work placed on their personal lives, but also stories about how women overcame these constraints. Dominant themes were around the key ways in which the participants believed they were successful and effective in their work. The themes were analysed by using software that enabled the researcher to more closely evaluate the themes that appeared across the varied groups and distinguish patterns.

QSR's (a Microsoft partner and global supplier) NVivo 9 software was used as a tool to classify and sort the themes in the stories. QSR's software is useful for the basic tasks of qualitative research and was used in this research as a tool to store and sort the dominant and counter segments of interviews, which were defined as 'parent nodes'. The dominant and counter nodes were stored and classified using NVivo 9; and themes identified using the software. This tool provided a means to further develop the analysis. NVivo 9 provided a basis capture and labelled the data then placed them in files. This tool provided a means to collect, sort and review all similar themes.

NVivo 9 provides a powerful means of indexing and retrieving data, and also allows application of coding. Coding was applied to dominant and counter themes, but the data were also grouped by group, which provided a way to compare the groups. A matrix of relationships can be formed by exploring the cross-tabulation of coded themes. NVivo 9 was used to create a matrix analysis, which counts the number of text segments defined by the researcher as a dominant or counter node and the number of parent and child nodes discussed by particular groups. This provided a means to compare the themes discussed by each group and identify patterns across the stories.

Initially the themes in the stories of Boomer Generation (also known as group of senior women) and Generation X (also known as midlife group) women were compared, and the way relational strategies were employed by the two groups was analysed. The themes touched on in the stories of women of different generations were then compared, and the relational strategies that each group drew on were discussed and analysed.

The experiences of participants were analysed by drawing on the relational model for analysing narratives (see Figure 1), but also by considering how the social meanings of experiences and the memories that participants had were embodied in social meanings (Crawford et al 1992). The way that the participant's memories were embedded in what Gee (2010) defined discourse identity. The notion of multiple identities was explored, with particular attention to the multiple identities to show how individuals in the group are socialised in the workplace context and develop a sense of belonging in their professional group. The women of the varied life stages were considered to view their development and growth in different ways and draw on varied discursive strategies to tell their story about how they develop and group in their work. Discourse analysts such as Gee (2010) interchange the word 'identity' with 'socially situated identity' and 'multiple identities' to emphasise that identity can be explored by looking at how we recognise and act out our different social roles or different social positions in society. In this way the different generational groups (or women at different life stages) tell their narrative in varied ways and experience their socially situated identity in varied ways. The notion of a socially situated or multiple identities may be universal in the workplace; however the expression of the experience of growth and development may be experienced by women at different life stages in different ways. The design of the analysis seeks to highlight this variation.

3.7. The context through which the narratives are told and heard

My role as the interviewer was to facilitate the interview conversation. However, as Holstein and Gubrium (2001) illustrate, individuality is inherent in the interviewer's interpretation of the narratives they hear. Subjectivity can influence the types of participants identified in a study and cultures may be comprehended subjectively.

> 'In other societies and historical periods, agency and responsibility have been articulated in relation to a variety of other social structures, such as the tribe, the clan, the lineage, the family, the communities, and the monarch. The notion of the bounded unique self, more or less integrated as the centre of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action, is a recent version of the subject' (Holstein and Gubrium 2001: 6).

These interviews were based on a semi-structured conversation, with long stretches of talk and just 'nods' from the interviewer. Clarification was at times sought about the participant's meaning and if key questions were not addressed the interviewer directed the participant back

to the prepared questions. The participants' subjective accounts were not questioned, but rather considered as integral to the experiences they understood. In the analysis of interviews the variation in the way stories were told was seen to have relevance to the participant's agency and the discourses that participants drew on to express their effectiveness were also analysed.

3.8. Narrative truth

This research offers insight into the way narratives are embedded within workplace culture. The key questions about the value of narrative research are often embedded in the rationale for conducting the research. A chain of evidence has been developed that was based on a 'richness and depth' and empirically grounded within narrative theory. This study is based upon a methodological approach that has been applied in varied forms by narrative researchers (Bamberg 2003; Gee, 2000, 2010; Riessman 2008). Riessman (2008) asks how research aids the individuals and communities who were part of the research. Chase (1995) asks whether a researcher's work with a group to collect and interpret their stories fosters social justice. Andrews (2002: 52) asks 'how will stories be received by differently situated audiences?' Questions of validity and the ethical dimensions of this research are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, which questions what workplace contexts enable participants to engage in inclusive forms of dialogue about their development and growth.

These definitions of narrative can be seen to hold implications for narrative truth (Polkinghorne 2007; Riessman 2008). The way stories are analysed and made sense of has ethical implications and it is the role of the researcher to be explicit about these ethical implications (2005, 2008). Narrative research is positioned within the reformist community of knowledge development (Polkinghorne 2000, 2007). The key issue for narrative researchers is that their research is generally focused on two areas of validity, these include:

> *'the differences in people's experienced meaning and the stories they tell about this meaning and the connections between storied texts and the interpretations of those texts' (Polkinghorne 2007: 471).*

This validity issue raised by Polkinghorne (2007) are similar to the issue raised by Gee (2010) and equally relevant to this thesis. Stories will be explored in this study and the narratives strategies applied will be defined. An analysis of relational processes is drawn upon because there is an interest in what was said but also how what was said had context

specific meaning for the participants. The way people experienced different meanings about development and growth is recognised and the way their storied text is interpreted is explicitly explored.

Gee (2010) asks, how do we make judgements about what in the context is relevant to interpretation? Gee (2010) suggests that an interesting problem with context analysis is that we can consider the context in which language is produced and the context in which it is interpreted. An objective of this research is to explore how the stories of professional women of different ages are told and understood in the context of the Australian work culture and to identify aspects of the participants' stories about their work and life that are considered to impact on career development and professional identity. The latter has been more of the focus in this analysis; this is done by making explicit the analytical framework that is used to explore the problem. What is said by the participants is considered to be a valid account of their perception of their experience.

Using a dialogical form of narrative analysis requires a close reading and in-depth engagement with the material, not only with the excerpt for analysis, but also regarding its positioning in relation to the rest of the material collected and interpreted, such as its relation to common themes emerging across the stories of varied groups. Hence it has value not just in itself but in conjunction with other narrative methods, such as thematic analysis. The strength of the method in assisting in the development of deep insight into the dialogic of subjectivity also has its weakness, since there are considerable limits to the amount of material that can analysed in this way. The significance of the approach will be discussed in terms of the insights and 'truth' derived about the workplace contexts and how the approach provided insight into the workplace dialogue about their development and growth.

3.8.1. Ethics

Ethical clearance was provided by the university ethics committee approving the sample and the approach. Each participant was provided with information outlining procedures and confidentiality was assured (see Appendix 3 participants' consent form).

3.9. Concluding comments

How women talk about their experiences forms the basis for the data analysed. Dominant and counter narratives are explored, and big and small stories these have been defined as relational processes. Chapter 4 that follow has a focus on analysing the gendered narratives of women from two different life stages to explore how women identify themselves in their professional life and position their stories (drawing and big and small story strategies). The analytical framework discussed in this chapter provides a way to interpret the narrative strategies that the participants adopt. These strategies for analysis are considered to provide insight into the way participants construct and reconstruct their story but also how participant perceives themselves in their career and present their career aspirations and career quest. The focus of the analysis is on exploring the relational processes within narratives. An analytical framework has been proposed in this present chapter to explore the narrative strategies women of different life stages adopt to tell their story about development and growth in their work and life. The following chapter compares the stories of the women of varied life stages to illustrate how the relational processes highlighted provide a way to make sense of participants' stories.

Chapter 4: The gender narrative: interpreting women's stories

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed how situated identity theory and positioning analysis are relevant to this thesis. The analytical framework and the methods applied to explore how women of different life stages tell a story about their development and growth in their work was outlined. In this chapter the data are analysed by drawing on empirical findings from five participants representing cases from women at different life stages. The way a woman starting out in her career tells her story is compared and contrasted with two women from a midlife stage and three from a senior group. What is critical in their career story is analysed by using a relational form of analysis to explore the women's talk in action. The analysis shows how the women position themselves as story agents and identifies a recognisable plot. The narrative strategies that the women drew on are explored, firstly the discursive forms of language, and secondly the way the women position their narratives and draw upon gendered themes when telling their story. There is an analysis of the context in which the story is positioned and interpretation of how this context may influence the telling. The careers of women participants are seen to be influenced by the cultural context in which they work and the cultural context in which they work influences the way they identify themselves professionally.

Variation was determined by exploring relational processes to analyse the way women identity themselves in their career. The discursive talk that the midlife group drew on is described as an experience enmeshed in a story about career, work and life. The midlife group positioned their story as a narrative about choice and the balance between work and personal life. The senior women presented their story about development and growth as an experience enmeshed with the larger segments of their life and they highlight how their gender has relevance to their career experience. The senior group position their story in a broader political and cultural context. The stories that the women from varied life stages share illustrate that they position their professional identities differently and draw on varied strategies to tell their story; each woman highlights varied cultural features that impact on her development and growth and therefore the way they understand and interpret what it means to be an effective professional. The similarities and differences in the way the women of varied life stages position their career story and their aspirations is highlighted in this chapter. 'A close reading of narrative devices, such as narrative structure, pattern of worlds and turn-

taking between the interviewer and the interviewee is a means of connecting biography and society' (Riessman 2008: 10). The turn-taking features are interpreted in this study to have relational significance to the creation of meaning. The participants' quest is interpreted as a process through which the researcher and participants make sense of what it means to develop as an effective professional.

4.2. Constructing identities through talk in interaction with others

The sections that follow demonstrate how the participants in this study position their identity discursively. Development and growth of the women's careers is explored as a process of constructing a professional identity as opposed to a role.

> *'Positioning denotes a dynamic, discursive accomplishment of becoming an identity, while role presupposes a static state of being' (Johnson 2008: 188).*

Each of the five women's stories begins with a response to the same question: How have you developed and grown in your professional life? Participants were then prompted to recall anything critical in their development and growth. The way the women began their story and responded to the interviewer's question is outlined below. Positioning analysis begins with attention to the overall form of an oral interview. Labov (1972) outlines the key structures in talk that provide guidance in analysis these include: 'abstract', which summarises critical life experiences; 'orientation', which describes sequences of actions, turning points, critical actions and problems; 'complicating action', 'evaluation', narrator's commentary on complicating actions, or summary of significance; 'resolution', which resolves a plot; and 'coda', which ends the narrative and returns the listener to the present. Vignettes from each participant's transcripts are analysed below to identify the way the women from different life stages draw upon structures within their talk.

The five participants cases outlined below (Molly, Ginny, Connie, Betty and Edna, pseudonyms) provide insight into how work was positioned in the professional lives of women at different life stages. The way women in this study identify themselves in their professional lives, and a narrative a story about their aspirations is analysed by identifying the structures in their talk. The language the women drew upon is discussed as a form of agency that emphasises subjective constructs. The analysis highlights how each woman demonstrates her agency and positions her career story in her youth; however, they are telling the story at

different life stages, all women tell a gendered narrative, yet draw on varied strategies to position their gender story within their professional lives.

Betty and Edna are in senior management roles and are in the senior group (also the Boomer Generation); Molly and Ginny are in middle management roles and are in the midlife group (also Generation X). Connie has just commenced a professional role after completing her studies and is in the group labelled the junior group (or Generation Y). The participants represented are interviewed at a life stage that is different for each interviewee and the stories are analysed to highlight the gendered narrative and how the participants position themselves differently.

4.2.1. Interview 1: Betty's story

Betty begins her story of becoming a professional by discussing her aspiration to be a teacher of science at the time when she was finishing her secondary school studies and getting tuberculosis. This interrupted her studies and she missed a year of school. The text below highlighted with (I) represents the interviewer's question and clarification of the question and (B) represents Betty's talk. This first part of the analysis shows how the talk is organised by drawing on the plot the characters are ordered (focalised) in time and space (Bamberg 2003). The labels or temporal ordering follows labels outlined by Labov (1972) and further demonstrated by Riessman (2008).

Preamble: orientation

I:
1. How have you developed and grown in your professional life?

B:
2. Are you asking when I started my career and what role I started or when I started thinking about a profession?

I:
3. I suppose it could be when you started thinking about career or how you have reflected over the years on your own growth, it could be that you've been on a number of different pathways that have shaped where you want to be, and perhaps your current career as a Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor has been influence by the decisions you have made about your career.'

B:
4. If you are asking, when I was 18 did I have a vision of what the journey would be?
5. The answer is no.

Orientation: provides some relevance of early learning at school influencing choices
B:

6. I was intending to be a secondary science teacher, all through high school.
7. Then I got TB in year 11, and I had to be in hospital all year, where I did correspondence.
8. I was doing science; you could not do physics and chemistry, then by correspondence.
9. I had to do other things. In those days it was a real shame to go back and repeat a year.
10. It meant you were a failure, I was too proud to do that.

I:

11. Is there any critical moment you recall that has influenced you?

Abstract
B:

12. In world picture stuff, a euphoric moment was when Gough Whitlam got elected.

Orientation
B:

13. Leading up to the 72 elections Gough was larger than life.
14. To see someone talking about values that I believed in.
15. Optimism, taking the soldiers out of Vietnam, supporting higher education.
16. I remember going to meetings where he was, themed, It's Time.
17. Show Biz people singing, people were excited.
18. It was great. It was a time when people on the streets were excited.
19. That was a moment.

Evaluation
B:

20. He pulled the troops straight out of Vietnam.
21. I wish there was more of it; we have had a little taste of it recently, with the marching about Iraq.

Complicating action: describes qualities in father that are relevant to her career
B:

22. Dad was very political.
23. He was a big influence; mum was interested, not like dad.
24. Unionism and so on, which was why I got to that as well.

Complicating action: describes political change that occurred at an influential time
B:

25. The movement back then was enormous.
26. It had been going on a long time, Vietnam.

Orientation: provides relevance of the timing of the story
B:

27. I had been at uni for a little while then, paying fees, a lot of money.

Resolution: resolves the plot
B:

28. He just abolished them.
29. That was the first time in my life that I had seen politics as a positive force.

Coda: ends narrative, returns listener to the present
B:
30. Now I am waiting for it again.
31. Positive changes within society.

Betty demonstrated her capacity for introspection (reflection) and in so doing referred to positive changes in society. She embedded her story in a broader narrative, a 'bigger story' about social change; she recalled her political view and the government being a positive force. The narrator positions herself as a person who made choices, her frequent use of agentive verbs related to her reports to orientate the listener. (For example, in turn 27: Betty said, 'I had been at uni for a little while then, paying fees, a lot of money'. This statement is culturally significant because the interviewer as an Australian knows that this was a time that education became much more accessible to many Australian women.) Betty selects a story to tell the interviewer that positions her critical choices in relation to her parents and political change that occurs in the broader social scheme. When Betty resolves the plot of her story, she emphasises that she had seen politics as a positive force early on in her life and ends her narrative by highlighting that she is now looking for positive changes to occur again. She also mentions a significant figure that influenced her choices and her values (her father, see turns 22–23). The complicating action highlights that her interest in politics was a feature of her development and this interest came from her relationship with her father initially. Betty described relationships and experiences as significant to her development and growth as a professional; this was a key theme emerging from her story.

The story has been generated through an interview and generally an interviewer has predetermined goals, therefore both interviewer and interviewee treat the interaction as constraining in some way (Bamberg 2003). Betty's identity production in the interview narrative highlighted that she positioned her story in her youth because she saw this as an important time when her choices about being a teacher were shaped (turns 6–10) but also she positions the critical timing at university being influenced by the broader political climate as this influence her choice, she resolves the plot by highlighting that university fees were abolished (turns 28–29). Betty positions her narrative about developing effectively as being attributed to her ability to experience and embrace 'positive change in society' (turn 31). Betty highlights the significance of the story she has to tell in the coda.

4.2.2. Interview 2: Edna's story

Edna, also a member of the senior group and in her late fifties, positions her story about her value to the organisations she had worked in; she positions her identity as a leader who learnt to 'work well with others' (turn 9) illustrated in context below: 'I have worked with great people; I read fast, I come to conclusions fairly quickly'.

Edna began by talking about the significance of relationships in her life, relationships that influenced her decisions but she also provided examples of making decisions that were based on strategic objectives. She described her education as a significant influence on her professional choices and key relationships as important to her development, growth and learning. Edna had been a successful senior executive in a number of high-profile organisations. She was also a representative on several boards. At the time of the interview she was moving from an executive role and entering a new stage of working in a consulting firm that exclusively assisted high-profile clients. In particular, she would work as a mentor for women in executive roles. Her role would be to provide mentoring services to enable senior women in executive's roles to meet their business objectives. Edna regularly mentioned having had opportunities to take responsibility and confront challenges, so she had experience to share with others. Edna identified herself as a professional who had made a choice to be a leader.

Preamble: orientation
I:
1. How have you developed and grown in your professional life?
E:
2. I think it was a matter of what I didn't want to do; I did my first degree at Latrobe where I was doing Sociology.
3. I had not finished my PhD, I felt I would go to my grave with an unfinished PhD.
4. I think I learnt too slowly, that I didn't want to be an academic.
5. I was not cut out for it.
I
6: Is there any critical moment you recall that has influence you?
E:

Abstract
E:
7. My mother's influence about having the educational skills.

Orientation
E:
8. The importance of having a good team, none of what I have done has been done alone.

Complicating action
E:
9: I have worked with great people; I read fast, I come to conclusions fairly quickly.

Evaluation
E:
10. I can absorb an enormous amount of material.

Resolution
E:
11. The ability to work with politicians, I have never wanted to be one.

Coda
E:
12. it's a world where you learn influence, they have ministers, and you work in the background.

Edna reflects back to her youth when responding to the interviewers question. She responds to the interviewer by talking about her degree at university (see turns 2–5). She then moves on to talk about what is critical and responds to this question by telling a story about her mother's influence and encouragement to have an education (see turn 7). It is not clear that there is a relationship between her mother's influence and …'the importance of having a good team' (see turn 8), perhaps both are seen as critical to her. Edna discussed her first professional career opportunity and how she came to the realisation that she had some qualities that were highly regarded (she orientates the reader to the 'importance of having a good team' (turn 7). Edna resolves the plot of the story concerning what is critical by highlighting that 'she has the ability to work with politicians, but has never wanted to be one' (see turn 11).

Edna positions her story as a woman with the educational background and as a leader who aspires to support others. Edna uses the word 'I' on a number of occasions this highlights that she has ownership and does not necessarily see others influence her choices. Edna starts six of her sentences with 'I' and Betty has more to say about the context and others that influenced her in the experience of development and growth. Betty however starts five sentences with 'I'.

The two cases discussed above demonstrate some similarities in that when asked a question from the interviewer about how they have developed and grown in their professional life both senior women positioning their story in their early career. They position their story by discussing what is critical in terms of values they hold and what has influenced their values.

A theme emerges from Betty's story about political values and Edna's story about leadership values. They identified with particular values.

An important way of telling storytellers identity production is by exploring how a participant interacts with an interviewer and what they chose to tell and where they position what they share (Johnston 2008). The storyteller makes selections (choices) about what to tell and what to leave aside and how to tell the story.

Bamberg (1977, 2003) questions how a storyteller positions herself as a particular identity to her immediate audience, the interviewer. Boden and Zimmerman (1991) explore the sequence of turn-taking during an interview. Note in Betty's story she works (in turn 2) to clarify what it is the interviewer wants to hear about and then responds with a rhetorical question that lets the interviewer know she has a view that the way she has developed and grown has not been a straight forward trajectory or based on a career plan … the experience emerged. For example, turns 4 and 5 provide the context for her journey.

4. If you are asking, when I was 18 did I have a vision of what the journey would be?
5. The answer is no.

The narrative interview begins by the interviewer asking a broad question. Just the first few lines of the response are presented above and the question about what is critical comes later in the interview; however they are selected here as extracts to present and to observe the patterns of what the two women above see as important in their initial response and critical to their development and growth. Below the story from a woman starting out in her career is presented.

4.2.3. Interview 3: Connie's story

Connie is one of the younger members of the participants who shared her story; she is in her early twenties. She tells a story about how she has growth through working hard to complete her studies in Law and looking for opportunities to exercise her capacity. Connie has recently had a child and intends going back to work now that she has found a bit of support through a local child care agency, she is a single mother. A law firm that provided a contract at end of her studies did not take her on as a full time employee. She highlights in her story that she is interested in exploring environments that are congruent with her values and has recently started a contract with a new firm.

Preamble: orientation

I:

1. How have you developed and grown in your professional life?

C:

2. I have not graduated yet, I finished my final semester in Copenhagen.

3. Due to different times I have not officially graduated, but I have completed studying.

4. I started here on the 1st of March.

5. In terms of Law this is my first professional role.

6. Many people at uni have done para-legal work or legal research as a way of getting started, but I did not actually do that.

I:

7. A critical times in your career path? I am hearing right now … With what you are going

through … Are you exploring career opportunities?

Abstract

C:

8. I thought I'd find it hard for my interest in social justice.

9. To translate into paid work.

10. And this was important to me.

Orientation

C:

11. I got involved with social justice sort of campaigns.

12. And other minority groups.

13. I undertook a lot of advocacy roles.

14. That was personally very satisfying.

Complicating action

C:

15. I would like a change now doing something that aligns with my personal values

16. But you can't afford to be too picky...

17. When you are a mother as well.

I:

18. I see.

Evaluation

C:

19. I like working with people.

20. I work better when I have human contact.

21. I talk with colleagues and clients and witnesses and they explain their situation.

22. I find that very rewarding.

Resolution

C:

23. I get most satisfaction out of working for others.

24. And seeing them develop.

25. I think working with others well.

26. Is critical to being effective in the organisation.

27. They support me and through that I support them.

Coda
28. This is a time of change.
29. And that is exciting to be in on that.
30. You feel you are a part of something.
31. Something that's developing and important.
32. I have had to become a bit more conservative to fit in, but I still feel my values are aligned.
I:
33. That sounds a bit like a career aspiration.
C:
34. Yes, that is what I am looking for and see as critical.

Connie's narrative is situated in her youth, and is also focusing on what she is aspiring to become or practice in her work. The interviewer makes the statement that the story she is telling sounds like a story about her aspirations (see turn 33 and Connie confirms that this is the case turn 34). The interaction from the interviewer varies with Connie (as opposed to Edna and Betty) there is less prompting from the interviewer.

Connie positions her story around what she aspires to develop further in the future as opposed to the women in the senior group that reflect back on where they have acquired their values concerning what is critical. Nevertheless Connie does demonstrate some reflection concerning her time at university and developing a sense that she valued social justice principles (see turns 11–14). Before moving into what she aspires to she qualifies that (see 16–17) she said she 'can't afford to be too picky', the interviewer provides a prompt of reassurance (turn 18) as opposed to a question. Connie uses 'I' to highlight what she values and to demonstrate that she is an agent making choices' (see turns 19–27).

Betty, Edna and Connie all provide the interviewer with a story about their career, a narrative about their aspirations as women developing in their work and in so doing make choices about what is significant for them and valued in their work. Betty indicates that she aspires to be involved in 'positive change' an experience she enjoyed in her youth. Edna indicates that she aspires to support and lead others, but not necessarily 'be a politician'. Connie is exploring her aspirations at the time of interview and indicates in her story above that she values social justice principles and aspires to practice these principles in her work, she also highlights what she thinks being effective in her work means to her as this is seen as relevant to her story, however she wants to 'fit in', she resolves the plot of her story about her social

justice aspirations by highlighting that this is the way she likes to work with others … to see them develop. Ginny tries to qualify what the interviewer want to hear.

24. And seeing them develop.
25. I think working with others well.
26. Is critical to being effective in the organisation.

Ginny below asks the interviewer directly if she is interested in what she understands by being an effective professional; however, the interviewer does not pose this question.

4.2.4. Interview 4: Ginny's story

The following describes Ginny's description of her career that illustrates some linear direction. She was interviewed whilst on maternity leave. She reflects on her career at this point. She has decided not to return to work since this interview was conducted and has been working as a stay at home mum and in organising the administration of business analyst consulting firm; her husband's firm.

I:
1. How have you developed and grown in your professional life?
G:
2. I did not have a map of what I wanted to do, but had choices that presented themselves.
3. Doing nothing about moving is actually a choice.
4. I have had a few different roles.
5. Then people offered different things.
6. And then I changed a lot to get where I wanted to go.
7. I started part-time in a clerk role with XXX (company mentioned) in the 1990s.

I:
8. Are there any critical incidents that have shaped this decision?
G:
9. Are you asking, what is an effective professional?
I:
10. Yes, in a way what is critical to you may have some relationship to what you see as an effective professional.

Abstract
G:
11. Some of the things that have shaped my professional life have been an opening up,
12. like a bit of luck, I did not initially set out to do what I am doing sheer luck helped,
13. but also doing nothing about moving is actually a choice.
14. I have taken number of steps.
15. When making a career choice.

Orientation

G:

16. I have had a few different roles, then people offered different things.

17. And then I changed a lot to get where I wanted to go.

Complicating action

G:

18. I started part-time in a clerk role with XXX.

19. What I originally studied at university was maths.

20. I interviewed for a graduate actuary position within the company.

21. During my last year at uni and got a job as a trainee programmer.

22. I left university to I did not finish. Then I got the travel bug and went overseas.

Complicating action

G:

23. The people I have always worked with have been very technical and ...

24. I have strong communication skills; there is a lot of fighting in my team.

25. I am often the one that holds the team together.

26. Various team activities have reinforced this.

27. Lots of managers have said my next sensible step is to move to a more senior manage role.

28. I am really attracted to the problem solving and I get really tired of the people management issues.

29. In a more senior role I would possibly not have to manage the day-to-day conflict.

30. I like my time away from work and I am not sure if I want to spend more time at work.

31. But I will probably move to a senior managerial role.

Complicating action

G:

32. I am from a working class background,

33. but I am are not really that anymore.

34. I now ask, 'what is in it for me' and think I am better aligned with the liberal views.

35. Many of my friends are liberal voters.

36. I have tried to think a bit more broadly about my alliance and where I have come from.

37. I think my son will be ok no matter how much money we have.

38. I have worked with great people but ...

39. Sometimes I cringe when at work,

40. My values about the company making money at the expense of individual people are in conflict.

41. I detach from that.

42. I need to because I don't really agree with it.

Evaluation

G:

43. Initially I chose maths because I was a good student.

44. In my day a good student did math science.

45. I went to Monash because I identified with working class that is where my father and brother went.

46. I don't really know what I want to do next as I did not really know when at school.

47. Teachers and family influence me.

Orientation

G:

48. I came back to work on a contract in the role from the job that I am in now.

49. Three years later they offered me a permanent position.

50. Then I started to move into the role I am in now.

51. I have only ever worked for the same company.

52. My whole working life has been with XXX ...

53. That is what has helped me get some of the jobs that I have got.

54. Because I know people in the company and people have known me.

Resolution

G:

55. I have got jobs that I have not necessarily been qualified for.

56. But I have proven myself.

57. One of the things that has helped me is that I am clever and a quick learner.

58. Most of the jobs I have done have been problem solving jobs.

59. That involves using my intellect to solve a problem.

Coda

G:

60. My official role is Manager of Customer Intelligence

61. My preferred role is mum.

Ginny explores how her work role and her role as mother vary. She discursively constructs a story that highlights that she seeks to qualify what she aspires to in her work and how she believes she is effective in her work.

4.2.5. Interview 4: Molly's story

For Molly, having a career is framed as an expectation rather than as a liberating experience; it is portrayed as one of the many options in her portfolio of choices. She describes never plotting any career, but indicates that instead it was shaped by opportunities. As Molly took up opportunities she also made decisions about other things she would have to forgo or do differently. Molly describes actively making an assessment of the 'best fit' and emphasises decisions and compromises that she has made, or felt expected to have to make in order to live the life that she wanted. In contrast to the collaborative partnering approach, the approach of 'best fit' is more individually focussed.

I:
1. How have you developed and grown in your professional life?
M:

Abstract
2. The choices that appeal are obviously out there and they speak to you.
3. I think some of the choices I made were for my idealised self as opposed to my real self.
4. When I left school I went overseas for a while and
5. I then applied to the commonwealth public service.
6. I applied to foreign affairs and trade,
7. not really knowing what I wanted to do but I had done an international politics degree
I
8. Are there any critical incidents that have shaped this decision?
M

Complicating action
8. Being a diplomat I realised
9. I loved the sound of it, but development has been a really good fit for me.

Evaluation
I made the choice to be financially stable.
10. and lived in my own home and had a bit more of a sense of what my future was.
11. Orientation of story within the workplace culture
9. I started thinking
10. there is one thing I have missed out on here
11. and realised
12. I really wanted to have children.
13. Probably about 18 months after that I heard about the possibility of accessing IVF
14. for single women.

Resolution
M
15. There are a whole lot of people in the development field
16. that have this neo-colonialist perspective that I find objectionable,
17. I realise that development is now a huge industry.

Coda
M
18. My friend were really critical when I went to work in this field and got paid over $100,000
19. to be in this field, but now I think working for the UN and so forth was a fantastic opportunity.
20. Seven years ago I thought I would absolutely squash my profession if I could have a child.
21. As it is I have been really luck to stay in Australia.

Molly's work story is located within the context of her life as a whole and it reflects her attempts to create a sense of work–life balance, a term often used to reflect the struggle to balance care and work responsibilities.

4.2.6. The context of the interaction: How are the women's stories told and heard?

There are elements of each story told by participants that are common threads. Despite the age of people in this study all refer back to their youth when telling their story of growth and development and all emphasise the importance of understanding value in order to understand career aspirations. Connie the younger women talks more about what she hopes to achieve or aspires two, the other women reflect on values that have influenced their aspirations. That is they positioned the experience of how they have developed and grown as having origins in their youth (around the time they finish formal studies at university). There is variation in aspects of the stories told. Some draw on early family experiences and others on later life experiences. The majority however positioned experience in late adolescence as having a high degree of significance. There are key crossroads or critical incidents that occur along the way; however youth appears a critical time to develop the genesis of strengths and place in the professional world.

Aspirations were understood in this thesis to be goals towards a career quest the way a goal is experienced in a given context. Within each story provided by the participants the notion of aspiration was seen as an expression of values whereas the career quest was seen more as a story about what the participant presented as a dominant and counter story. Career quest was seen as different from identity quest. The career quest had a focus on the way work had meaning in a person's life and Beattie's (2009) definition of identity quest was drawn on to make a distinction between the career quest and identity quest. Beattie (2009) suggested that identity is a quest and this quest in constructed throughout a person's life via various interactions. Career quest is thought to be constructed through a person's engagement in work. When the participants talked about their aspirations they highlighted what they hoped to achieve. When they talked about their career quest they talked about their aspirations but also what barriers may have impacted on their development and how they had at times overcome these and moved closer to their ideal professional work. The quest was viewed as a storyline about what the participant saw as critical to providing meaning to their work. At this point in the analysis there is an interest in exploring the talk around the goals and values that underpin the aspiration. The following chapter will focus in more depth on the way in which

the quest is expressed and distinctions will be made concerning the way in which the women in this study talk about aspirations and their quest. This interpretive chapter intended to highlight how some participants discuss their aspiration and quest and the relational features between an aspiration and quest, they are often woven together.

The two women from the senior group (Betty and Edna) present a story about how they develop career aspirations by learning about what is critical to their values. They position their aspirations as personal and they use 'I' to demonstrate a sense of agency when talking about an aspiration. The context in which the story is told has an impact on the telling (Patterson 2002) and potentially the way the quest is narrated. The older women draw on larger segments of their life in telling their stories and consequently a life story or big story is the emphasis; however, they also emphasise how this is relevant to their current working life particularly when they resolve the plot of the story. The complicating action for the two women in the more senior life stage in this group has a focus on turning points where they recognised part of their strengths. The strengths the two recognise are different, but they both focus on times when they gain insight to strengths they bring to their work. For example, (in turn 9) Edna emphasises that she recognised her capacity to 'work with great people; read fast, I come to conclusions fairly quickly.' Betty recognised by reflecting on her early career that she had experience with political change (see turns 25 and 26). Kolb et al (2010) highlight that women learn to become capable of negotiating their value to the organisations they work within as they develop their capacity to recognise their strengths and emphasise their abilities. Campbell (2008) explored the complexities of identity and suggests that through life experience we come to construct meaning. What becomes clear from the participants stories is that the cultural context in which participants work influences the way they identify themselves professionally.

Beattie (2009) suggests that identity is constructed through enquiry, dialogue and interaction and Ricoeur (1992) provides a theory of language for exploring relational aspects of identity formation. These theoretical perspectives provide a means to consider the significance of the stories the participants reconstruct and how these may provide insight into the professional lives and identity quest of the women; however, what is portrayed in these stories provides insight into a perspective the women held at the time of telling and may not reflect their current insights as the identity quest would potentially change as new interactions are formed, new dialogue exchanged and new insights developed.

The two women from the midlife group (Ginny and Molly) discuss their 'choice' and how their choices were influenced by values but they also discuss how they weigh up their choices and consider how available options fit with values and aspirations. The complicating action they present highlights that their career stories are characterised by flexibility (Inkson 2008), but also balancing family. Ginny (in turns 28–38) discusses the origins of her values, but also conflicts she has experienced and constraint. She talks about the values she has for her son and sees this as relevant to her story about her development and growth. Molly (in turns 4–14) highlights that her values for work have changed and a priority over career advancement was to have a child, even if she has not found a suitable partner.

The barriers the women of the midlife group talk about emphasise the word 'choice' this word does not appear in the more senior women's stories (not in Betty and Edna's transcript) when they tell their stories. Choice is used to highlight the pathways taken and also the emphasis on work and life decisions. Perhaps they believed they had more choices to make or the language was more commonly discussed in the work culture of women in their midlife. The more senior group tell their story at a time when they have made choices about where they will focus their resources and development. Broadbridge (2008) and Simpson (2011) noted that middle management women are less likely than men to reach senior roles due to outside work commitments. Members of the senior group (Bettie and Edna) that are in senior roles have made choices to focus on their professional roles and the story about balancing work with personal life is not as significant to these women. They did not mention the word 'choice' this was not a term commonly used in the workplace or they may have forgotten they made the choices they did concerning family and work.

Bendl and Schmidt (2010) introduce the notion of 'firewall' when they discuss barriers for women Connie and the midlife women do not use this term; however, their stories certainly present them as agents who make choices between certain possibilities that may be seen as constraints to what they pursue or aspire to, for example: Connie (the younger participant starting out in her career) provides a different emphasis when she highlights the complicating action impacting on her career at the time of interview (see turn 16). 'But you can't afford to be too picky ... when you are a mother as well.'

The stories the women from the varied life stages tell all highlight their aspirations and discuss their careers as fluid processes. Defillippi and Arthur (1994) and Weick (1991) also suggested that the definition of careers for professional are fluid and an on-going process of

making sense, but they do not highlight that at certain life stages there may be narrator's story telling strategies that are evident. Women at different life stages identify with their careers differently. The more senior women emphasise their qualities and strengths and highlight some of the 'turning points' that were critical, while the women at the midlife stage highlighting how they are 'juggling' and how this impacts on their aspirations for career and their career values. Connie (a member of the younger group) highlights that being a mother is a complication that impacts on what she chooses. The more senior women position their stories in a broader narrative about what they have learnt. Freeman's (2011) highlighted that big stories are those that involve participants reflecting on how their work 'fits' within their lives. Each of the women do this to some extent in the stories above, however the women from the more senior group draw on broader examples, particularly in Betty's case. She introduces examples of political change she experienced and discusses how this influenced her values.

When telling their career stories the five participants position their story predominantly at a midlevel (that is they draw on larger life experiences and smaller elements of their everyday lives to highlight their career aspirations. Bell's (2009) study relied on participants who were at university and she found that the university students tended not to draw on larger elements of their life but rather midlevel elements when telling their story about development. This study relies on stories from participants at different life stages and explores, each of these participants draw on midlevel stories (that is a combination of larger life events and small examples from their everyday life) to tell their story, however those with more experience (the more senior group) tend to draw on larger life experiences that are embedded in a broader social experience (as in Betty's case described above).

Josselson (2006) examined the narratives of midlife women and found that there is a struggle to develop a cohesive identity at midlife, but that variation exists in the way individuals make sense of conflict and that this explored as small stories that connect to a larger theme. The two women at midlife in the current study (Ginny and Molly) introduce a number of issues concerning their work values when they describe the complicating features of their stories about their development and growth. Unlike the more senior women they have not reached a resolution that highlights their strengths and this is similar for the Connie.

Bell (2009) emphasised that midlevel stories are those that focus on the way participants gain insight into what is 'stable' in their lives and how they maintain a sense of stability in their

careers. Each of the participants from the midlife group begins a career story by mentioning their choices and about abilities. All participants end the story by considering what they have to offer as professionals and consequently provide a structure that emphasises their stability in their current role. The positioning of the end of most participants story is at the midlevel, it is not a small story about everyday life events or positioned in a bigger story but reflects their current abilities and how these are situated in their experiences. Although they do not mention the way they see the concept of career they each inadvertently tell a story about how they are effective in their work and what values they bring to their work. When each participant resolves the plot of the story they highlight what they see as effective. Connie (in turn 26) for example tells the interviewer that she certain qualities are critical to being effective. Ginny (in turn 5) directly asks the interviewer if she wants to know what being an effective professional means to her.

Each of the stories presented above cannot possibly tell the whole of what professional identity means to the participants in this study, the examples provide some insights. Freeman (2011) highlighted that neither big nor small story analysis provides a picture of the whole self and identity story:

> *'I would argue that the idea of self as well as the idea of identity require reflective component, one in which "I" take stock of "Me", and this in turn entails a distancing, a stepping back – which is to say, an extrication from precisely those action-filled moments at the heart of the small story perspective' (Freeman 2011: 120).*

Each woman can be seen to share a story with the research that is embedded within a dialogue that has meaning for the teller and the listener. The stories are positioned in varied ways by the women of varied life stages and draw on varied term and strategies to exchange experiences.

4.3 Life stage and career quest

The more senior women can be seen to embed their story or position their story about their development and growth in a broader context, they take stock of their experience and emphasise their strengths. The women in the midlife stage emphasise how they have come to know they offer certain values to their work and are valued by others in their work but they also have personal values that are not always aligned with their professional careers. This difference indicates that the way in which women form boundaries between their personal

lives and professional lives or describe their career aspirations may be dependent on their life experience and their life stage. This finding leads to the proposition that women themselves may change their perceptions of their professional identity as they move into different life stages. As suggested in Chapter 2 even when there are changes in organisational cultures and concepts of career women often chose to sacrifice their career in preference for family (Lovejoy and Stone 2012; Cahusac and Kanji 2013). This was more evident when listening to the women of the child-bearing years than to the women in the senior group; the latter groups' stories indicated that they had reached some resolution about the way work was aligned with family. Sullivan and Arthur (2006) propose that psychological mobility, that is an individual's capacity for movement as perceived through the mind of the career actor, is influenced by gender. It is possible that psychological mobility is gendered and it may also be influenced by life stage. The five participant examples presented in this chapter highlight that the women of different life stages emphasise varied degrees of mobility when they talk about what is critical in their careers and provide a response to the way in which they have developed and grown. For example the women of the more senior group and midlife group reflect back to their early life to describe how they have developed and see this as significant to their narrative about their development and growth. The younger woman also positions her story in this stage although she is currently at this stage. She has finished her formal education and is currently looking to find a place in the workforce. The way people develop a sense of their mobility may develop when they first enter their professional lives and therefore it is possible that women of a similar generation enter a similar work culture with legislation and demographics that influence how they understand their working lives and develop a story about their working lives. Thus life stage may be a feature impacting on mobility and potential the way women position themselves in their professions. Identifying with a professional role may be stronger in some individual than others and the degree to which one identifies with their profession may in part determine their success and/ or effectiveness in their profession (Lobel and Clair 1992: 1066). Therefore it is possible that the participants' case examples presented in this study and the sections of narrative highlighted are not representative of all women of varied life stages.

Strauss and Howe (1991) posit that generation is a social construction. It is possible that people of a similar age are exposed to similar social policies and workplace practices and this influences how they talk about their work. It was clear that each participant in this study positions her development and growth beginning at youth and although each are currently

operating in the same workplace and legislative requirements some older women may have been exposed to varied forms of discrimination. Strachan (2010) highlights that many changes have occur in regard to equal opportunity legislation since the 1960s. Because there is a small sample it will be noted that some generational features may impact on the women in the groups represented in this study; however, variance in life stage of the senior and midlife group is more the focus for exploration.

The literature that was explored in Chapter two has provided a framework to make sense of the stories, but also to respond to the research question that intends to explore how women of different life stages make choices about their development and growth. Ricoeur (1992) suggests that 'discordance' or conflict is sometimes presented in the language of people and this highlights a struggle or conflict between dominant and less dominant ways of understanding. In this study the dominant and counter narrative will be explored as discursive patterns that provide insight into the quest of the participants in the study. Chase (1995) highlighted that dominant and counter narratives highlight women's struggle in a male-dominated workplace culture. This focus on the dialogue strategies employed by women of two life stages is explored further with a broader range of participant examples in Chapter 5, in this current chapter variation in the dominant and counter narratives are discussed and interpreted as a dialogue that each women presents.

4.4. Interaction with the interviewer when talking about personal experience

A semi structured format was used to interview each participant (see appendix 2 for interview prompts). Each interview began with the same question. The interviewer was guided by the interviewees as each participant made choices about the way they would respond to the question and each sought to clarify some aspects of what was being asked. Many narrative researchers have highlighted that story telling is embedded in the interaction between researcher and narrator (Riessman 1990, 2002, 2008; Chase 1995; Bell 2009). The way in which narrators seek qualification is worthy of inquiry in exploring the shifting nature of the discourses in the case of this study the dominant and counter discourses were explored. Many interviewees sought to clarify with the interviewer how she wanted them to discursively construct their story about growth and development as a professional. The agency of the interviewer as well as the interviewee can be seen as relevant to the narrative interview process. McNay (2003c) argues that the way we analyse language is important in understanding the concept of agency. The stories and language used to tell stories were

analysed in this study and the findings suggest that each participant presents a story about her agency and constructs her story by trying to qualify what the interviewer is interested in hearing. Johnston (2008) highlighted that patterns of positioning provide important insight into the way in which 'identity production is accomplished internationally and discursively through storyteller/interviewee engagement inside the telling of a story' (Johnston 2008: 189). The dialogical approach as defined by Riessman (2008) is further developed below to emphasise the process through which women of varied life stages tell their story.

Chase (1995) highlighted that women tend to draw on dominant and counter discourses when they tell their narrative about their experiences at work. Each of the participants responds to the interviewer's initial question about how they have developed and grown in their professional lives. It became clear that when the initial question was asked, participants responded with what was seen as a dominant response for example:

1. How have you developed and grown in your professional life?
G:
2. I did not have a map of what I wanted to do, but had choices that presented themselves.
3. Doing nothing about moving is actually a choice.

The two participants from the midlife group responded to the interviewer by highlighting that they made choices about their development and growth and these choices were positioned in their early lives when they started in their professional roles. It is seen as a dominant discourse (see Cameron 1998). The dominance of a particular group may influence the voice we hear most (it may be we hear discord rather than harmonious convergence) and potentially become the dominant discourse. The language and word choice appeared more in the midlife group than in the stories of the senior group of participants.

The more senior group also responded to the initial question by drawing on a dominant discourse for example, Betty's response:

 2. Are you asking when I started my career and what role I started or when I started thinking about a profession?

I:
3. I suppose it could be when you start thinking about career or how you have reflected over the years on your own growth, it could be that you've been on a number of different pathways that have shaped where you want to be, and perhaps your current career as a Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor has been influence by the decisions you have made about your career.

B:
4. If you are asking, when I was 18 did I have a vision of what the journey would be?
5. The answer is no.

Betty begins her story by trying to clarify with the interview where the interviewer intends her to position her story and the interviewer aims to leave this open for the respondent to choose where to position the story. Then the participant responds by positioning her story back at a time when she was eighteen and then opens up to talk about some of the values and opportunities that were presented that influenced her career. There is further example of making a choice about position the story from Connie.

I:
1. How have you developed and grown in your professional life?

C:
2. I have not graduated yet, I finished my final semester in Copenhagen.
3. Due to different times I have not officially graduated, but I have completed studying.

Connie makes a decision to draw on a dominant discourse that is the story about graduating and experience in the workplace. As highlighted in the previous chapter the dominant career story (also described in this chapter as a dominant discourse) is thought to have a particular purpose, which is to communicate the story of success or effectiveness, and the counter story, which is to communicate certain emotional and social features in the work culture that influence the way women experience their work or potential constraints and experience of ineffectiveness. Chase (1995) illustrates how the less socially acceptable discourses – those seen as counter (for example, struggles between power and subjugation – are woven into the dominant story of development). The dominant and counter story may sometimes seem to be contradictory and represent a clash between two ways of telling one's story. The counter story is highlighted or woven into the Participants examples above when they are asked by the interviewer: Are there any critical incidents that have shaped this decision? In the response provided by each of the participants a counter story can be seen to be woven into the dominant story. For example:

Ginny's response in turns 9–15 provides a story about her way of making sense of how she is effective and in the complicating action she introduces her counter story (see turns 23–42).
8. Are there any critical incidents that have shaped this decision?
G:
9. Are you asking, what is an effective professional?
I:

10. Yes, in a way what is critical to you may have some relationship to what you see as an effective professional.

Abstract

G:

11. Some of the things that have shaped my professional life have been an opening up,
12. like a bit of luck, I did not initially set out to do what I am doing sheer luck helped,
13. but also doing nothing about moving is actually a choice.
14. I have taken number of steps
15. when making a career choice.

The researcher made sense of the dominant and counter narratives by exploring each of the transcripts in an in-depth analysis and identifying common threads among the two groups. The dominant and counter narratives were also made sense of by referring to literature in the area of women's careers and empirical research that explores how women develop in the workplace context. The table below outlines these dominant and counter themes but also the way in which they are woven together about a narrative concerning career aspirations and quest. The quest story is seen as a dominant narrative; a narrative that highlights how the women aspire to develop. For example, Connie tells a story about her aspiration story and a story about quest when she said: 'I have had to become a bit more conservative to fit in, but I still feel my values are aligned' (turn 32).

The example above highlights what Gee (2000) defined as discourse identity because Connie tells the interviewer about wanting to fit in and believing that to do this she would need to be more conservative. This is also an example of a dominant narrative about what being effective entails and a counter narrative because Connie emphasises that currently she is not entirely aligned with the dominant culture of her work.

An important means of understanding the storyteller's identity production in personal interview narratives is to identity patterns in responses, this method was applied across the data set and the following patterns outlined in Table 4.1 were identified.

Table 4.1: Dominant and counter narratives by themes for two groups

Dominant narrative about effectiveness and aspirations	Counter narrative about growth and change and achieving the identity quest
1. Capacity for introspection	2. Adaptability, flexibility and resilience
3. Recognising ingredients required to get things done	4. Recognising barriers and learning to adapt
5. Building relationships	6. Formal education/informal knowledge and networks
7. Pursuit of quest	8. Becoming part of a professional group

Table 4.1 outlines key themes, when telling a story about their development in the workplace, the women participants in this study typically talked about the way their work colleagues and others in the workplace recognised their contributions and how they came to recognise the way in which they were seen as effective and or valuable. They present a story that is embedded within the context in which they work, the story is constructed to highlight the relevance of the experiences they have had in their workplace. They referred to elements or themes when describing the way things are done in their workplace and sometimes described the values they have or guiding spirit that drives them in their work (their aspirations). The aspirations are often a more personal expression of agency and expressed as a counter narrative, however it may also be a story about what they recognise as effective (point 3 and 4 above as themes may appear as a story about dominant and counter narratives). For example, this is expressed by Connie (see turns 19–27 below). She is recognising what ingredients are required below to be effective for her and get things done and in the preceding discussion to what is presented below (turns 15–17).

Evaluation
C:
19. I like working with people.
20. I work better when I have human contact
21. I talk with colleagues and clients and witnesses and they explain their situation
22. I find that very rewarding.

Resolution
C:
23. I get most satisfaction out of working for others
24. And seeing them develop
25. I think working with others well
26. Is critical to being effective in the organisation.

27. They support me and through that I support them.

The themes that are outlined are more fully explored across the participants examples in following chapter along with examples of the themes presented in Table 4.1. The language used was explored to gain a deeper understanding of what was effective development and growth and what participants saw as constraints or potential barriers to their effectiveness.

The counter narratives that the two groups expressed are posed against the dominant narratives (see Bamberg and Andrews 2004 and Chase 2005). The gendered narratives of the women of the two different life stages are shown to have a varied emphasis. The quest that each participant expresses is seen to be part of their personal identity and therefore is significant to agency. Connie above tells the story about her quest and in so doing tells a story about what she values as a social agent.

4.5. Positioning of the career story

The previous chapter stated that Gee's (2000) multi-theoretical perspective on identity formation would be explored within the data analysis to highlight the way in which the women display aspects of four types of identities: natural identity, institution identity, discourse identity and affinity identity. Gee's multi-theoretical perspective provides a way to explore the context in which the telling of a story is positioned. This study is particularly interested in what Gee (2000) termed natural or 'N-identity' (e.g. stage of life), their institutional affiliations or 'I-identity' (e.g. professional women manager or senior manager) and their discourse of 'D-identity' (e.g. assertive, reserved) and their way of showing association and affinity or association 'A-identity' (e.g. member of a professional group). It is important to note that identities are ambiguous and unstable and can shift across a person's internal state and the four perspectives are interrelated (Gee 2000: 1). Mishler (1999) demonstrates how craft artists construct their identities discursively in their interviews. The women in two case examples wove a story about their dominant and counter narrative when they present their discourse identity. Two participants' examples are drawn upon, Edna and Molly, to highlight the way in which women constructed their identities in the interviews.

The multi-theoretical perspective on identity highlights that women's knowledge about their professional experience of growth and development is storied through varied levels of self-understanding and this understand is derived through the context in which experience is acquired. This multi-theoretical perspective supports Beattie's (2009) notion of identity, she

considered identity to be constructed through inquiry, dialogue and interaction, which is similar to affinity identity, affiliation identity and discourse identity. However, Beattie (2009) did not consider if life stage of natural identity impacts on the way women tell stories and that is considered a significant feature of this study.

The career identity quest is expressed through the narrative interviews and the stories that are provided are retold tales (Mishler 2004) and stories are cultural reproductions where agency is played out (Andrews et al 2000). Andrews (2002) highlights that stories will be received by differently situated audiences in different ways and this is potentially why a multi-theoretical perspective in exploring the perspective on career identity is useful. The application of the multi-theoretical perspective highlights that individuals have different ways of storying their lives for different audiences and situated purposes. The stories of the participants in this study reveal personal, social and cultural meaning.

4.6. Application of the multi-theoretical perspective on identity

Edna began her story by positioning talk within her D-identity, she begins talking about the significance of relationships in her life, relationships that influenced her decisions but she also provided examples of making decisions that were based on strategic objectives. She described her education as a significant influence (her A-identity) on her professional choices and key relationships as important to her development, growth and learning. Edna had been a successful senior executive in a number of high-profile organisations (her I-identity). She was also a representative on several boards. Edna regularly mentioned having had opportunities to take responsibility and confront challenges, so she had experience to share with others. Edna identified herself as a professional who had made a choice to be a leader (N-identity). Within Edna's story all four forms of identity were highlighted and woven into her narrative. The discourse identity story was significant to her aspirations and her quest and also to her dominant and counter narrative.

Molly, a member of the midlife group, began her story by saying that her career path was pretty 'straightforward' and after completing her education and taking a bit of time off to go overseas, she applied for jobs. She makes reference to her N-identity or stage of life. She then explained more fully that at times choices were straight forward and other were more complex and lead to a re-evaluation of the choices she made (her D-identity). At the time of the interview Molly was in middle management, working for a business that required her to

manage projects (she highlights her A-identity). Molly tells a story about identifying with people who work in the development field. She wrote many tenders for government funding and managed large budgets and a team of people that develop resources in communities. Her growth was focused on drawing on the resources she had developed throughout her professional life and applying these to manage new projects while making choices that were important to her as a single mother of a young child.

4.6.1. Themes within the professional identity discourse

Molly and Edna described their experiences of developing in different ways and positioned their stories about becoming part of the professional community differently. At different stages of their lives, these two women had distinctly different priorities and were, consequently, challenged by different choices. However, both demonstrated insight into the way they identified themselves in their professional lives, explored here by presenting extracts containing key themes (stanzas are presented) highlighting the dominant and counter narratives. The expression of the dominant and counter narratives could also be described as a 'story schema', a term defined by Georgakopoulou (1997) as mental processes that contain culturally specific information.

4.6.2. Examples of theme in Edna's narrative

Participants in this study described their journey to becoming part of a professional group – a counter subtheme – and being recognised as successful and effective. Edna reflected that the commencement of her professional career was when she joined the public sector. She saw this early role as an opportunity to engage with people. The challenges she enjoyed and barriers she confronted were discussed in her story. She described the commencement of her career as the time when she entered professional management and reflected on what qualities she had that contributed to professional management. Edna attributed part of her success to her formal education and informal networks, another counter subtheme. Her decision-making style becomes more apparent to her in this role. She became aware of what she did not want to do, but also what her strengths were. She recounted key incidents highlighting her capacity for introspection, which was interpreted as a dominant subtheme. Edna described following the path of most suitable options based on weighing up the available opportunities

Edna discussed how her studies influenced her professional work, but another critical factor was her husband's role in her life, he was also a politician.

'While I was at uni my husband was a labour lawyer. In those days Victorian MPs only had one employee in their office. They only had a receptionist; they did not have advisors or researchers as they do now. I did part-time work for a liberal lawyer … in 1976 … He was a Shadow Minister for Planning and the Shadow Attorney General. I wrote some of his speeches, did legal research for him, especially when I was at law school … he invited me to join his staff once he became Premier.'[*1]

Formal education and informal knowledge and networks, which represent counter themes, were significant for Edna. Work opportunities emerged through the contacts she had made and key people recognising her talents and offered her more work. This theme relating to 'informal knowledge and networks' were expanded when she recalled opportunities that were offered through these informal networks. These connections knew about her informal knowledge and her ability to get things done. Edna described finding strength through developing relationships, but also making conscious decisions about what she did not want to do. She regularly mentioned having opportunities to take responsibility and confront challenges, a counter theme through which a dominant theme was interwoven – the capacity for introspection.

Edna presents herself as someone who does not shy away from hard decisions. This is highlighted when Edna recalled her early life as the eldest of nine children, she said she believed this experience provided her with skills to lead others and make hard decisions. Edna presented leadership as one of her key professional skills. In the following extract it is evident that Edna's role as a wife and mother was (in her view) well timed and complementary to her work.

'I am the eldest of nine children and that early experience of leadership, whether you liked it or not, stays with you. My husband has always been entirely supportive to me in my career and bringing up my daughter. I think a number of my friends have struggled professionally. I had my daughter while I was studying, whereas my friends had children later and had to take time out of their careers then. I think that would be harder. Some of the experiences I have had both in the Victorian Government sector and with the Shadow Attorney General were experiences that people don't normally get relatively early in their

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[1] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna Quote 1.

careers ... There were some difficult issues to manage. Also exposure to senior people relatively early on……….there were some great opportunities.'[2]

Edna's counter narrative regarded her family, the timing of having children and the support provided by her primary relationships, which she described as significant, but not core to her professional success. Edna described a process of rethinking how connections were made in her professional life. How she 'found a place' as a professional was interpreted to be part of a smaller story within her growth narrative and counter to the bigger identity story. Her family life constituted a significant memory that was built into her story about success, as was her role with her husband and daughter. There was a dominant theme about Edna's strong capacity to build relationships. The counter narrative that began to emerge was that education and informal knowledge and networks assisted Edna to become successful and effective. Some of Edna's counter narrative is illustrated in the following extract, including her mother's values influenced her values and potentially her identity (a big story).

'No, I knew I would always work. I remember having two weeks off before uni went back and I was getting bored. My husband was relieved when uni went back. It was like whew. I guess part of that was my mother's influence, she had nine children and she was not allowed to finish her high school education. Not because the family could not afford it, but because you don't waste education on girls. Mum was determined that her girls were going to have a good education.'[3]

When Edna spoke about some of her high profile career roles (her dominant narrative) she discussed how the early foundation experiences assisted her to meet and overcome challenges. She talked early on in her story about her mother's influence and her mother's voice being one of encouragement not to 'repeat the pattern'. By the 'pattern' she means not having access to education or finishing studies, getting married young and being a 'stay at home mum', instead creating alternative choices. Edna said she only had one child as an over-reaction to her Mum being at home looking after nine children. Again, all these factors form part of her counter narrative, but these dominant and counter themes are also interpreted as being gendered. The counter story had distinct gender qualities, for instance, family life was a feature emphasised by women more than men. Family life was a counter theme spoken about by many women in this study. Reflection on the past is part of a big story because it has

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[2] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna quote 2.
[3] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna quote 3.

autobiographical features that are significant to social identity. The role of family or childhood was often spoken about by the participants in this study. In some cases, the reflection involved the participant drawing on the counter theme of recognising barriers and learning to adapt.

Opportunities were regularly mentioned, opportunities to take responsibility and confront challenges. Edna provided examples of making decisions based on bottom line strategic objectives, and having the capacity to improve business outcomes. Later in her story, she provided a rationale for why she remained open to opportunities and new responsibilities.

> *'If it had been a private sector company it would have been bankrupt. It was in dire straits when I joined and a lot of it was done in the glare of publicity when I joined. It was in the early stages of public sector reform, contracting out, and a lot of controversy. Financially and culturally, changes had to be made. Whatever you think of the (organisation mentioned) now it has several million dollars' worth of works, I'm a bit out of date now. We sold the electricity company and we basically restored finances, which are in good shape today; more importantly than that we had to restore the culture. There were some rogues, corruption was rife, certainly lots of bullying of staff and very bad behaviour in others. The opportunity to turn around the culture was a highlight. In the others ... (examples provided of turning the bottom line around) it would be their growth, those kinds of things that have been significant in my career. That was in 1990s at the bottom of the property recession, I contributed to significant, tangible changes.'* [*4]

When Edna spoke about her successes (her dominant narrative was about being successful and finding a place where she was recognised) she discussed a range of factors that influenced her decisions. In addition, she drew on the dominant subtheme of recognising the ingredients required to get things done.

> *'I guess I thought about financial services without doing anything about it. I said if it met all the criteria, I would be happy to talk to them. So that was what happened, without spelling out the big picture. When the head hunter rang me about the (a particular position and job mentioned) I said no, but you change. At that stage I would have talked to anyone about any job. I said to a friend of mine, what do you do if head hunters ring? She said, "I do nothing". I said "bad idea", if they ring and say there is this job in Singapore,*

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[4] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna quote 4.

and you don't want to go to Singapore, be diplomatic, in case a job comes up where you would like to go and work and you can at least make a decision about it. It is a matter of being open, even if you "love" your current job. New opportunities are exciting. The head hunter said to me, 'don't narrow your thinking, I might have a job for you in Geneva, and you never know what may be out there to interest you.'

'I know a lot of lawyers in their 50s and they say, how do I get a career like yours? The only answer is, start 20 years ago. In your 50s it usually means you are stuck in your area, unless you climbed out when you were younger. It is better to talk to young women, and tell them what to be open to.

Give them some guidance, making sure they finish their qualifications, when I talk to the graduates, especially the female graduates, with HR, or whatever move and get other experiences. You look at the careers of people in big business, you need to diversify and get experience.'[*5]

Edna elaborated on why she emphasises to women that it is important to be open to new possibilities.

'I also point out to women that although it is 20 ... a lot of senior positions are still held by men. They tend to promote in their own image, corporate is still hard for women to make their careers. I tell them that I did not make my career through one organisation. Have good networks; be open to moves, and risks. Don't expect that hard work will be recognised in your own organisation by promotion.'[*6]

The essence of Edna's counter story was summed up when she described how she weighed up the opportunities that were available and made measured judgements about what she engaged with.

'Some advice I got from a friend was "you get lots of offers, don't say yes to anything". I know how much I can take on, significance in terms of time and money as to how much I can do well, time and energy. I will step down from the breast cancer board this year, but that will allow me to take something else on.'[*7]

Edna's dominant narrative emphasised an underlying set of values that supported the

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[5] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna quote 5.
[6] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna quote 6.
[7] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna quote 7.

institution she worked in; her counter narrative described how relationships assisted her to weigh up alternatives and remain open to challenging opportunities. Her quest (pursuing a quest is interpreted as a subtheme that forms part of the dominant narrative) is framed in terms of demonstrating business acumen 'bottom line' objectives, to put in her words, a drive 'to leave an organisation in better shape than I found it'. She presented a narrative that illustrated her conscious role as an actor in understanding the key features of her own development. This became evident when Edna described what she offered as a mentor.

> *'The mentoring we do is quite expensive. When I sign on ... I sign on not only to help my client personally but also to assist the company they work within to get a greater return, with a business plan a strategy etc. I am currently working with someone in the insurance industry and I am getting a handle on the strategies necessary for her job. She will be mostly responsible, and she will get the bonus, but I am working with her to achieve it.'* [*8]

Edna referred to the importance of working with others to achieve objectives and weigh up opportunities. These elements were woven into her dominant and counter narrative and the themes within these two parent nodes.

Edna spoke about her effectiveness and accentuated her qualities, yet she wove these through the story about how her relationships assisted to her to achieve success. Her story indicated that she was given encouragement and confirmation that her contribution was valued. Edna spoke about how others recognised her value in her work and the contribution she made. Edna's mentoring model involved 'working with' women to help them achieve success. Her story included several recurrent features in accounts of her early work history. She presented others as inviting her to take up positions of responsibility, yet developed the idea that she was always open to opportunities. Edna identified herself as a successful professional woman; she describes how she has been successful despite some gender barriers, an integral feature of her professional identity. She referred to advice she had from other women, including earlier memories of her mother's experience, but also to her role as a mother and a wife supported by her husband. It could be said that Edna identified strongly with her professional identity and she described a sense of belonging, yet used the 'I' word to represent the choices she made to be part of a collective group, for example, 'I know how much I can take on'.

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[8] Participant from the senior life stage: Edna quote 8.

Edna's transcript was analysed to explore the number of times she referred to the themes represented in the dominant narrative, for example, themes about recognising ingredients required to get things done, building relationships and demonstrating a capacity for introspection along with recognising a quest. The analysis detected that Edna referred to these themes as much as to counter themes, for example, adaptability, demonstrating resilience, recognising barriers and recognising education and networks. Most of the women in the senior life stage group emphasised the counter themes, but Edna's narrative was more balanced between the dominant and counter themes.

4.6.3 Examples of themes in Molly's narrative

Molly, a participant in the midlife stage, began her story in a similar way to Edna in that she emphasised her studies and how they were a 'springboard' to her first job. Molly started by discussing themes with a counter narrative; for example, she talked about becoming a professional and the pathway that assisted her to get to her professional role. At the time of the interview she was working for a private contracting company that managed international development projects. She had worked as a project manager for several years and had a young child who was beginning primary school. She worked in her role part-time and was a single parent. Molly was in her early forties. Her narrative about pursuing a professional career was framed in a way that indicated that she had an expectation to be a professional. Her counter narrative was explicit. She described never plotting any career, but indicated that it was shaped by her taking up opportunities that were offered and having the ability to make good choices. As Molly took up opportunities she also made decisions about other things she would have to forgo or do differently. Molly described actively making an assessment of the 'best fit' and emphasised decisions and compromises that she had made, or felt she needed to make in order to live the life that she wanted. When Molly positioned her story about becoming part of the professional community she talked about what she did and, consequently, what became available. Later in her story she described her role as a 'good fit'. Molly described how opportunities 'opened up'.

> *'In many ways for me it was very straightforward. When I left school I went overseas for a*
> *while and I then applied to the Commonwealth Public Service. I applied to Foreign Affairs*
> *and Trade, not really knowing what I wanted to do but I had done an international politics*

degree. I got in but in the year that I got in I got asked if I wanted to do the aid program the government program. I started to work in the field.' [*9]

Molly described her travel as influencing her learning about herself and others. Perhaps Molly's travel represents an equivalent counter experience to Edna's relationships and networks, as significant to their growth into professional roles. Molly said she 'applied for jobs'; in contrast, Edna talked about selecting from opportunities that opened up. Here is an example of Molly discussing her pathway to becoming part of a professional group:

'The first time I travelled I went by myself. I did a degree at uni and I majored in communist political theory. I went and travelled for a year in Eastern Europe by myself. You were meant to go to those countries in tours at that stage. At the time I did not necessarily think I was testing anything out. I immediately thought of Berlin and the fall of the wall, which was ten years later after I had travelled as one of the significant things for me that have impacted on my perspectives.' [*10]

Both women drew on a counter narrative that expressed their family membership and roles being important in their professional lives. Molly described her family background as important. Edna talked about her position in the family and her mother's voice.

Molly talked about her private education and how this influenced her quest to 'take up professional roles'.

'I had a pronounced sense of being working class and I went to a top private school. My brother got a scholarship all the way through. My parents offered me a private education because he got one. I sort of had a sense that I was working class that was my underlying values. I saw the girls I went to school with as having nothing outside of the eastern suburbs values.' [*11]

The examples provided by Molly can all be interpreted as part of her counter narrative, in that they don't really form part of the story that is dominant to her success and achievements, but rather provide some background to her work and life experiences. She began to make a connection to her dominant story of success when she described her career as a more 'tactile thing'.

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[9] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 1.
[10] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 2.
[11] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 3.

'I wanted to be socially active. I did not want to be in the suburbs and live this cushy life and get married and have children. To me I really felt I had to be passionate about what I chose to make of my life. For me I had this series of tragic relationships, so I poured all my passion into my career for me a career could offer that same sense of self. It was a more tactile thing to put my energy into. I also came from a schooling situation where lots of the girls I went to school with had a choice to work. It became a lot more important for me to work in an area I enjoyed.' *12

Molly began to talk about an unpleasant personal relationship and inferred that her career had given her independence to make choices, but she did not elaborate on this in any depth.

'I worked for volunteers abroad and UNICEF and was in a really bad relationship. It was terrible for me on so many levels ... I decided to work for a commercial contractor. I was 33 then and I moved from Sydney and left the UN. I moved back to Melbourne and bought a house. That was that thing of saying well I am going to be by myself ... This meant I was more financially stable and lived in my own home and had a bit more of a sense of what my future was. I started thinking there is one thing I have missed out on here and realised I really wanted to have children. Probably about 18 months after that I heard about the possibility of accessing IVF for single women. That was in my sight early on and then I made professional choices that made that a possibility.' *13

Molly talked about her professional choices providing the opportunity to have a child as a single mum and later she did talk about being given the opportunity to work part-time after she had a child. However, the personal choices are not as complementary to Molly's life as they are to Edna's. Molly reflected and demonstrated a capacity for introspection (again, a dominant theme) as significant to her development, some of the women of the earlier midlife stage that influenced her thinking and how this may have influenced her to make choices to be independent.

'The two women that I admired growing up were Germaine Greer ... and Michelle Grattan at The Age. She was this plain-looking spectacled women who was taken seriously who was able to have a political voice and the same with Germaine she was a respected social commentator who told it like it was ... I classed myself as a strong

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[12] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 4.

[13] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 5.

*feminist and went out of my way to give my opinion ... It was interesting for me that the women that I looked up to were not coupled. For me if you went down the path of getting married and having kids it meant you lost your voice as a citizen in the world. You became something different, it was a direct result of coming from those ordinary suburban lives, which now I feel very comfortable but I admired people that were smart and political and who were out there and people listened.' *14*

Opportunities and choices were discussed in Molly's interview; she demonstrated awareness that she made professional choices that were limited by what was available. Molly emphasised that she did not have a clear quest or goal she wanted to achieve, she just had the capacity to take up the opportunities that were presented. Edna also had the opportunity to choose from opportunities that were presented through her networks, so in some ways both women saw themselves as privileged to be able to make choices, but Molly was more explicit that she made choices.

*'The choices I made were really shaped by opportunities. I think if I went into foreign affairs I look at family that are diplomats it just would not have been something I would have lasted with. I think now the competition is so much harder now to build a career at 21 or 22. I never plotted any of my career paths, you do one thing and then opportunities arose out of that. The choices that appeal are obviously out there and they don't speak to you.' *15*

Molly discussed some of the fragmentation reflected in the group of midlife women that participated in this study. She uses the term 'idealised self' to talk about the influences of family and friends and her dreams and quest, and then 'real self' to talk about the way she practically went about taking up what was presented.

'I think some of the choices I made were more for my idealised self as opposed to my real self. Being a diplomat I realised I loved the sound of it, but development has been a really good fit for me. There are a whole lot of people in the field that have this neo-colonialist perspective that I find objectionable, I realise that development is now a huge industry. I think working for the UN and so forth was a fantastic opportunity and when I worked for them I was earning about $80,000 and was working with people in developing countries and I felt like I was just learning ... I think that one

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[14] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 6.
[15] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 7.

*interesting thing about choices is that; people in developing countries have very different choices.' *[16]*

Molly was certainly conscious of the notion of an idealised self, but examples that follow from the midlife group of participants will demonstrate a less conscious example of what will be referred to as an 'idealised self'. Patterson (2002) highlights that by focusing on the semantics of narrated experience we can access examples of less conscious meaning or 'idealised notions of self'.

Molly told a counter narrative that was not supportive of her dominant narrative about her development; some things in her personal life had not complemented her professional life. For example, she weighed up opportunities to earn more and was aware that although this would give her more choice, also it would also require increased commitment, time and overseas travel. The two red arrows crossing in the middle of Figure 4.3 are representative of the position of the story that Molly provided.

Gender was significant in Molly's story about growing as a professional and about her personal life (a single mother). She was committed to both her professional life and her personal life, but the two placed differing demands on her time and required different identifications of herself Molly's narrative bore some resemblance to other women from midlife stage. For instance, women in midlife undertaking middle management roles discussed a conflict between personal and work life choices. The women in midlife also told a counter narrative about life outside their work and tended to give equal attention to this narrative, if not slightly more than their story about developing as a professional. Their story of growth in their work was moderated by what they experienced in their family lives and this story often did not complement their professional development. Sheridan et al (2009) discussed the importance of the workplace culture as having an impact on the way women identify themselves as effective professionals. The women in the more senior life stage demonstrate greater insight in the way they tell their story about the work culture than the women of the midlife group, the midlife group emphasise the way they weigh up their choices more about where they set boundaries between work and other choices this will be further highlighted with seven participants cases in the following chapter. However it is important to note that the way in which choices are expressed, as Pocock (1998, 2005) suggests there is compelling evidence that although there have been undeniable

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[16] Participant from midlife stage: Molly quote 8.

advancements in terms of professional women's equality, in significant but subtle ways they are still discriminated against, this discrimination is highlighted in their counter narrative as they describe ways in which they overcome parries they experience in their place of work.

4.7 Gender and career

The counter narrative that the women develop highlights the constraints that are common to the two groups at varied life stages. Sinclair and Wilson (1999) highlighted that the management culture within Australia is seen to be a culture in which women recognise barriers and learn to adapt and this is reinforced in the narratives of the women of the two life stages. There is a story schema presented by each woman that highlights the constraints (presented in the counter narrative) are woven into the story about being effective (the dominant narrative). As Chase (1995) and Andrew's (2009) suggest counter narratives are have cultural significance and in the case of this study they have significance for women's careers and the workplace culture in which their careers are experienced. Chase's (1995) work highlights cultural tensions between the dominant discourses of work and gender, describing a:

> *'tension between discourse about professional work (with its emphasis on gender and race neutral individuals) and discourse about inequality (with its emphasis on gendered and radicalised groups)' (Chase 1995: 6).*

This study does not focus on race, however the gendered story is presented in a different way by the women of the two life stages and the patterns inherent in the counter narratives are explored further in the following chapter (Chapter 5). This chapter has highlighted that the women in the more senior life stage embed their counter narrative in a broader social context (in a bigger story) and the women of the midlife group tended to position their story at a midlevel. Although the two groups draw on small and large stories they have a tendency to position their story slightly differently and the midlevel women place an emphasis on "juggling family demands and opposed to working to overcome the barriers within the culture of work. This relational form of analysis has highlighted that although youth is a significant time of beginning a professional career experience influences the way women understand their development and growth and the culture of the workplace influences the way they tell their story about development and growth.

Variance in the way two groups of women (those from the midlife and senior group) discuss barriers is further explored in the following chapter. It is important to emphasise here that the variation in themes have been considered to have significance in the way women make sense of their effectiveness but also how the challenges and constraints are understood. The midlife group and potentially people entering the workforce have a tendency to discuss the metaphors for ineffectiveness (for example firewalls, without necessarily using that term) and this may impact on their careers and how they identify themselves professionally.

This discursive approach to exploring the career identity of women at different life phases highlights the significance of their career experience:

> *'Experience, if it is to be remembered, and represented, must be contained in a story which is narrated. We have no direct access to experience as such. We can only study experience through its representation, through the ways stories are told." (Denzin 2000:xi)*

Denzin (2000) represents culture as a dialogue captured in narrative. Because the stories of the women in this study highlight that their experience of professional development and growth has involved working through barriers and it is possible to suggest that opportunities to share stories with women of different life stages may provide greater insight into way in which to work through barriers within the work culture. The idea of a 'pipeline' was discussed in chapter two as a way of characterising women's advancement into upper management as a process that involves moving through the ranks. The analysis using pipeline theory proposes that women are less likely to reach senior management roles in organisations because of their commitments outside work (Broadbridge 2008; Simpson 2011). Pipeline theories make possible an exploration of gendered organisational cultures, however the opportunity of women in the middle management roles to hear the career experience of women who have worked through barriers and constraints may make it easier for those women who are struggling to come to terms with their 'work life collision' (Pocock 2003).

4.8. Concluding comments

This chapter analysed the differences and similarities in the way women of different life stages told their story about development and growth and positioned their professional identity. While each professional woman interviewed in this study had a very different story to tell, the overall narratives that bound the women together included a dominant narrative highlighting professional experiences and effectiveness and a counter narrative about some of the constraints and how these were overcome. The women of the different life stages were seen to position their story of effectiveness and draw on big, small and midlevel stories. The women of different life stages position their story differently and also discuss the importance of their workplace experience differently. The more senior women reflected on larger aspects of their life (they told a big story) and the younger member of the group reflected on experiences over the past few years. Meanwhile, the participants from midlife reflected on current values and how these entwined with their past experiences, consequently they were positioned differently. Each participants case example discussed in this study highlights patterns evident in positioning the story about development and growth as an experience that is embedded in a professional context and this context provides meaning concerning the degree to which the women identity their professional lives as effective. The women of the more senior group place more importance on the workplace and social culture than the younger women, and this was seen to be a gendered narrative. The next chapter further explores the patterns evident in a larger sample of women from two life stages (two groups).

Chapter 5: The patterns in the stories – life stage and gendered narratives

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored relational features in five participants' stories and the way in which each narrative interview was interpreted in this study, but also how the theoretical constructs were interpreted and seen to have significance to the telling of stories. Within the dominant and counter narratives themes emerged, the women of the each life stage talked about a dominant narrative that had a focus on success and effectiveness and there were some themes that were woven into this dominant narrative. The themes included various stories about how the women developed their capacity for introspection, recognised certain ingredients for productivity and valued building relationships. A career quest was described by each of the women that participated in this study. The dominant narratives were different, yet they shared some common themes. Counter themes were about growth and change, and themes within these more personal counter narratives focused on opportunities for this growth and change. Some of the themes that emerged were talked about throughout the interviews. A particular theme that was identified was- 'recognising the barriers in her work and learning to adapt', along with how 'formal education and informal knowledge' provided a basis to further develop, there was also a counter theme that involved a story about the pathway to 'becoming part of a professional group.' The way these themes and themes were identified was discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter explores the dialogic pattern in the narratives of women at two different life stages. The counter narratives that the two groups expressed are posed against the dominant narratives (see Bamberg and Andrews 2004 and Chase 2005). The gendered narratives of the women of the two different life stages are show to have a varied emphasis. The first group (the senior group) are seen to provide an overall narrative that has a focus on how they have overcome constraints in order to be effective and the second group provided a narrative about how they have made choices that enable them to be recognised in their work and personal lives. Each women draws on psychosocial features to tell her story (that is her story is positioned in such a way that personal, social and cultural aspects of experience are highlighted). Each of the women within and of the two life stages told different stories and drew on different discourse strategies to weave a narrative which united their work and life experiences, however all women tell a dominant and counter narrative. The way stories are used by individuals and groups is seen to have significance to their identity quest and to the career aspirations held by

women at varied life stages.

This chapter begins by comparing the extent to which women of the two life stages referred to dominant and counter narratives, and the themes within these narratives. There is a comparison of the emphasis of the different groups in terms of what was significant to them in their development and growth and what was highlighted within the dominant and counter narrative. This is followed by examples drawn from each group about what it means to be effectiveness in work and what is counter to effectiveness. Finally there is an analysis of how the stories each group told were embedded within discourses about effectiveness and barriers to effectiveness and an interpretation of how this may impact on development and growth.

5.2. The life stage groups represented in this chapter

There were a total of four groups (only three groups were discussed in the previous chapter); however, there are only two life stage groups who were focussed on in the analysis and these are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Groups participating

Age group and life stage	No. of cases	Group number
1. 46–56 years **Senior group**	7	1
2. 35–45 years **Midlife group**	7	2
3. 65+ years **Semi-retired**	1	3
4. 20–30 years **Starting out**	1	4
Total	**16**	

Table 5.1 presents the four groups the primary focus of this analysis is group 1 and 2.

While there are small numbers referred to here they are not intended to be a representative sample that has statistical significance; however, there are patterns within the representative sample concerning narrative strategies that are seen to be important. A relatively small sample of participants were interviewed and their stories are compared and contrasted in this chapter to highlight the differences in the patterns between groups and the similarities between

members of a particular life stage. As this study is a qualitative study, small samples are used to illustrate variation in the narrative strategies and patterns inherent in the groups.

5.3. The dominant and counter narratives represented in the two groups of women

Below, the analyses of the narrative strategies derived from fourteen women's interviews are represented. The samples from the two groups of women are presented as varied stories. These are contrasted by providing a cross-section of examples from a number of participants. This cross-section of stories further emphasises the variation in the story strategies. The differences are highlighted by drawing on themes and themes. These themes and themes help describe what the women from the two life stages saw as critical to their development and growth.

Table 5.2 maps the variation in the discourse between the women of two life stages. The dominant and counter narratives were considered to have varied discourse patterns.

Table 5.2: Number of dominant and counter themes identified

	Women from the senior life stage	**Women from the midlife stage**
Dominant narrative	61	38
Counter narrative	78	48

The women of the two groups both referred to the counter narrative on more occasions than the dominant narrative; however, women of the senior life stage spent proportionately more time narrating their counter narrative. In particular, they spent more time reflecting and recounting the way others had assisted them to develop and grow in their professional roles. The women positioned their story in personal, social and cultural experiences and examples of this are highlighted below. The women of the senior life stage generally provided a longer interview and spent more time talking about the dominant and counter narrative than the women of the midlife stage, perhaps they had more experience to draw upon and more to reflect upon. The midlife stage typically told their story by switching between the counter and dominant narrative and weaving their story of success though their counter narrative and vice versa. The women of the senior life stage tended to talk more about how they had reached some resolution concerning their counter narrative. Examples of this weaving process are

provided in greater depth below.

Marie, one of the senior women in the sample, talked about the role of dialogue in organisations as significant to her growth and development but also to the growth of others she worked with.

> *'Dialogue I think is one of the key things to organisations now. Allowing people to get out their misgivings and talk about that, then it is amazing what break through you can achieve. I find it is a mindset ... I encourage people to think about growth, we can all offer something. The development is often about being true and having a concept about what is appropriate and what is really not appropriate. I think looking to learn is important.'* *[17]

Each transcript was explored to consider the gendered nature of the counter stories and how the dialogue referred to particular themes. These themes included talk about recognising the barriers and developing the capability to adapt or demonstrate flexibility and resilience. The women often told how their formal education or informal knowledge and networks helped to build their understanding of what was acceptable in their work culture, but also their story of becoming part of a professional group was entwined in the themes about growth and pursuit of their quest.

5.3.1. The dominant and counter narrative expressed by the senior life group

The women in the senior life stage highlighted how obstacles exist, yet these are overcome though demonstrating certain traits of resilience. Each woman found opportunities to overcome obstacles through building relationships that led to effectiveness and achievement of quests, though not necessarily the quest that they set out to pursue (these themes form part of the dominant narrative). In each case there was a great deal of reflection about how obstacles are presented and overcome, commonly with intersections of critical features that assisted relationship building that enabled membership in a professional group (these themes form part of a counter narrative in the stories of the women of the senior life stage group).

The women of the senior life stage placed more emphasis on their capacity to make choices. The process through which these women developed their confidence to pursue their quest was referred to as a reflective 'narrative strategy' as they recounted their experiences (see Widerberg 1998 and Ryan 2009b on making sense of collective themes). The participants

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[17] Participant from the senior life phase: Marie quote 1.

referred to significant people who had assisted them to recognise the key ingredients required to develop as an effective professional and those that assisted them to work through constraints. The women drew easily on professional discourses to describe themselves as accomplished and productive (the dominant narrative). Each woman of the senior life group expressed surprise that they were recognised in a professional sphere and, grateful for the opportunities they had been presented with. So there was an undercurrent (a counter story) that described the experience of becoming part of a professional group through adapting, but also making choices to adapt to the professional world.

Betty made it clear that she became actively focused on becoming part of a professional group without actively focusing on a quest. Her formal education and relationship with her parents influenced her choices, but also access to education and her teachers. She described an illness creating a barrier, but also opening up different opportunities.

> *'My parents were extremely supportive, but had no experience of tertiary education at all. Dad left school at grade eight was self-educated after that. Mum was self-educated too, but she had done a business course here when she was 15. So they had no idea, the ropes of University, so I went to teachers college, in those days they were pushing for people to go. I did want to be a teacher, but I wanted to become a primary teacher ... So I taught secondary schools while I went through, most of an Arts Degree. I studied part time and worked full time. In the last year or so of the degree part time, I was offered a job in the teacher's college. So I went to Toorak Teachers' College and I taught there, Teacher Ed. Program. Then I just stayed in places and things changed around me a bit. I was teaching primary school teachers' music, which I really loved.'* *[18]*

Betty discussed the importance of building relationships (a dominant theme) and believed opportunities 'opened up'.

Betty talked about what she saw as some of the ingredients for success (a dominant theme) but also how she was capable of demonstrating adaptability, flexibility and resilience (a counter theme).

> *'People who are experts in their areas, very experienced in their fields, they have a right to say, and I disagree with this particular philosophy or this way. I think we should think about such and such. We should welcome that. As a leader, I welcome that, if someone says to me, I am not sure if this is the right track but I think we should consider another approach. I*

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[18] Participant from the senior life phase: Betty quote 2.

welcome that because it can guide me into making better decisions and get a broader perspective.' *[19]*

Betty discussed her capacity in regards to building relationships and the importance of building relationships, but also the counter narratives of adaptability and flexibility and ingredients for success. These themes were entwined in her story about success and her notion of an effective professional identity, presented as themes forming broader counter themes about her understanding of her development and the growth that she embraced.

'It is important not to work alone. Develop colleagues of the same level but also above. Without that it is really hard. Always stay alert to the need to keep retraining. I have always updated my skills and qualifications. That kept me ahead of the game, which is very important for women. Stay focused on your work, and persevere in the face of adversity, be prepared to change jobs too; if not between organisations, at least within your organisation.' *[20]*

Betty did not necessarily discuss actively going about building relationships to enhance her success but there was a strong theme about 'speaking out' about what she saw, perhaps because she was fortunate to live in a time when others spoke out and she learnt to do this. There was also a counter narrative within the dominant subtheme that included recognising the barriers and learning to adapt.

'If you think of the women who do speak out, they often try to marginalise them. That's why it is important to bring them together to let them see that there are others here that give them someone to talk to about these things. Not a mentor in a formal sense. Just to be able to say, am I right in thinking this is what is happening and it is not fair? A lot of women feel isolated because of the faculty they are with they feel alone. We are hoping to do something about that quite soon, maybe Easter, but that may be too ambitious.' *[21]*

Betty reflected a great deal on her professional roles. Her capacity for introspection was themed by the notion of overcoming barriers, which she experienced along with other female colleagues. Indeed, she actively supported other women to 'step outside' the barriers in the mainstream workplace. In the following extract she refers to 'other colleagues' and 'we' when talking about overcoming barriers, which illustrates how she describes herself as working with others.

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[19] Participant from the senior life phase: Betty quote 4.
[20] Participant from the senior life phase: Betty quote 5.
[21] Participant from the senior life phase: Betty quote 6.

> *'So long as that is their choice, they may be an engineer but choose the home role of a mother. But that is not very long out of a working lifetime. When I was young it was usually nursing and teaching. If you talk to Sue, there were programs here that tried to get women to look at non-traditional professions and they did that for nine years. They tried to make sure there were women in once male dominated fields. The funding dried up.'* *[22]

Marie also recounted how she overcame barriers in the workplace and how women come to understand effective contribution.

> *'Also I think that women … if you look at the history of women in the workplace and suffrage and so forth, that we are acutely aware of how we are treated in the workplace. I am not one of these women who assume that it is just a matter of evolution. If you are thinking along the lines of well these things don't happen by accident. You start um … trying to unbundle what the phenomenon is that you see. I now have very deliberate things that I do. I do stop and talk to people about their futures and I do paint some big scenarios about what they might be able to do … I do talk to people on others behalf and encourage them to aspire way beyond where they are because I don't think they should impose limitations. I think organisations are very good at thinking horizontally. It is horrifying, that not a lot of change has occurred in a lot of ways.'* *[23]

There was evidently a counter narrative in both Marie and Betty's notions of overcoming barriers that had a strong gender focus and was narrated as counter to their dominant story of making an effective contribution. Both Betty and Marie were senior executives from the senior life stage (it was noted in Chapter 2 that women are still represented as a minority group in the current Australian executive culture at senior managerial levels and these two women were from senior managerial levels) (Bendl and Schmidt 2010).

The two women talked about how they and other women acted as agents of change, how they saw themselves as actively changing perceptions through their actions. They also spoke about overcoming barriers (a counter theme) and deliberately supporting women in non-traditional roles like themselves working in a masculine environment. They identified with the struggles of others because they had lived through these struggles and they saw that they had been recognised for their contribution.

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[22] Participant from the senior life phase: Betty quote 7.
[23] Participant from the senior life phase: Marie quote 1.

Marie, like all the women in the senior life stage, talked about how formal education and informal knowledge assisted her to make a productive contribution.

> *'I go back to university; I did Law/Arts at Melbourne and particularly in the Law degree I think you … it's a closed system and a very specific discipline you find as much as you would like to think otherwise you are influenced by the early training you received as a lawyer. That has influenced my view of ethics, ethical behaviour around a certain approach to critical reasoning, rational discussion, so it's a way of exploration of certain ideas that has informed me and my values.'* *[24]

Marie provided an example of recognising barriers, but included the story of her quest and also the ingredients for success and elements of adaptability, flexibility and resilience. The following extract contains numerous themes observed in the stories of the women from both life stages. Marie demonstrated a strong capacity for introspection.

> *'If we bought the story that men offered us – e.g. if only you were more like this than like a woman – then you could move forward. If only you had a really top degree from a top university, yes done! Then you would get to your goal. I can say I have done those things. If only you were numerate as well as literate. I can say yes done! … I have probably worked longer hours than men in my time. Oh! You're weighed down with children? Oh don't have any children. It is all a myth because women have changed their career in order to be more like men and what we realise is it is about power. We realise that men are not going to share power. I have discussed this with so many women that have been uncomfortable about taking power. The only way we can really share in those social justice issues is by taking power. It is interesting I have a view that human resources are the conscious of an organisation. If we don't ensure that there is fairness and equity in an organisation then the head of finance is not going to do it. That is our "value add" to the organisation, to ensure that the organisation is sustainable from a corporate values perspective. I am a very firm advocate for that.'* *[25]

Marie discussed the importance of power in organisations – she used the term 'taking power' – and how this entwined with her identity as an effective professional. Her quest was defined as having a 'value add' to the organisation and ensuring sustainability. Sinclair (1994) makes reference to the hero's odyssey.

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[24] Participant from the senior life phase: Marie quote 2.
[25] Participant from the senior life phase: Marie quote 3.

'Embarking on a quest for membership of the executive culture has traditionally been a Ulysses-like journey: full of grand-scale trials of endurance and test of strength-the modern day equivalent of a heroic quest' (Sinclair 1994: 15).

Professional identity was seen to be closely aligned to what was defined as a career quest. In this study, the career quest is understood as a way of expressing how work has meaning in a woman's life at a particular point of time whereas story quest or identity is understood to be a broader concept to mean a continual quest that is constructed through inquiry, dialogue and interaction. The quest is understood in this analysis as a dominant theme inherent in the transcripts of the women of different life stages. In the senior life stage group the quest was told within the theme of overcoming barriers, and these barriers are described as being embedded in the workplace culture. As Beattie (2009) has suggested dialogue and interaction provide a way to engage in the exploration of the stories that have formed us, in this stories beneath the surface of those stories, and learn to create and re-create new narratives for our lives. Career Quest is thought to be similar to identity quest and is explored in this study through a relational form of narrative analysis. The career quest is analysed as a process of identifying and telling a story about how work has meaning in the lives of participants in this study. For example:

Mary's reflection and capacity for introspection were entwined in a story about making critical decisions to embrace new directions that were shaped by broader political agendas.

> *'Sigh! Look, I was just so tired of the secondary school system. It seemed to me as if it was getting nowhere. I had been on a real high. (you talk about high and lows). (Quiet softer tone) I had been on a high with the Dunstan era and the whole focus and attention was a very scrupulous approach to development and to cultural values, the development of social values and then everything took a dive, you know and in the late '80s, we left Adelaide in '98, in the late '80s from say ... about '85–'89, funding got withdrawn from special projects. Language schools closed down, um! The whole emphasis on multiculturalism became ... started to die out and ... this new wave of kind of aggressive um ah! Alternative kind of ... philosophy came into place where it was almost a counter reaction to multiculturalism.'* *[26]

Mary's reflections on the ways her career trajectory changed during midlife demonstrated a capacity for introspection but also how this capacity assisted to develop her identity and become part of a professional group. Mary wove a narrative into her career story about times

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[26] Participant from the senior life phase: Mary quote 1.

when she enjoyed her work and perhaps this indicates a sense of pursuing her career quest. She described her quest by talking about times when her work was in alignment with her enjoyment and there was room to be creative in what she did.

> *'What I thought would be one position became a substantial engagement over a number of years and then. Life sort of took its course and I got married and had kids, these options sort of started to … this door sort of started to close and partially I closed the doors. I needed to focus my attention I could not keep the breadth of things. And also I really enjoyed academic pursuit and think that is why I escaped out of classroom teaching and into university and lecturing there with a desire to do something bigger, than just … having said all of that I had immense rewards from teaching, I had fantastic students that I coached, they won scholarships to Italy that kind of thing, but it got to the point where I thought that it was just closing in too much. It became too much do not what you think, but what others tell you should be done, I just could not see myself complying to that whole kind of value set that I did not belong to.'* [27]

Mary talked about the way she acquired her ability to demonstrate adaptability, flexibility and resilience but also she recognised ingredients for success and productivity. Mary's capacity for introspection was illustrated in her understanding of the dependency between the personal and professional spheres of her life.

> *'My music is therapeutic. Working in the corporate world does not necessarily align to your personal values, so there is a lot of internal tearing that occurs in me. I need to find an environment where my body heals. I can be quite exhausted and sick. When I go to a rehearsal I feel so well. Once the performance is finished, it goes away, but during that time when I am performing, my body rejuvenates itself. I think my body is an expression of my psyche, it gives me a sense of harmony working with others, I work with my musicians and we create a sound that is just right, we don't work in conflict. In this corporate we work in conflict to get harmony. There we work in harmony to get harmony. It is a different way and allows me to feel refreshed psychologically. I know that if I did not have those activities I could not work. There is a kind of dependency between one and the other. I have been singing for 20 years it is the other side to my psyche. So …'* [28]

Mary talked about needing to find ways to balance the challenges she expressed how she recognised the barriers and adapt to the corporate culture, and how this culture was not

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[27] Participant from the senior life phase: Mary quote 2.
[28] Participant from the senior life phase: Mary quote 3.

necessarily in alignment with her values. She recognised the value of her contribution as a rapid worker (an expectation of the culture) and she described herself as part of the professional group. The professional culture was viewed as a 'beast' and the nature of the work was not always ideal, but she knew what was expected in her work despite rather had a pragmatic feature, so in the work there was a desire for greater balance between her professional values and her private values. Her private life was described as compensating for what the work context lacked.

> *'Look, working in (service sector organisation mentioned) is like riding a beast. There is times when your movement and the movement of the beast are moving in the same direction. They are kind of in synchronised. (Laugh) and there are times when you feel like you are moving in one direction and the beast is moving in another direction. It is really a bit of a roller coaster ride. One thing that has been constant, when I have asked to join other companies I sort of do an about turn and come back to (organisation mentioned) is because it is a fantastic organism it is a place that moves under you. There is a lot of stuff that is unpredictable and it's frustrating, but there is a sense that there is something in the making all the time. The frustrations are that often you don't finish things that you have to be rapid in your work and being rapid means that sometimes you need to be pragmatic and not necessarily fulfilling the thing that you have to, to get the thing right, it is kind of an 80/20 set up.'* [29]

Margaret described how she developed significant relationships that assisted her to become effective and productive in her work. She described a career quest to lead others and she also talked about the importance of dialogue in her work.

> *'When you are a representative you are responsible for making sure views are coming through you for decision-making. I think that is an ideal leadership model. There are times you have to make a stand. You realise you have enough information and you have to move ahead. You never have all the information, but if you wait for all of it you are indecisive. You must hear enough voices to make sure there is no area that you are neglecting ... So that was interesting.'* [30]

Throughout her narrative Margaret placed importance on the contributions of others in her work and how this developed her capacity to build strong rapport with others and overcome some of the difficulties of resistance when faced with tough decisions.

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[29] Participant from the senior life phase: Mary quote 4.
[30] Participant from the senior life phase: Margaret quote 1.

> *'Then we moved to a single management, but I consulted everyone. I asked everyone on the staff to put in a submission on what they thought we ought to do. I asked the outdoor staff. In hierarchical terms the outdoor staff, the cleaners and others, they should have a view. They responded well because they were asked. It was very interesting, and that is how I like to work with people, to hear their ideas, and encourage them to pursue them. I usually say to people you are not going to make a mistake if you are not trying something.'* [*31]

Margaret discussed some of the barriers in her work that she needed to overcome (a counter subtheme), but also how her work assisted her to overcome some of these barriers. She learnt about certain workplace rules and types of discourses that were appropriate to share and those that were not welcome in the professional workplace culture. She learnt what the ingredients for success (a dominant theme) were and how to exercise these.

> *'In terms of lows it would be when my husband started having health problems. It started with a heart attack and then other major things, prostate cancer and deep vein thrombosis. Although I was sad when he died I was pleased to have a job that was engaging. If I had expected my partner to be company for the rest of my life, and he was not there, it would have been a lot harder. To be alone and not working would be really hard.*
>
> *Even now, moving into a higher career on your own would be much harder. The work place is not the situation to share anxieties without looking weak. It is not a place to show emotions. You need other people outside the work place to discuss such personal matters.'* [*32]

The previous examples demonstrate dominant and counter narratives that emerged in the stories of the senior life stage women. The dominant narrative was about success and effectiveness and the themes woven into this dominant narrative included various examples of how the women developed their capacity for introspection, recognised certain ingredients for productivity and valued building relationships. A career quest was described by each of the women that participated in this study. The dominant narratives were different, yet they shared some common themes. Counter themes were about growth and change, and themes were about opportunities for this growth and change.

5.3.2 The dominant and counter narrative expressed by the midlife group

The narrative that unfolded from the midlife group of women was somewhat fractured, the personal lives of these women were part of the counter story and this narrative cut across the

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[31] Participant from the senior life phase: Margaret quote 2.
[32] Participant from the senior life phase: Margaret quote 3.

narrative of becoming an effective professional, not in synchronicity. The dominant narrative was success and effectiveness. Obstacles were sometimes described yet were rarely elaborated on, and the narrative strategies drawn upon illustrated a grappling or a shift in story or a mere utterance that redirected the conversation to the dominant narrative about recognising professional accomplishments. The professional, or dominant, narrative in this work sits in juxtaposition with the more personal stories about being a wife or a mother or a member of a family or community. There was an undercurrent (a counter narrative) of expectation that they would have the opportunity to embrace professional work and some degree of shock that they have had to choose between professional and private demands and in many ways sacrifice their career quest for personal endeavours.

In the midlife stage the dominant and counter narratives accentuated the fragmentation of contemporary life. The dominant narrative presented emphasised choice and the counter narrative suggested that sacrifices were made in order to accept choices offered, but this was told in a way that encouraged the listener to believe that the sacrifices were not necessarily expected. There was an undercurrent that it may be possible to 'have it all', but fragmented counter narratives also recognised that there were trade-offs. The following extracts illustrate some of the women in the midlife group of dominant and counter stories and emergent themes. The transcripts are taken from four midlife stage women: Melanie, Paula, Nancy and Penny.

Melanie, like many of the women in this study, talked about the relevance of her formal education and informal knowledge and how, after completing studies, she sought opportunities to become part of a professional group.

> *'The opportunity came to me after uni to work in recruitment and before that I had worked in retail since I was fourteen so I had years of retail experience I was a graduate with a Bachelor of Arts and I was really fearful that I was not going to be able to escape retail and not be able to move into a professional world.'*

> *'Just thinking about my 20s I recall my first boss I had I volunteered for this role and I was very inspired this boss was energetic and really valued my work and I really was in sync with fitting the culture. So that was an early experience of feeling I could do something well. I got*

a lot of good feedback and found it hard work that was a boutique role and that emphasised that feeling of hanging on and hoping for the best.' [33]

Melanie told a story about how she became a professional by getting experience with people in professional roles. She mentioned that her family did not work in professional roles. Relationships are a dominant theme for Melanie. The informal knowledge she gained from her role after university was considered key for Melanie in assisting her to become a professional. This notion of becoming a professional was part of the career quest for Melanie.

'My family had not worked in professional jobs so there was a panic for me around how I scope this out how do I become a person with information on how to get a career that was not in the trades or services or practical like that ... you know professional with a capital P.' [34]

Melanie emphasised that choice was important to her to become a professional and there were themes about how she adapted and developed some introspection about how she recognised skills that were key ingredients to becoming a productive and effective professional. This unfolds in the following extract:

'For all of my 20s my career decisions were built on a panic scrabbling up I felt I needed to take anything that was offered. I knew that I had ... I had seen peers that were just a little bit older than me stay in their hospitality or their retail job. I still have some friends that never escaped that ... Sometimes it is a choice but a lot I think just missed the boat. I know some of those people who are still waitressing that were bright and intelligent and there was no pathway made obvious. I did some postgraduate study which I thought was going to be practical which was the history of publications which I thought might have practical components, I was able to gain work experience through that with someone who ran a small operation in book publishing and recruitment. I had this opportunity open up it was very unstructured and it was a job that led to paid work after working in this voluntary role during my grad dip. I felt like I spent my 20s scrambling from thing to thing. Learning as I went that you can sort of build a bridge to your next job. I ended up working in HR recruitment. I did not allow myself to choose things. I looked for things that had my skill set that I could guarantee that I had some skill in and you know that thing people talk about that they feel a bit like a fake? I spent my 20s faking it until you make it and the problem with that is that you

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[33] Participant from the midlife phase: Melanie quote 1.
[34] Participant from the midlife phase: Melanie quote 2.

never know if you have made it. It was an energetic exciting time because I was building a career.' *[35]

Melanie emphasised that she was not aware that she knew exactly what her professional career would look like, but she had a belief that she could develop a range of professional skills by making active choices to work with professional people and develop professional relationships.

> *'Not that I knew what a career would look like for me but it was also very stressful. It was as I say just clinging on to every opportunity that enabled me to get some skills and hoping it would be ok each time. Just thinking about my 20s was this first boss I had that I volunteered for was very inspirational and energetic and really valued my work and I really was in sync with fitting the culture. So that was an early experience of feeling I could do something well. I got allot of good feedback and found it hard work that was a boutique role and that emphasised that feeling of hanging on and hoping for the best.'* *[36]

Paula described how becoming a mother influenced her to rethink the ways in which she demonstrated adaptability, flexibility and resilience (a counter subtheme). The narrative about her personal life was very different from her values in her professional life, with an interest in 'self-expression' and the ability to express her 'true self' in her work and personal life.

> *'Being pregnant ... work is not a self-actualisation component for me anymore, motherhood is. Work has become a means to an ends it pays the bills, the mortgage, having said that I still like to enjoy what I do, but having said that previously my work was more of a fundamental self-expression. It is not as important as in terms of myself expression now.'* *[37]

Paula was pregnant with her second child at the time she was interviewed and had talked through the interview about recognising the barriers in her work and learning to adapt, two counter themes. However, she also talked about taking time out of her work to do this. She ran a career development consulting business and, unlike after her first pregnancy, during the second pregnancy she wanted to have a break from work. Work was not as high in her priorities at this point in her life. She talked about her business being her passion before becoming pregnant, but at the time of the interview it was not part of her identity quest, being a mum was her current quest.

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[35] Participant from the midlife phase: Melanie quote 3.
[36] Participant from the midlife phase: Melanie quote 4.
[37] Participant from the midlife phase: Paula quote 1.

'I want to have a longer maternity leave break this time. I want to have time at home. I don't see myself working full time. I like the idea of having time with the kids at home. Probably 2–3 days per week. There are so many unknown what is the baby like are they a happy child? Are they sleeping and eating well? How much attention do they need? I don't really need go back to work. I would like to go back I feel like I can contribute in that space as well.'[*38]

Paula also discussed how she rethought the value of work and the value she placed on work at this time in her life. She reflected on the role of work and motherhood and how this had changed on her outlook. She had developed her capacity for introspection, a dominant theme, yet was still exploring how these values had shifted in her life.

'Now work, you know it depends on what you call work. Is your real work about parenting about raising a child and about making the most for them? The importance of a career in my life has shifted.'[*39]

Paula's career quest was not necessarily one that focused on the relationships she had built, because she was interviewed at a time when her work was not the primary focus of her life. Instead, her personal life was her focus and therefore the story was told in a way that highlighted ways of generating income that would enable her to step back from her dominant narrative of success and achievement.

'I am actually looking at how I can creative a passive income source so that need of the financial security is met, so I can concentrate on being a mum. The other interesting thing is that I want to work on being a home maker. I want to learn how to sew. I want to be able to do a garden. That is where I want to invest some of my time and growth, learning about things I resented when I was a child. I used to hate doing the garden with my mum. Now I am interested in growing home and showing creative expression in a garden.'[*40]

Similarly, Nancy was interviewed while on a career break, so she was more focused on family. Unlike the women from the senior stage, the women from the midlife stage told a story about how career does not always fit neatly into their personal lives, but rather they need to step away from career and work to give time to family priorities. In the interview Nancy focused on her family, yet she reflected back on how she started becoming part of a professional group and building relationships in her profession.

[*38] Participant from the midlife phase: Paula quote 2.
[*39] Participant from the midlife phase: Paula quote 3.
[*40] Participant from the midlife phase: Paula quote 4.

'I met my husband at the (institution mentioned) but the (previous bank) were people that talked more about the family. The people were rough and ready and my boss was an inspiration very encouraging and supportive and allowed me to be myself. If I met my targets as a team member I was encouraged. At the start of my career with the (new institution) I was 27 when I worked as a manager and I did not feel in that environment I had the support to do that role. There were no role models.' [*41]

Nancy had a strong capacity for introspection with an emphasis on key ingredients necessary for productivity through building relationships. Her formal education and informal knowledge were also viewed as assisting her to become part of a professional group.

'I got a job at the ... bank in 1987 just as a data entry operator while I thought about what I wanted to do at university. That motivated me to go to uni. A lot said to me you will like the colour of the money too much if you take a year off rather than go straight to uni after school. This data entry job really motivated me to go to uni thought. I did not really have a lot of support from my family. I came from a background where women don't go to school. My parents did not have much schooling. They put me through a private girls secondary school and then after that I was expected to go and get a job. I kept the job going a couple of days and went to uni part time eventually I graduated. I got married young to a nice guy while at uni working part time all thought. I ended up getting a bachelor of economics. I liked finance and banking. I did not perform very well in accounting. Banking and finance were my key interest.' [*42]

Nancy was in a situation that enabled her to recognise the ingredients required for success and her capacity to overcome barriers. She acknowledged her ability to adapt and demonstrate flexibility; however, she made the choice to focus on her personal life, not believing she could have both at the same time.

'My children and family are my focus now so I did not expect that and a lot for people did not expect this from me I focused on my career and study I found the transition very difficult. The second time around I am enjoying motherhood allot more. I have got through the transition of being in the corporate world and it being about you and now being a mum and not having my lunch time for yourself because you are focused on your children. I have put my career at the back and now I think I have lost the opportunity to be a senior executive. If my kids were at school and I could focus on my job I would possibly consider that. Or pursue something else. I feel different now. My husband is sick with cancer. When he had all this urgent stuff to do

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[41] Participant from the midlife phase: Nancy quote 1.
[42] Participant from the midlife phase: Nancy quote 2.

and 8 months later when he went back to work all the urgent things were not urgent anymore.' [*43]

Nancy reflected on how she overcame certain obstacles and barriers (a counter theme) in her professional life and how these were at odds with her personal life.

> *'People are wanting this tomorrow and yesterday and when you don't have your health it is not that important. I don't think my priorities could ever be the same. I don't have that support. I would just drop everything for my children if your child is sick or I don't think I could live with myself If I was not there for my children. Career is not the driver. I feel I sacrificed career for motherhood. I see this as an opportunity to steer my life in a different direction. I think it would be hard for me to work part time. I proposed a couple of days in my time of role that is very customer focused. People expect this role 7 days a week. I would have to job share I would not be able to do this part time it would be difficult. I would get calls from people overseas on the weekend and it was very demanding and now I could not do that.'* [*44]

Penny, like many of the other female participants in this study (of both life stages), considered the importance of her formal education and described this as a bit of a marker for the beginning of the story about professional development and growth, but also as the springboard into becoming part of a professional group. She talked about how her formal education assisted her to get a professional role, but then how the informal knowledge (a counter theme) she acquired in her first professional role helped her to develop further.

> *'In my career, I started out with my economics degree, and then I went straight to work. The biggest influence earlier on was a very supportive manager. Someone to this day, we have maintained a relationship with. She was devoted to developing with her staff. That was significant. It was a catalyst for my confidence. The next big thing was being given a role which, relative for my age was quite a senior level role.'* [*45]

Penny described a process where she learnt about the rules of the professional service culture from a manager (midlife stage). She learnt about the importance of adaptability, flexibility and most importantly resilience in the masculine environment. Penny talked about someone who coached her in her first professional role, teaching her what not to do. Learning form

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[43] Participant from the midlife phase: Nancy quote 3.
[44] Participant from the midlife phase: Nancy quote 4.
[45] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 1.

others assisted Penny to recognise the ingredients for success and productivity. In the following extract she makes reference to what she learnt from her first boss.

> *'Something that happened to her was very telling of her as a person. She worked in an operational area, up in (corporate service company mentioned), and apparently she had cried in one of the meetings. Just that display of emotion, it went around the department like wildfire. People would snigger about her as though it was all a bit of a joke. Admonished because of that and it was my first experience of the rules, I guess. The rules are women in the work place need to be more masculine. You don't show your femininity or vulnerability. Show no signs of weakness, whereas men if they are not allowed to control their emotions, they are allowed to yell and scream ... That was significant.'* [*46]

Penny talked about how she was proactive in becoming part of a professional group, and how she built relationships in order to develop her professional capacity.

> *'I had my job before the graduate recruitment professionals came to campus, from when I was still at university. I started contacting graduate recruitment officers at various universities. I had an interview and I had been offered a role, even before we got through the graduate selection process. So that was good.'* [*47]

Penny was asked the question 'can you describe your experience of growth and development as a professional?' She responded by asking: 'Do you mean just as a professional or in life as well?' None of the women from the senior life stage made a distinction between their personal life and their professional life or described any 'tearing' between the two. Mary talked about times when her professional values were not in synchronicity with her professional life, but all the midlife stage women interviewed told counter and dominant narratives that were at odds. Penny's question was significant as it conveyed her awareness that her professional life story would be different if she incorporated aspects of her personal life. In particular, Penny spoke about the influence of her personal life around tough professional decisions. She recognised the barriers that existed for her in the professional culture and learnt to adapt, but she consciously made a choice to put her family before her career, inferring that this has been at the expense of pursuing her career quest.

> *'The other big developmental experience for me, I was married at the time, commuting four hours a day to go to work and doing a Master's degree. It was putting a lot of strain on my marriage. I was about 25, I knew at that point that, this is not sustainable; my marriage will*

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[46] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 2.
[47] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 3.

end up breaking up. So I made a tough decision to put my family first. So I got a job in Wollongong, and within two weeks of me notifying them that I was going to leave, my mother had a brain tumour and subsequently died. She lived in Wollongong, so I guess it was my first experience that involved real synchronicity. Fate, things were meant to happen. Even though the promotional prospects of that role were much lower, the developmental opportunities were extreme because I went into a smaller environment. Showed initiative in the university environment and soon I was being promoted, promoted not necessarily with dollars but with responsibility. That was a huge learning curve.' [48]*

Penny spoke about the times her personal life was synchronised with her work life. However, this was not spoken about in a way that suggested her personal life was enhanced or aligned with her work, but rather as weighing up her personal choices. She spoke about making personal sacrifices and sometimes professional choices that led to growth opportunities.

'My marriage had broken up anyway. It's funny, life, you end up making all these sacrifices and they don't work out anyway. As my marriage had ended I needed to get more life experiences. So I took off to Canada and worked overseas. It was huge, in terms of me being more holistic, worldly, and mature. That was a huge period of growth.' [49]*

Penny demonstrated a capacity for introspection by reflecting on what she valued from her work in varying roles she had taken up. She ran her own consulting business and expressed how her experiences assisted her to develop resilience. Her career quest was described as being shaped by what she valued about what she could offer clients in her work.

'When I was at (corporate mentioned) I was passionate about corporate social responsibility. Part of that has been shaped by the work I did in Canada, when I was running a residential college working with the community. I think it is values, like in HR, you serve the needs of other people. So I think it's serving ... I am not saying that (corporate mentioned) needs to change from being a telecommunications centre to a welfare organisation. But there are some services that corporate could provide that would address some of the problems in our society in a way that addresses some problems and makes money you know the mentality that is either/or? If we are going to be good corporate citizens it means we are not going to make enough money. I think that paradox is one we have to change ...' [50]*

Penny discussed life balance as being able to pursue her values in her work.

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[48] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 4.
[49] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 5.
[50] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 6.

> *'Life balance, is work that provides actualisation of potential … The main thing I remember sticking in my mind was the hierarchy of needs, and it is still there. What excites me is the concept of life actualisation. Self-transcendence, those sorts of themes inspire me. The concepts of buy offs and being in flow, the concept of discretionary effort, working with things intangible, with spirit, with soul. The stuff you can't measure or see, or train, the stuff that is inherently within, it can't be coerced it has to be released.'*[51]

Penny, not unlike a number of the women at the midlife stage, discussed money as a trade-off for balance between personal and professional spheres.

> *'The thing about financial success is dollars aren't always an indicator of value. It's just what people are prepared to pay. Shifting consciousness, what is your own level of happiness? Your own health and vitality, level of calm. Peace, also lucidity, when I am lucid, I know I am on the right path. I have to remember that, for when I do not have any. What am I doing right now that is not calibrated correctly.'*[52]

The discourse about professional development and growth that the midlife women drew upon had a greater focus on what had assisted them to move ahead. They discussed the dominant aspects of their development on more occasions than the senior life stage group of women. Both groups focused on the constraints that had affected their development and growth; however, the emphasis of this in the stories varied. Work and life balance was a key focus for the midlife stage participants and the constraints inherent in the workplace were more of a focus for the senior stage group of women.

The previous examples drawn from the senior stage of women pay a great deal of attention the counter narrative themes, which include: adaptability, flexibility and resilience; becoming part of a professional group; formal education and informal knowledge; recognising barriers; and learning to adapt. There was a deeply seated traditional narrative in the senior life stage that accentuated a woman's propensity to develop through others, and be particularly concerned with work life in the context of relationships with others and the recognition of key ingredients that have been learnt through these counter narratives.

The dominant and counter narratives provide a means to analyse the way in which the two groups perceive they are recognised in their work and potentially insight in to the way they understand to development and growth.

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[51] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 7.
[52] Participant from the midlife phase: Penny quote 8.

'The work we humans do through talk and interaction to seek to get recognised as having a specific socially situated identity … All the contestation, negotiation and ambiguities round such identities and the ways in which we humans "bid" for them (try to get them recognised and accepted) and relate to and contest with each other over them' (Gee 2010: 210).

There can be seen to be interaction with an interviewer in the telling of the stories presented in this chapter but also the telling is situated in a culture and highlights through the process of the telling the way in which the women in this study tell a story about how they are recognised.

5.4. A comparison of life stage narrative strategies

Table 5.3 also indicates a ratio of the number of times each senior or midlife women running through the group's narratives.

Table 5.3: The ratio of themes identified in the two groups

Themes in counter narratives	**Senior life stage**	**Midlife stage**
Adaptability, flexibility and resilience	2.9	1.7
Becoming part of professional group	2.1	1.3
Formal education and informal knowledge	3.0	1.6
Recognising barriers and learning to adapt	3.1	2.3
Themes in dominant narratives	**Senior life stage**	**Midlife stage**
Building relationships	2.1	1.3
Capacity for introspection	2.1	1.1
Pursuit of career quest	1.7	1.9
Recognising ingredients for productivity	2.7	1.1

Table 5.3 highlights the following findings:

- The women of senior life stage told more counter narratives and dominant narratives than the women of the midlife stage.
- The women of the two groups placed greater emphasis on a counter narrative when telling their story.
- The midlife women had more to say about the pursuit of their career quest and the way they had come to recognise the ingredients for productivity than the senior group of women.

Overall, Table 5.3 highlights that the women of the two life stages placed greater emphasis on the importance of the subtheme of learning to adapt within their counter narrative. They learnt to adapt through personal reflection and engagement in social and cultural experiences. This was also highlighted when they emphasised their life quest story through their counter narrative and contrasted this with their career quest story within the dominant narrative.

The number of times the participants referred to the dominant and counter narratives was presented here to provide a snapshot of the variation in narrative schema. The career aspiration is seen as the goals toward a career quest. The aspiration story is generally expressed in a given context that highlights some of the constraints and ways in which individual recognise their value and are recognised by others. The story about career aspiration through the dominant narrative this is a story about how the individual hopes to further develop. The career quest includes both the dominant and counter narrative (it is seen as a story schema) that involves an expression of how a person understands their development and growth in their work.

5.4.1. Summation of key variation by participant

The numbers below represent the number of times each participant referred to a dominant and/or counter narrative and themes within these. This highlights the degree of variation between the participants but also the patterns that were evident within the groups. It is important to note that each group that participated referred to dominant and counter narratives and aspects of the themes within each. Table 5.4 provides a summation of the dominant and counter narratives that were coded for each participant including the number of times each participant referred to one of the themes.

Table 5.4: Dominant and counter narratives coded for each participant

Women from senior life stage	Dominant narratives	Counter narratives
Betty	5	9
Sandra	12	22
Margaret	5	6
Marie	12	14
Mary	9	15
Lou	5	1
Edna	13	11
Women from midlife stage	**Dominant narratives**	**Counter narratives**
Ginny	2	3
Molly	7	8
Melanie	5	6
Paula	2	4
Penny	15	16
Nancy	4	5
Lara	3	4
Other life stages	**Dominant narratives**	**Counter narratives**
Jan semi-retired stage	2	2
Connie starting out stage	8	2
Rachel starting out stage	2	0

Table 5.4 illustrates that each narrative had a particular form and some participants had more to say about certain dominant and counter narratives than others. Nevertheless, a thematic pattern was inherent across each group. The semi-retired participant and the women starting out in their career discussed some of the themes within the dominant and counter narratives. In general, the group from the senior life stage provided more examples of counter narratives than any other group. Sandra in particular discussed overcoming barriers more than any of the other women in the senior life stage. Midlife stage women generally did not show a great deal of variation in the way they discussed their dominant and counter narratives; however, they discussed them less than women of the senior life stage. Penny in particular discussed her dominant and counter narratives more than any other midlife stage woman.

5.4.2. Women of the senior life stage

The way the women of the senior life stage talked about their life quest is a story entwined with key drivers that led to them aspiring to and pursuing a career in senior management. The two participants examples selected below (Sandra and Marie) referred to the dominant narrative about how they had come to recognise their effectiveness. They both believed that they had added value in the organisations in which they worked. Sandra paid far more attention to her counter narrative than Marie, in particular placing greater emphasis on recognising the barriers for women in her place of work (Table 8 identifies the variation in the number of times each women of the senior life stage referred to the dominant and counter narrative). Sandra referred to the counter narrative on 22 occasions and the dominant on 12; Marie also referred to the dominant narrative on 12 occasions but the counter narrative on 14 occasions.

Sandra, the first participant's example, demonstrated a strong drive for achievement, but this was not generally presented as a career quest. Sandra reflected on her experience and said that having children had not changed her focus, but it had created challenges for her in balancing competing demands. Sandra presented herself as a woman with a strong drive to produce results and outputs. She was very motivated by intellectual stimulation, was politically savvy and demonstrated a strong awareness of her intellectual capacity. She worked in a senior role in academia. Throughout the interview she placed a great deal of emphasis on the support provided by mentors, however she also placed emphasis on the counter narrative about experiencing restrictions when not recognised as equal with her male colleagues. She placed emphasis on recognition in terms of title and power rather than in terms of monetary reward.

Sandra discussed the importance of formal education and how this provided grounding for her to pursue a professional career in academia. She referred to her career quest to go to university and later in her story elaborated on how her interest in scholastic pursuits assisted her to find her place in academia. She did not directly talk about pursuing a career quest, but rather becoming aware that this was the right profession for her to make an active contribution within.

> *'I had a clear intention to go to university. There was no one else in our family that had ever been to uni. From an early age I had formed this intention. My teachers at school significantly influenced me. I am not sure how I developed the confidence to do*

it. I was fortunate, like a lot of people my age, when university fees were lifted and it became free education, I was able to afford to attend.' *[53]

Sandra acknowledged the significance of her role as a woman. She indicated that she was grateful for being able to pursue something she valued and fortunate to have attended university. In the following extract Sandra presents her dominant story about what she has learnt from working within the academic community. She touched on the theme of significant relationships that assisted her to grow and develop, but also how this helped her recognise the ingredients for her productivity and effectiveness. In telling this story she presented a capacity for introspection and highlighted how certain relationships have assisted her to pursue her career quest.

'The highs are intellectual stimulation, the recognition, and the relationships with colleagues inside and outside the university have been fantastic. The opportunity to network with a range of fascinating people, people who are great thinkers has been very significant. The responsibility I have been given even from a young age. It is good to see your books and articles published. It seems tangible....

Going from building to building can mean an enormous shift in my career life. There is a huge internal labour market in the university; you can do a lot within the university or the university system.' *[54]

Sandra clearly had a strong drive, but this drive was measured and she put steps into place to achieve her goals. She described herself as 'fortunate' to have an education. Sandra recognised barriers in the work culture and discussed how she learnt to adapt to adverse situations and to recognise key ingredients that enabled her to be effective and productive in her chosen profession. Recognising barriers was talked about more by Sandra than any of the other women in the senior life stage, but more by the women within the senior group on the whole than any other group in this study. She also discussed how key relationships assisted her to adapt, the role of mentors being significant for her. She demonstrated a capacity for introspection in describing a recent application for a promotion.

'It is a challenge I relish. They advertised this job three times and did not appoint until me. I spoke to a few people that said they thought of applying but thought the

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[53] Participant from the senior life phase: Sandra quote 1.
[54] Participant from senior life phase: Sandra quote 2.

position would be too hard. You would not take on this job unless you were prepared for a challenge. If they had created these positions a few years ago we would not be in this situation. We are on the eve of reforms, we do not know if we will be funded in the future.' [55]

Sandra talked about how family pressures caused her to be exhausted a lot of the time and this impacted on her work. None of the men in this study talked about barriers that related to family pressures.

'I was sleep-deprived every day for about four years, I still am. When the kids were babies, I did not get enough sleep, because of breast-feeding during the night. It was tough; it is not as bad now they are older. It did wear me down. That is why I chose to go into this job, this job is stressful too. You can balance work and kids, but after a while you burn out. Working between the kids' routines, not enough rest, nights where you are expected to go to university functions, they are very long days.' [56]

Sandra talked about recognising barriers in her work as well as how building key relationships helped overcome some of these barriers.

'... some people are generous, not everyone. I have been amazed at the men that have given that access. There have been plenty of men that have oppressed me, but a few men that were prepared to help me as well. My mentor has been extremely supportive. If he had not supported my promotion application, it would be dead. If he did not write a glowing supervisor's report, I would go nowhere. In the past I have had supervisors that were hostile to any promotion. My previous supervisor, the Dean, said 'don't worry about putting in an application'. So I lost three years. Looking at my career, I have had it slow-moving for an academic. I have not had a merit promotion, despite producing eight books and articles, helping obtain a quarter of a million dollars' worth of grants, and all the rest of it, I have had no promotion. So something has gone wrong, some barriers, some bad career planning.' [57]

Sandra talked about the gendered nature of her role. She demonstrated her capacity to reflect on her minority status as a senior woman, she also illustrated that she has been resilient and flexible and adapted to the inequalities observed in the culture in which she worked.

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[55] Participant from senior life phase: Sandra quote 3.
[56] Participant from the senior life phase: Sandra quote 4.
[57] Participant from the senior life phase: Sandra quote 5.

> *'For many years I was the only director of a centre that was a woman. A number of people remarked on that and said you ought to be a professor. It was an anomaly; a male professor heads most of the research centres. Research at universities are male dominated, women tend to concentrate on the teaching area.'* *[58]

In talking about ways in which she has needed to adapt and develop her identity as part of a professional group Sandra referred to some of the key ingredients that enabled her to be productive and effective in her work.

> *'I am a good negotiator at work, I am not in the personal spheres, and emotions intrude. Less patient and tolerant … I am good at negotiating my workload. For example at meetings I negotiate what is a high priority and what is a low priority, to create a manageable workload.'* *[59]

Sandra demonstrated her capacity for introspection by considering how men and women are impacted at senior levels by the demands of time and how this impacts particularly on women.

> *'The Associate Dean is paying the price with his family life, he is away overseas every other week. I think the price is heavier for women. I don't think anyone has found the magic formula. I think I would be a good example of how to have your cake and eat it too. I built up a strong career before I had children. I deferred having children, non-intentionally, so I built up a strong career. I was 39 having kids. It means you have more experience and can handle the extra stress of lack of sleep and so on. If you are confident, you can do your job well, but if you were new it would be hard to do.'* *[60]

Marie was also a senior manager, but worked for a large corporate telecommunications company. Her role involved planning learning and development programs for executive teams and young graduates that came into the organisation. She had a focus on developing key capabilities that the organisation valued. She was interviewed at a time when she was thinking of moving out of the large corporation and exploring other avenues. When she spoke about the counter narrative she often referred to ways in which she sustained herself within this environment, which was very exhausting for her, and ways she built up her resilience to 'confront the status quo'. Marie had made a decision not to have children and she had a

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[58] Participant from the senior life phase: Sandra quote 6.
[59] Participant from the senior life phase: Sandra quote 7.
[60] Participant from the senior life phase: Sandra quote 8.

strong focus on developing equal opportunities for women within her organisation. At one point she described her mother's feminist activism influencing her to make deliberate decisions to challenge the corporate behaviours that are enmeshed with historical discrimination. Her key carer quest or drive could be described as exploring opportunities to create social justice within organisations.

Marie described the importance of relationships (as did Sandra) in assisting her to become part of a professional group.

> *'I went into a very big bureaucracy in the city of Melbourne and … that was very interesting for me. I got interviewed by HR people and plucked into HR originally because they thought that anyone with a personality they would send into HR and all the others graduate into assessing tax returns.'* *[61]

Marie also provided an example of the way many of the women in the senior life stage talked about their identity quest.

> *'I think something that people are rarely in a position to do where it makes a human value contribution they need to think about the forks in the road. You often talk to people who really never know how they got where they got. I have always made deliberate decisions and done some soul searching. I have always made deliberate decisions, few people do.'* *[62]

In the above extract Marie provided an example of her decision-making process about career moves. She was interviewed just after she had applied for resignation as a senior executive of the board of a bank. A few weeks after her interview she rang and said:

> *'they have won me over again I am going back early next year to a role with a specialist emphasis'* *[63].

The theme that women of the senior life stage talked about most was overcoming the barriers and learning to adapt, followed closely by a focus on how formal education assisted them to make transitions into new careers or roles with a different emphasis. Marie talked a great deal about how her training early on as a lawyer assisted her in career development. She then discussed the ways she had to adapt and demonstrate flexibility and resilience in the

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[61] Participant from the senior life phase: Marie quote 4.
[62] Participant from the senior life phase: Marie quote 5.
[63] Participant from the senior life phase: Marie quote 6.

corporate sector as many women of the senior life stage had. The senior life stage women talked about this subtheme of adaptability and finding some balance between work and personal values and how this either sustained them or how they needed to find ways to maintain their resilience. When the senior life stage group women talked about their dominant story there was a tendency to focus on recognising the ingredients they had learnt though their counter experiences. They told a narrative about how key relationships assisted them to move forward and how their reflective capacity played a role in understanding where they offered value to an organisation. This notion of adding value was often how their career quest was presented.

5.4.3. Women of the midlife stage

Lara and Melanie, two women from the midlife group, were two of the younger participants in this group. When Lara's interview was conducted she did not have children; however she took leave from her corporate role in 2009 to have her first baby and decided not to return to work as she became pregnant with her second child during her 12 months of leave. Lara only referred to dominant and counter narratives on a few occasions, paying only slightly more attention to the dominant narrative (she referred to the dominant narrative on three occasions and the counter narrative themes on four occasions). Although Lara had the title of 'manager' within the people and culture team of a large bank, she essentially managed information rather than people. Melanie referred to her dominant narrative on five occasions and a counter narrative on six occasions. The midlife women had less to say than the senior life stage women about their dominant and counter narratives and less to say about their dominant narrative than the women in the senior life stage group.

Lara demonstrated some recognition of the ingredients that made others successful and in so doing provided some insight into a career quest or desire to manage people effectively.

> *'What I have come to realise over the last couple of months is that has a lot to do with your people leader, that experience has a huge amount to do with the people you are working with, you know I think a lot of people are put into roles where that is not necessarily their thing, they may be an expert in an area, you know, industrial relations or whatever, but they are not good on the people management side, on managing people themselves. You know we have developed a people framework side where you can specialise and still go up the corporate ladder in terms of money and status or whatever, but we also have a people leader side where you can go up the*

corporate ladder. At one stage to go up the corporate ladder you had to take on a people leader side of things and you know it just does not work.' *[64]

Lara was keen to pursue her career quest to integrate career development practices within her role; she combined this with an interest in managing people with varied abilities. She discussed her capacity to learn from others and considered how this informal knowledge was relevant to her current work experience.

'Yeah and I have spoken to Katie who is our head about possibly doing some career management of career stuff with our trainees, for example, they come in at, like, 16 years old and it's a trainee program and I kind of said, like first year they could learn the technical skills and getting them into the role and second we could focus on their career management, you know do they want to go to university or stay on with the bank or look at different roles and trying to map that out a bit more and I think we need a bit more support for people with a disability, for example, you know they start on with the bank ... set up various things, for example, if they have a vision impairment they have what is it called Jaws or whatever that we set up but there is not sort of career focus. Katie has said you know I think that is a great idea but I am not sure how I go ahead with that or what her expectations are around that. Because with our trainees are all over Australia so I am not sure how we go about that logistically or whatever.' *[65]

Lara reflected on what drives or motivates her in her work, but was not clear about her career quest at this point in her career, or what her key strengths were. She talked about some of the barriers she had encountered in demonstrating resilience within a corporate culture that was challenging for her at times.

'I don't necessarily know sometimes what does drive me. I can say I like to be challenged and I like to be busy. When I did some assessment work with the right management on myself, my stresses and things like that, one thing that they did provide feedback on was out of a score of 10 it had your interest in working with a big corporate and mine was like a 2 out of 10. I get frustrated with the political bullshit. I can't be bothered with it, I think there is a whole lot in my own life, like gossip and things like that and not understanding where I am, or stand with people, you know if someone has an issue with me just tell me and often it just goes over my head, I often

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[64] Participant from the midlife phase: Lara quote 1.
[65] Participant from the midlife phase: Lara quote 2.

just ignore it, someone will say to me "did you see that someone just did this at work" and I will say "well no" ... and I will go where is this person and someone will say "oh they got fired!" I say "oh I did not realise". I suppose equality drives me; I think everyone deserves a fair go, do you know what I mean?' *[66]*

Lara implied that the culture she worked within was not always equitable, she suggested that some minority groups were not represented in her company, she hoped to get opportunities for Aboriginal women to participate and her drive involved an interest providing greater opportunities for access to some groups that were underrepresented in the organisation, there value was not recognised within this culture. She also implied that her values were not aligned with the dominant culture, but she had not learnt how to build a resilience to this other than avoid being part of it at times. Her counter narrative neither built into her dominant narrative about success nor conflicted with it, because she had found a way to focus on the things that energised her in her work and avoid confronting what did not energise her.

Melanie was a career consultant in a university and was responsible for a small team of people. She did not have a partner or children to take care of but referred to her parents on a few occasions and her father's illness as a concern for her. Melanie believed she was good at her current role and it allowed her to pursue her 'real passion' to become an author. Building relationships was a key feature of Melanie's dominant narrative. She spoke a great deal about how these relationships enabled her to develop informal knowledge that assisted her to 'learn the rules' in a professional environment. An obstacle was that she was not clear about what was expected of professionals. Because she did not grow up with people who were in professional roles she believed she has had to adapt to fit in and demonstrate her effectiveness. Melanie placed relatively equal emphasis on her dominant and counter narratives (her dominant narrative was referred to on five occasions and counter narrative on six occasions).

Melanie described her drive to adapt to professional roles and her desire to move out of what she saw as non-professional roles and onto a professional pathway. Finding a professional role could be said to be a dominant theme or career quest for Melanie.

'For all of my 20s my career decisions were built on a panic scrabbling up. I felt I needed to take anything that was offered. I knew that I had ... I had seen peers that were

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[66] Participant from the midlife phase: Lara quote 3.

just a little bit older than me stay in their hospitality or their retail job. I still have some
friends that never escaped that ... Sometimes it is a choice but a lot I think just missed
the boat. I know some of those people who are still waitressing that were bright and
intelligent and there was no pathway made obvious' *[67]

Melanie did not believe her formal education in the liberal arts necessarily led to professional
career and talked about acquiring professional skills and knowledge through informal and
voluntary opportunities.

'I had this opportunity open up it was very unstructured and it was a job that led to
paid work after working in this voluntary role during my grad dip. I felt like I spent my
20s scrambling from thing to thing. Learning as I went that you can sort of build a
bridge to your next job. I ended up working in HR recruitment.' *[68]

In some ways Melanie was similar to Lara as neither was very direct about their carer quest,
but talked about some of the things that motivated them or created a drive for them in their
work. Both Melanie and Lara referred to the dominant and counter narrative in equal
proportions. They talked about the dominant and counter themes as interconnected, but not
necessarily complementary.

5.4.4. Variation and similarities among the two groups discussed

The women emphasised their formal education and how this had assisted them to develop
their abilities in their professional lives. What was counter to the development of
effectiveness and being recognised as successful was the capacity to network. The capacity to
network is here considered to be a subtheme that assisted them to develop their effectiveness.
Although the groups represented these groups adopted a strategy of weaving between
dominant and counter narratives, the themes they talked about and the way they presented
their stories were very different.

Kumra and Vinnicombe (2010) suggest that gender permeates organisational practices,
cultures, structures and processes and this is not a personal issue, but an issue prevalent in the
culture of the workplace. The analysis presented in this chapter highlights that women from
the senior life stage had a stronger capacity to demonstrate through their discursive strategies
the impact of the work culture on their experiences than the women in the midlife stage. The

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[67] Participant from the midlife phase: Melanie quote 5.
[68] Participant from the midlife phase: Melanie quote 6.

women in the midlife stage tended to discuss personal choice impacting on their development in a greater number of instances and this highlighted a conflict that they experienced. Women of midlife stage showed a greater degree of conflict between the themes identified in the counter narrative. It appears that the way women make choices about their development and growth is impacted by the culture in which they work. Their aspirations maybe shaped by the workplace culture however as is indicative of the stories presented throughout this chapter.

According to Beattie (2009) the understanding of identity is a continual quest that is constructed through inquiry, dialogue and interaction. The way identities are understood by women of varied life stages and the researcher is explored in this thesis.

> *'Through inquiry, dialogue and interaction, we engage in the exploration of the stories that have formed us, in this stories beneath the surface of those stories, and learn to create and re-create new narratives for our lives. This process of creating and recreating our identities is one of continuous exploration, and of reconstructing and re-forming the existing patterns of our lives into new configurations in the light of new insights, understanding and of the ever-changing circumstances around us'* (Beattie 2009: 4).

The women in this study share a story about how they are recognised in their work and in so doing provide a 'snapshot' of their professional identities and their career quest to develop an identity that is congruent with their values and aspirations.

5.5. Concluding comments

This chapter highlights that women of different life stages emphasise different features that are important to their professional development and this has an impact on the way in which they believe they are effective within the work. A different emphasis was detected in the stories of the women of two life stages. The groups represented in this study identified themselves in their professional lives by developing a language about their drive and aspiration for achievement, and their career quest, which is their quest to be recognised for making an effective contribution in their work and lives. Career quest was defined as a concept that is important in this study, because the career quest story highlights the gender constraints and also the career choices that women of different life stages experience. It seems that women in their midlife stage who occupy middle management roles are conflicted by their work and life and this is expressed in the counter narrative that highlights the identity

quest. Some of the women in the senior life stage also reflected back and discussed how they have had to adapt to the workplace and had come to recognise the value of their contribution. The women of the senior life stage seemed to have reconciled the worlds of family and professional work more than the women of midlife stage, however they focused their story about their experience of work and how the work culture is not often aligned with their personal values. It was not only work and family that were in conflict for the women of the midlife stage, there was also a strong story about how they have adapted to professional work cultures. Again, the women of the senior life phase group presented a more integrated story about adapting to workplace culture. In this study, women of different life stages recognised their contributions in different ways and experienced different levels of constraint in their development and growth. The next chapter discusses the importance of the findings (presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) in relation to the research questions proposed in Chapter 1 and presents a discussion concerning the significance of the theoretical and analytical framework presented in earlier chapters (chapter 2 and 3) and considers how the aims of this research have been achieved.

Chapter 6: Discussion and considerations

6.1. Introduction

This study has explored the way a small group of professional Australian women experience development and growth in their careers at two life stages. A narrative approach has been applied to analyse the strategies that women at different life stages draw on when telling a story about development and growth in their work. From this position no voice is suppressed, displaced or privileged over any other. Participants were found to position their story about development within the context of their career. The pursuit of a career quest was interpreted as important to the development of a professional identity. Each participant provided a story schema that included a dominant and counter narrative and there were patterns identified across the sample groups at different life stages.

The analysis undertaken here highlighted that women reflect on the constraints experienced in the workplace differently at different life stages. The women of different life stages positioned their story in varied contexts and recognised the ways in which they were effective in their work. They had varied perceptions about what it means to develop and grow as an effective professional. The narratives provided by the women who took part in this study provided insight into how women at different life stages understand their careers and tell a story about overcoming gender barriers in their workplace. This chapter presents the key findings and discusses the way in which the analytical framework provided insight into the aims and research questions. Finally, consideration for further study is proposed in the context of the findings.

6.2. A summary of the findings

The key findings of this study surround differences in the way women at different life stages recognise their development and growth, and how work has been positioned in their life. In summary, women in the senior life stage narrated a story about how they had overcome challenges and barriers in the workplace. They told a dominant story about how they recognised their value in the workplace and a counter story about the constraints they had experienced. In contrast, women in a midlife stage struggled to balance professional and private demands, which had been created by choices they had made. They told a dominant story about recognising their value as effective professionals, but indicated a counter story about the inherent difficulty in pursuing career quests and aspirations. Women at a midlife

stage sought to reconcile the challenges of balancing personal and professional demands, indicated that barriers often impacted on success and effectiveness, and favoured a story about 'becoming' more effective in their work.

The positioning of story in the participants' lives was also found to be important. Life stage and experience is relevant to the way women at different life stages position their stories. After examination of the participants' stories (presented in Chapter 4) it became evident that the participants in the senior group positioned their stories in a larger contextual backdrop, drawing on large segments of their life to tell their stories (in general terms, they positioned a larger portion of their story as a big story). In contrast, the midlife group tended to focus on recent experiences to position their stories about development and growth, (note the glossary in appendix 1defines stories big and small and value of analysis of stories through investigating story position). Participants from the junior life stage positioned a great deal of their story within a small story frame (drawing on recent events). This understanding of positioning was derived by exploring segments and stanzas from long stretches of the narrative each participant provided; however, examples were drawn on to highlight variation in the way the stories were positioned. For example, the youngest participant, Connie, positioned her story in recent experiences and drew on a 'small story' to position her experience of her professional development and growth.

Freeman (2011) argues that a key element of exploration of 'big' stories is an interest in the way individuals or members of a particular group take stock of large segments of their life (e.g. their understanding about family relationships or work). Bell (2009) suggests that midlevel story analysis highlights aspects of professional development in university students. For the women in this thesis a midlevel analysis was significant to the position of the stories gathered from the midlife group as opposed to the younger group or more senior group. The present study strengthens Bell's (2009) findings, but highlights that life stage also influences the positioning of stories. Bell (2009) found that career stories tend to draw on larger reflections and also 'small' stories, but are generally positioned at midlevel after participants find a position in a professional domain. Bell (2009) proposes that a third analytical level, the middle story, provides a bridge between big and small stories. In this thesis this level of analysis was where the midlevel group positioned a large segment of their narrative. The midlevel group drew on examples from their personal sphere of life when discussing their everyday life and choices they faced, but also at times reflected on experiences from their

earlier life supporting Georgakopoulou (2006) who suggests that small stories are aspects of everyday conversation and are not necessarily fragmented.

Relational processes were described in earlier chapters as a way to compare how the narratives of women at different life stages are positioned. The approach drawn on in this study compared how women at different life stages positioned their story. Dominant and counter narratives were explored, and big, midlevel and small stories were defined as relational processes. All participants in this study highlighted a midlevel story; however, relational processes highlighted that when talking about their experiences in their work, participants at different life stages wove between big and small stories and life experience impacts on the degree to which they embedded their story within larger cultural and social events.

The varied way in which the women of the senior group and midlife group positioned their story highlights a difference concerning women's 'socially situated identity' (Gee 2010). The way the women of the midlife group discussed constraints and recognition was more concerned with how they balanced varied commitments in their life. The way the senior group situated their story about constraints and recognition was more concerned with how they managed the gender barriers that were presented within their work culture.

6.2.1. Professional identity

The way women identify themselves in their professional lives was explored in this study by identifying how groups of women at different life stages told their stories about recognition and constraint. Ricoeur (1992) uses the term 'discordant concordance' to illustrate how we relate aspects of experiences through stories, suggesting that the stories people tell may be discordant at times or illustrate a sense of 'struggle' (as was evident in the counter narratives), and concordant at other times or tending to illustrating a sense of alignment or achievement (as was illustrated in the dominant narratives).

Some of the women in the senior group expressed discordance concerning the barriers they experienced in their work and these were embedded within the workplace culture. For example, Mary talked about needing to find ways to balance the challenges she experienced when working as a senior manager. The corporate culture was not always aligned to her values. She recognised the value of her contribution as a rapid worker (an expectation of the culture) and described herself as part of the professional group. Mary reflected on the ways

her career trajectory changed during midlife, and how this helped her develop a professional identity, which demonstrated her capacity for introspection. Mary wove a narrative into her career story about times she had enjoyed work, when there was room to be creative while still making a contribution. She also described times when working in the corporate world did not align with her personal values, and she experienced an internal tearing that left her quite exhausted. She expressed a desire for greater balance between her professional and private values and highlighted the importance of activities in her private life. For example, she described her singing and music as therapeutic, describing enhanced feelings of wellbeing when she went to a rehearsal.

The way the production of story connects with professional identity construction was explored in this thesis. Gee (2010) defines identity as different ways of being in the world at different times and places and for different purposes, and suggests that socially constructed discourses provide a way to analyse ways of thinking, valuing and enacting particular socially recognisable identities. Professional identity development was considered to be a construct that develops through stories and it was central to the analytic concept of narrative identities in this study. The women of the two life stages described different forms of constraint and ways they were recognised for their professional contributions, and patterns and themes were identified in the narratives the two groups provided.

The findings of this study support the idea that professional identity development is dependent on social interactions (Ibarra 2004; Gee 2010). However, Gee (2010) defines life stage as N-identity, a feature that impacts on discursive patterns. Indeed, here, the discursive patterns of the women at different life stages differed when talking about their development and growth. The women all spoke about their professional identity by developing a story schema, which shared some common discursive patterns; however, the story schema had a different emphasis in the women of the two life stages.

The findings in this study indicated that individual women and women at varied life stages identify themselves differently when talking about their choices. Multiple career demands were described by the women in the midlife group that at times conflicted with professional identity. Women with younger children told stories about the tensions between career demands and family responsibilities, which could adversely affect their work performance and career progression (Smith 2009). The women whose children had become adults no longer described this tension as impacting on their career. However, they did highlight the

way in which the work culture impacted on their careers and opportunities for progression. For example, two of the women in the senior group talked about how they and other women acted as agents of change, how they saw themselves as actively changing perceptions through their actions. They also spoke about overcoming barriers and deliberately supporting women in non-traditional roles, like themselves, working in a masculine environment. They identified with the struggles of others because they had lived through these struggles and had been recognised for their contributions.

The findings in this study also support Andrews et al (2000) proposition that narrative identity can be explored through the concept of agency. Within this study there was an exploration of how the scholarship of narrative can be utilised to gain insight into self and/or professional identity as a narrative creation. Within this thesis there was an exploration of the degree to which being a woman of a certain age, in a particular life stage influenced the stories that were told. There was an interest not only in how women identified themselves as professionals but also how they told a story about identifying with a professional group.

The women of the two groups demonstrated their awareness and personal agency when they told their stories and situated their stories within a context that had constraints. McNay (2003a) suggests that language can be an expression of agency, that is, the way one expresses their experiences may be interpreted by exploring the degree of control they describe. The women of midlife stage tended to believe that they had choices about how much work they could take on and choices about the way they managed the domain of their personal and private lives. However, few expressed any sense that they were active agents of change within the workplace or expressed a sense that they belonged to a broader professional collective. The women in the two groups demonstrated their awareness and personal agency when telling their stories and situated their stories within contexts that had constraints. On one hand the older women described the constraints in terms of broad expectations in workplaces while the next group saw their constraints more in work–life balance.

The women of the two life stages discussed limitations to their choices, but drew on different discourses to discuss their subjective experiences about their choices. Walkerdine (1990) suggests that women and men develop varied discourses in social settings and these discourses have gender implications. It might be hypothesised that the women of the midlife stage experience a greater degree of agency (subjective choice in work and life). Even so, in the present study, as in studies that explore the impact of changing workplace legislation (see

Bardoel 2003, 2004; Firth 2004; Strachan 2010) it was still the women who shouldered most of the responsibility for family care. Empirical findings have suggested that women taking up more senior roles have generally had their children younger or do not take up these roles while their children are young (Bardoel 2003, 2004). Educated women working in more prestigious occupations have higher rates of childlessness (Miranti et al 2008). Thus, the balance of family responsibility is a significant feature that impacts on women's careers.

Cote and Dionne (2009) highlight that it is important to understand how women individually and collectively construct their stories. The patterns identified in the two groups examined in this thesis highlight that women construct a story about their professional identities and situate their stories within a gendered context. An analysis of counter narratives posed against the dominant narratives (see Bamberg and Andrews 2004 and Chase 2005) emphasised the dialogical nature of narrative production, but also highlighted the gendered narratives of the women of the two different life stages.

6.2.2 Career quests

Professional identity was found to be closely aligned to what was defined as a career quest. In this study, career quest concerns how work has meaning in a woman's life at a particular point of time, whereas story quest or identity is understood to mean a continual quest that is constructed through inquiry, dialogue and interaction (Beattie 2009). Identity quest was considered to be a broader concept, while career quest was understood to be woven within this broader story or quest to understand one's identity. However, when the counter narrative was examined insight was gained into how the career quest was often not aligned with an individual's identity quest and therefore 'struggle' was detected in participants' stories.

Within this study the notion of career quest was particularly important in forming identity. A career quest was described by each of the women that participated in this study. The quest that each participant expressed was considered to be part of their personal identity and therefore significant to agency. For example, Connie told a story about her quest and in so doing told a story about what she values as a social agent. The participants told a story that presented their agency within their personal understanding of their career quest, but also the notion of career identity was embedded in a story about the culture of work.

Career aspirations were viewed as the goals leading towards a career quest. The aspiration story generally highlighted some of the constraints, but also some of the opportunities and

ways in which individuals recognised their own value and were recognised by others. Many of the women in the midlife group expressed some discordance when they felt the culture of work did not provide the flexibility to manage work and family. Women in the present study told a story about their career aspirations in the context of choices they had made about their development and growth.

6.2.3. Effectiveness and growth – cultural agency and recognition

Gaining insight into professional identity is dependent on the way in which people understand their effectiveness. Effectiveness is potentially understood differently by women of different life stages and the role that professionals play may also impact on how they understand effectiveness. According to the women in the present study, being effective and adding value in the Australian professional workplace requires a great deal of resilience and the capacity to adapt. In particular, some of the themes that surfaced in this study, for example, 'getting things done', 'building relationships' and having a 'capacity for introspection' were considered by Sinclair (1994) to be central traits of effective leaders. However, Sinclair (1994) did not emphasise that there are also counter themes that women discuss that enable them to tell their stories about the way in which they develop and experience the workplace culture. Nevertheless, Sinclair does infer and discuss a culture that creates barriers and discusses metaphors for ineffectiveness that provide a basis to understand some of the experiences that women in this study describe. All women in this study developed a narrative that highlighted their success and effectiveness at work, but also the times they had been less effective. The discussion of effectiveness was expressed by drawing on particular themes, which included how the women developed their capacity for introspection, recognition of ingredients for productivity and the value of relationship building. The dominant narratives were different, yet they shared some common themes. Counter themes were about growth and change, and themes within these more personal counter narratives focused on opportunities for this growth and change. Some of the themes that emerged were discussed throughout the interview about recognising barriers in the workplace and learning to adapt, along with how formal education and informal knowledge provide a basis to further develop.

6.2.4. Constraint – cultural and personal agency

The counter narrative that the women of the two groups (the midlife and senior group) presented highlighted the constraints common to the group. Each woman addressed these

constraints in her own unique way and made personal choices concerning how to overcome barriers; however, the theme of constraint was a shared experience that the two groups expressed. Sinclair (1994) discusses metaphors that women may use to explain ineffectiveness in the workplace, such as 'glass ceilings' and 'firewalls' (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000), which describe discrimination in the workplace (Bendl and Schmidt 2010). Without using these exact terms, both groups in the present study told counter themes reminiscent of the glass ceiling metaphor frequently used to describe the obstacles women experience when seeking promotions to the top levels of organisations (Burke and Vinnicombe 2005; McLeod 2008). In particular, women in the senior life stage made inferences that being in a minority group and climbing the corporate ladder meant they experienced some barriers (i.e. a 'glass ceiling').

Strachan (2010) highlights that national policy has impacted on women's participation in the workforce and changes in Australian legislation have led to increases in equal opportunity and choices for women. It is possible that the senior women in this study emphasised the counter narrative about limitations more because they experienced more restrictions in their work. This may be a feature of the workplace dynamic as there are proportionately fewer women in the Australian workplace at a senior managerial level than managerial level (Davidson 2009; Ross-Smith and McGraw 2010).

The women of the midlife stage focussed their discussion around the challenges of balancing family and work life. This illustrated the significance of the research undertaken by scholars who explore the impact of work–life balance, but also highlighted that this is a key factor for women in their midlife that influences the way they make decisions about their career. Work–life balance can be understood as both a personal and a cultural factor that impacts on women's development and growth. In Nancy's story she reflected on how she overcame certain obstacles and barriers (a counter narrative) in her professional life and how these were at odds with her personal life. Indeed, she had made the choice to take a career break at the time of the interview.

Analysis of dominant and counter narratives of women at different life stages highlighted that barriers are experienced differently. Stories provide a means to make sense of the way work is integrated within our lives and provide a way to understand how we at times experience a sense of ineffectiveness or 'choose' not to engage with the dialogue of effective development and growth.

6.3. Did the findings address the aims?

The aim of this research was to develop an overall narrative that highlighted how professional women experience being effective in the workplace as well as capturing what constrains their development and growth. The overarching aim provided a basis to explore some significant questions about the experiences of professional women in relation to the way they identify themselves in their professional lives. The aim was to explore women's stories to identify how narratives reflect the way women feel recognised or constrained.

Gaining insight into professional identity has been interpreted to be dependent on the way in which women understand their effectiveness; however, it also depends on how the career they chose aligns with their identity quest. Individual women in this study discussed the importance of effectiveness and choice along with other themes that were important to them in sustaining a sense of professional identity. Collective experiences were attributed to the stage of life that the two groups in this study were in when telling their stories. The way production of story connects with professional identity construction was explored in this thesis by illustrating the way in which individual women tell a story about their experiences in a given context. Within the narrative field of inquiry there are multiple perspectives on the way narratives play a role in the formation of identity. Within this study, Riessman's (2008) perspective on narrative methods provided a basis to explore personal stories and Chase (2005, 2011) provided a basis to understand the significance of dominant and counter narratives in the production of gendered identities. Bell's (2009) insights into the positioning of stories and Bamberg's (2011) perspectives on the role of positioning analysis in narrative inquiry have all provided substantial contributions on which to build the theoretical framework used to explore the research questions.

The counter narrative that the women of the two life stages presented highlighted the constraints that were common to the groups. Sinclair (1994) argues that management culture in Australia is a culture in which women recognise barriers and learn to adapt. Being effective within the Australian professional context of work requires a great deal of resilience and capacity to adapt. According to the women in this study gender permeates cultural and structural practices (this supports Swan et al 2009). Women drew on discourses of choice, constraint and socio-political features. Watts (2013) highlighted that subcultures and dominant values impact on the way professionals identify themselves in their work. The workplace culture was found to influence the way women in this study told their stories about

how they experienced development and growth in the workplace. Effectiveness was understood by the women in the study to be personal (a subjective construct), but also something that was defined within a workplace culture (an inter-subjective construct).

6.4. How did the findings address the research question?

The research question – how do women make choices about their professional development and growth during different life phases? – has been explored by identifying different patterns in the way two groups of women tell their narrative. The research question posed in this study has been explored by drawing on narrative inquiry and utilising an analysis of the relational processes to make sense of narrative identity theory and undertaking positioning analysis. An analysis of dominant and counter narratives was undertaken through a dialogic approach and this approach highlighted the aspirations of women of different life stages and the quest to identify with effective professionals. The theoretical framework has provided insight into the research question and this framework highlights that the choices women make are affected by life stage.

The women of the senior life stage and the midlife group told a story about how they were recognised but also constrained within their professional lives by the workplace culture. The women of the two groups emphasised varied aspects of the culture that impacted on their development and growth. The senior women placed a great deal of emphasis on how they learnt to adapt to the dominant workplace culture and recognised what enabled them to be considered as effective and productive, while the midlife group were exploring their aspirations and reconciling how to develop professionally while juggling personal demands.

The women of the senior and midlife stages discussed limitations to their choices, but drew on different discursive strategies to discuss their subjective experiences about their choices. The women of the midlife stage discussed challenges in balancing family and work life. Gee (2010) suggests that socially constructed discourses provide a way for communities to analyse ways of thinking, valuing and enacting particular socially recognisable identities. The women of the midlife group working in middle management embedded their stories within a broader social discourse narrative (or theme embedded in a discursive dialogue) about work–life balance and how they were recognised as effective in their professional lives. The senior group embedded their story within a narrative about overcoming barriers and gaining recognition. Therefore the two groups of women placed an emphasis of varied themes when

telling their story about development and growth and these themes were considered to be gendered narratives.

6.5. Gendered narratives

A similarity between all women in this study was that they provided a gendered narrative about the way in which they had developed and grown in their professional lives. Emslie and Hunt (2009) found that women (aged 50–52) are affected by the problems of juggling a variety of roles. Similarly, the senior women in the present study and most certainly the women in the midlife group spoke about the effects of juggling a variety of roles. An interesting feature of Emslie and Hunt's (2009) study was that they found gender constructions between men and women. For example, some men are more inclined to 'work to live' while others 'live to work', and some women construct their identities as part of a family while others define themselves as independent women. The provided a narrative that acknowledged multiple identities (a dominant and counter narrative) was drawn on when talking about their professional experience. Butler (1990) suggests it is important to acknowledge the existence of multiple identities, or subjectivities, she may share some of these identities with other women.

In the present study the women of the midlife group were more likely to 'work to live', while the women of the senior group were more prone to 'live to work'. It is possible the women in the senior group have adapted to a male-dominated culture with the view that employees 'live to work'. The culture in which people work clearly impacts on how they experience their work and each of the women in this study spoke about how they overcame barriers prevalent in the workplace culture. Barriers in today's workplaces may be very different to those of the past and potentially those of the future. However, it is very likely that people will continue to struggle to balance work and life, and it is likely that this will differ at different life stages. It is possible that as the senior group reflected back on their experiences, the severity of earlier struggles may have faded, or may have been reconceptualised as a 'live to work' ideal.

It is interesting to note that variation was a recurring theme identified in the stories of the two groups, the women who worked as professionals in the Australian workplace exhibited similar patterns in the way they recalled their experiences, this could be described as a 'collective memory'. Ryan (2009b) noted that chronological age and life stage has an effect on the way women narrate stories. Ryan's (2009b) findings are consistent with the findings in this study. Crawford et al (1992) describes memory as a process of social construction. The

findings in the present study also support Crawford et al (1992), as the stories of the women of the two groups were positioned within a particular cultural construct at a particular point in time. The stories were formed and told in a particular context and this was a feature that impacted on the way they were narrated.

Strauss and Howe (1991) posit that generation is a social construct. Although there were some patterns discussed in Chapter 3 that may have related to 'generational' differences, these patterns were explored more as life stage variation. There was some empirical evidence discussed in Chapter 2 that highlighted that career aspirations may be shaped by social experiences. For example, Lovejoy and Stone (2012) found that after women take time out of their careers (so-called 'opting out') to look after children their workplace aspirations often change. What was not explored here in depth was the degree to which generational features impact on the story told or the degree to which aspirations are shaped by the association with other managers and/or senior managers. Further, variation within the groups of women at different life stages was not fully explored here.

In the present study, Riessman's (2008) perspective on narrative methods provided a basis to explore personal stories. Chase (2005, 2011) provided a basis to understand the significance of dominant and counter narratives in the production of gendered identities and this framework was applied to analyse the stories of women at different life stages. One of the women of the senior life stage, Edna, emphasised an underlying set of values that supported the institution she worked in; for instance, Edna revealed a personal value around doing things well and she appeared to value enhancing the organisations 'bottom line objectives'.

What becomes clear from the findings in this study and the empirical evidence presented in Chapter 2 is that the careers of women are influenced by the cultural context in which they work and this, in turn, influences the way they identify themselves professionally. Whitchurch (2008) found that career boundaries may shift to re-form professional roles or career directions, and these new boundaries influence the perception of professional identity. The present study highlights that stories women share about their choices and career aspirations may be shaped by the context in which they are told. Context, along with the strategies drawn upon to tell the story, influences the way women identify themselves in their professional lives during different life stages.

The findings of the present study support Broadbridge (2010) in that choices were constrained by contextual and organisational factors, but were also a matter for the

individual. Broadbridge (2010) highlights that narratives illustrate the complexity inherent in career choices for women, this was also found in the present study.

6.6. The significance of the analytical framework

The narrative approach provided a way to explore how the development and growth of the participants in this study was experienced in the workplace. This approach provided insight into the way professionals narrate their experiences and highlighted how gender and life stage affect the stories women tell.

The way the participants spoke about their choices in relation to their working lives had temporal significance, that is, the way information was understood and talked about was influenced by the culture in which the information was presented. This subjective interpretation highlights that both the participants and the researcher recognised constraints in the workplace culture of professional women and this has may have changed since the time that this study took place. However, it remains a part of the experiences of the women and the researcher that explored these experiences. The analysis of women's narratives in a given context provides insight into the experiences they had and how their experience was constrained, but also how their choices were formed within a particular cultural context. The interview and transcription approach provided a means to analyse the participants' experiences and to compare and contrast the way each individual and each group reflected on their development and growth in the workplace.

This research approach suggests differently situated audiences (women at different life stages holding varying levels of managerial roles) tell their story by emphasising varied features about their growth and development; however, they drew on similar themes when telling a story and the themes were in a dominant and counter form. Andrews (2002) suggests that the significance of cultural narratives is highlighted when narratives are analysed to highlight varied strategies that participants draw on to tell a story about how they are constrained within a given cultural setting. A study of the relational features in the dialogue of the women is a form of narrative inquiry that highlights how individuals and groups believe they are recognised and valued.

Narrative inquiry is a particular subtype of qualitative research grounded in a particular lens (Chase 2011).

> *'Narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experience as narrated by those who live them. Narrative theorists define narrative as a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or other's actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time. Narrative researchers highlight what we can learn about anything-history and society as well as lived experience – by maintaining a focus on narrated lives'* (Chase 2011: 421).

The analysis of women's stories has been centred on a narrative inquiry with a focus on exploring the methodological perspective that narratives are gendered and narratives have significance in the production of identity. The theoretical goal of this thesis was to explore the broad rubric of identity formation through a narrative approach. Narrative identity theory was presented in Chapter 2 as a way to explore how women of different life stages experience being more or less effective as professionals in their work and in their life more generally and in maintaining a work–life balance. Bamberg (2003) was drawn upon to explore how narrators constructed and situated positions when telling their story about the way they had developed and grown in their professional lives. Chapter 4 outlined the way narrative theory and methods are drawn on to analyse the stories of the participants. Andrews et al (2009) argues that a key feature that distinguishes narrative research is exploration of sequence in stories and exploration of change through time. This thesis conforms to the principles of narrative research by addressing these key features. Riessman (2008) argues that a distinguishing feature of narrative inquiry is that lives are located in a particular time and place and the context of the telling is significant to what is told. Riessman (2008) encourages narrative researchers to embrace a diverse range of definitions; however, argues that core components of narrative research involve attention to participants' lived experiences, attention to location of the story in time and place and attention to the language used in the context of the telling. Riessman (2008) emphasises that narrative research draws on approaches that explore culture and refers to Labov (1972) who analyses the structures within speech to explore how stories are co-constructed in the interview places. Aspects of a Labovian approach were drawn upon in the analysis in Chapter 4.

This thesis has been positioned within a particular approach to narrative that is defined by Riessman (2008) as a dialogical approach. As stated in Chapter 3, this approach has implications for validity and reliability. The way the researcher made sense of the stories is

illustrated in figures 3.1 Chapter 3. There are two levels of analysis, but the levels overlap and feed into each other. The relational processes is described as a way of exploring how stories are positioned, and a Labovian analysis identifies how some of the participants position their story at different life stages. The big, small and midlevel method of analysis, the positioning of stories, was also presented by drawing on narrative research traditions (Bamberg 2011; Freeman 2011). Themes were explored and patterns evident across a group that focused on Gee's (2010) stanzas method were presented to highlight how individuals and groups belonging to a particular group demonstrated what Chase (1995) defined as dominant and counter narratives. These dominant and counter narratives fell within Riessman's (2008) dialogical approach to narrative analysis. The sense-making in terms of identity formation was also illustrated in Chapter 4, which led to an analysis of the dominant and counter narratives. Riessman (2008) and Andrews et al (2009) emphasised a final component that is significant for a narrative approach and that is consideration of reflectivity. Aspects of the researcher's and the participants' reflective perspectives are sprinkled throughout this thesis.

The theoretical and methodological approach drawn upon in this thesis identified patterns in the narratives of women and there was a particular focus on how these patterns are relevant to the way individuals and groups make sense of their experiences.

6.6.1. The contribution of narrative practices to address the research question

Using a dialogical approach for narrative analysis requires a close reading and deep engagement with the material, not only with the excerpt for analysis, but also regarding its positioning in relation to the rest of the material collected and interpreted, such as its relation to common themes emerging across the stories of different groups. Hence, it has value not just in itself but in conjunction with other narrative methods, such as thematic analysis. The strength of the method in assisting in the development of deep insight into the dialogic of subjectivity also has its weakness, since there are considerable limits to the amount of material that can be analysed in this way. The significance of the approach will be discussed in terms of the insights and 'truth' derived about workplace contexts and how the approach provided insight into the workplace dialogue about development and growth.

Gee's (2010) term 'socially situated identity' has been explored throughout the present study using narrative data analysed from the perspective of professionals working in managerial and senior managerial roles in Melbourne, Australia (a specific location and group). Thus,

these results would likely differ if story collection was reproduced at a different point in time or from different groups.

Women in this study told stories about the ways they had overcome barriers. They told a narrative about their identity as professionals – a story about the struggle to develop and grow. The stories participants told were dependent on their life experiences and a reflection of their interactions at work.

The notion of barriers that regulate available choice is both subjective and inter-subjective. The way people recognise their strengths and constraints and perceive others to recognise these are also subjective (personal reflections) and inter-subjective or, to put it another way, discursively constructed through talk with others. The divisions between big stories, small stories, dominant and counter narratives are important in this study because the interactions are a site for analysis. Within small and big stories there are threads of dominant and counter narratives.

6.6.2. An approach that analyses relational constructions

There are facets of professional identity that are particularly important for the current study and these were analysed by examining the findings derived from two forms of narrative analysis that are empirically grounded in varied theoretical definitions of narrative identity. The present study explores how the participants' memories of their experiences are embedded within forms of discourse and socially constructed meanings as opposed to the way in which memories form a therapeutic tool or basis for empowerment.

6.6.3. An approach that explores dialogical constructions

The present study analysed what constitutes the dominant story about professional development and the story that is emergent, or counter to this, it then explored how these stories inform professional practice. For the purpose of this research the dominant career story was thought to communicate effectiveness, while the counter story communicated emotional and social features in identity construction that highlighted how an individual or group perceives themselves to be ineffective.

The present study illustrates how a number of groups tell a story; however, it does not provide an in-depth exploration of the development of professional identity. Interactions between the groups were not measured over time or compared with a broad range of

subgroups. Relational features were found to influence the development of groups, but also the degree to which people expressed some form of agency in processes of change and growth. The present study did not explore how identity states may change over a period of time. The groups in the present study employed different narrative strategies to tell their collective story about development and growth. Therefore, the dimension of individual growth was explored and considered to have equal significance to the development of groups in organisational contexts.

6.7. Subjective and inter-subjective experience

This study highlighted that individuals have unique forms of expression and tell subjective narratives about their development and growth, but also draw upon inter-subjective experiences that are consistent with others of a similar life stage. Exploration of subjective and inter-subjective experiences of the participants highlighted variation and similarities in patterns and the overall narrative strategies adopted by women of different life stages. As Walkerdine (1984) has suggested an analysis of discursive positions can provide some insights into the way interpersonal communication is constructed. The present study highlighted how women position their stories and found that women at varied stages made subjective choices about what they chose to tell an interviewer; however, the women drew on similar strategies when positioning their story about development and growth in the workplace. Analysis of dominant and counter narratives highlighted the subjective understanding women had concerning the way in which they were effective in their professional roles and potentially the value they believed they offered to the organisations in which they worked. The notion of a counter narrative suggests that women of different life stages experience constraints and this is relevant for professionals seeking to create cultural and social change within the workplace.

Inter-subjectivity was defined in the introduction of this thesis as a relationship of mutual recognition (Benjamin 1998b); processes by which people learn through others. Inter-subjectivity requires recognition of reliance on others and simultaneous recognition of our own distinctiveness (Benjamin 2005, 2002). Thus inter-subjective research provided a way to explore the personal understanding of effectiveness that women of different life stages describe. Women in a senior life stage tended to favour the notion of value over effectiveness when talking about their development and growth.

Andrews (2007) highlights that narratives can be explored as a cultural expression and provide insight into participants' psychosocial development. Rogers (1951) proposes that moving from one stage to another is dependent on the influence of psychosocial conditions that limit or inhibit growth and movement. Rogers (1951) considers the terms 'congruence' and 'incongruence' to be crucial to the development of the 'real self'. Within this study the 'incongruence' the women of the two life stages experienced was highlighted in the counter narrative. Rogers (1951) proposed that people experience similar stages of development with inter-subjective significance, in that they are shared by a group of similar-aged participants. Although the participants in the present study were of different age groupings; there was a great deal of overlapping concerning the themes that participant from each group made up, and at times it was difficult to differentiate between individuals at different stages. However, a distinction between the two groups could be observed in the overall patterns of the dominant and counter narrative.

Erikson (1979) discussed psychosocial stages and proposed that in later life (65+ years) people move through a stage called 'ego integrity verses despair' in which they reflect back on their development and life. The older group in this study appreciated their value and contribution, despite demonstrating an awareness of workplace constraints, more clearly than the women in the midlife stage. The senior group recognised that overcoming constraints had helped to develop their resilience and this was a significant feature of their professional life.

Apter (1995) and Josselson (2006) proposed that a key narrative that binds women's experiences is about the struggle to develop a cohesive identity at midlife. The findings of the present study suggest that women of different life stages share an overall narrative about adapting to workplace cultures and overcoming adversity. Here, exploring subjective and inter-subjective experiences of the participants detected variation and similarities in the patterns and the overall narrative strategies adopted by women of different life stages.

6.7.1. Reflexivity

Adams (2008) highlights that narrative researchers are placed in a position of privilege that has ethical implications, because they reflect on and make sense of the experiences of others. When interpreting patterns in narratives, the demarcation between one life stage and another may not be as clear-cut as has been portrayed in this analysis, there was some overlapping. In the early stages of analysis patterns between the groups were not distinct, yet as the narratives were further analysed patterns began to develop.

It might be possible to make a stronger conclusion about the way women of different life stages narrate their story with a larger sample population or a longitudinal study design. To re-interview some of the women who have entered the senior phase and those in the senior group that have moved into the semi-retired stage may provide greater insight into how stories change in the subjective lives of the women, but also greater insight into how the women in the study currently experience the workplace culture and the degree to which this has changed for the participants. There were some patterns discussed in this study that indicate that women of different life stages narrate their story in different ways; however, the degree to which this could be replicated in different life stages is difficult to conclude without exploring the stories of participants from several stages of their lives.

Through analysing the stories of professional women I have gained a great deal of insight into the level of resilience required by women to not only survive in the current workplace culture but also to develop. I believe other women would benefit from participating in development activities in which women of different life stages come together to hear about how others have worked through barriers and learnt to appreciate their value as professional women.

This study has provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my role as a professional women and how my personal values have influenced my understanding of professional work. I have often been challenged by incongruent values. The values I have acquired from family are at times in conflict with the values that are expected in workplace cultures. I have come from a family with low socio-economic status and from an Eastern European background. There is a strong tradition in my family for women to play the role of carer and the role of homemaker; it is seen as a privilege to provide support family and at times an unrecognised privilege. I have enjoyed at times the opportunity to have independence through my work and recognition for the work I have done, however there is a feeling that my values are outside the mainstream values of the workplace. Listing to the participants' stories in this study has helped me to understand that many women experience a counter narrative that does not necessarily reflect the values of the dominant workplace culture. I have been privileged to understand that there is a distinct gender narrative that women in managerial and senior managerial roles weave into their dominant narrative of effectiveness. I believe that it is important for women when they return to work after having a child to have the support of other women who have at times experienced conflict when managing family demands and workplace expectations. Hearing the voices of the women of the midlife phase working

through collisions between family and professional lives may also be valuable for human resource development professionals seeking to implement workforce planning strategies that enhance long-term career viability for women.

6.8. Considerations for further study

The opportunity to delve deeper into the stories of women at different stages and in different contexts may provide a richer understanding of experiences of development and growth. By collecting the stories of women at different intervals (that is, over a selected life stage, maybe a 10- or 20-year span) it may be possible to discuss how individuals change and transform their professional workplace identities and experience variation in career constraints and opportunities. Another key variable that would be interesting to explore is how support or mentorship influences a person's experiences and consequently their story.

The workplace context is experienced by the women in the present study in different ways and the experiences of effectiveness had situational meaning. Alvesson and Karreman (2000) indicate that 'discursive meaning' are generally illustrated to have temporarily connected meaning to specific cultural context, the findings of this study have supported the notion that discursive meaning is connected to the notion of effectiveness. An organisational lens for examining workplace culture may provide greater insight into the way effectiveness is constructed through social interactions. For example, Bryant and Higgins (2010) explore the construction of organisational norms and focus on the reported consequences of interactions with managers. The present study did not focus on interpretations of participants' interactions at work; instead focusing more broadly on development and growth and experiences within the context of work. By constructing interview questions with more of a focus on the way participants experience workplace interactions it may be possible to gain greater insight into features of the workplace context that impact on participants' experiences of effectiveness.

An analysis of the discourses in organisations that provide opportunities for women to engage in mentoring programs and women's only opportunities to share narrative that focus on how they have grown and developed as women may also be interesting. It is possible that organisations that provide women with greater opportunity to engage in discussion around how they have effectively developed in their work and life may have greater opportunities to implement policies that foster equal opportunity.

The opportunity to provide a voice for participants experiencing constraint may be a way to legitimise the experiences that different groups have and value the communication of different groups, but it may also provide a developmental opportunity for people who have a chance to express their experiences. Andrew's (2010) emphasizes the importance of stories in learning and in particular the importance of stories for empowering women.

> *'Learning with and through narratives is a very effective tool for bringing people into discussions who might otherwise be excluded. If we believe that stories are vital to who we are, that they change over time, and that they are both unique and culturally in scripted, then it follows that stories have a great potential for making vital connections between individuals and the world of ideas.' (Andrews 2010: 0)*

Greater emphasis on the differences in groups of people in a workplace may provide a fuller picture of variation from a broader sample of ethnic and racial groups to explore the patterns of different groups represented in the workforce.

Thus, it would be interesting to explore how workplace culture changes over the coming years and the implications this may have on the stories workers tell.

6.9. Conclusions

This thesis has highlighted how the narrative approach to exploring women's stories can contribute to knowledge about the experiences of women in the workplace. The women of the senior life stage told a story about how they had experienced constraints, but felt their value had ultimately been recognised. Women in the midlife stage were exploring their aspirations regarding how they wanted to develop professionally and how to identify with a professional group. Women's career trajectories were found to be unique, and yet there was a collective experience of barriers that impacted on development and growth. The women's stories presented in this study have assisted me to make sense of my own professional dissonance and provided an opportunity to obtain an understanding of how others have integrated their work and personal life spheres. The reconstruction of these stories that are presented in this thesis may assists women to make sense of their experiences and that workplaces continue to change and offer greater opportunities for women to recognise the value they have as effective professionals. This study provides some insight into the gendered nature of professional narratives. The notion of effectiveness can be influenced by the culture in which a woman works, and organisations should aim to create cultures that enable women to access effective development opportunities.

The findings of the present study indicate that women in managerial positions who may aspire to leadership roles require support to quell the conflict they experience between their work and personal lives. Women experiencing work–life conflict were often unclear of their career path and had little to say about their quest or opportunities for advancement. Workplaces that providing opportunities for women to share stories may increase the likelihood of middle management women progressing into more senior roles and, ultimately, enhancing the proportion of women at senior levels.

In conclusion, becoming and remaining a professional throughout different life stages appears to be more complicated for midlife women today than it has been for women in the past. In their narratives the women of the two life stages women examined in this study exhibited different cultural constraints. This may be due to increased discordance between family and work lives despite, or perhaps because of, improvements in home and workplace equality with men and, subsequently, increased choice.

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Appendix 1

<u>Glossary of terms:</u>

Agency theory

Agency theory has application in feminist studies, sociological studies and organisation and management theory, and can be considered a way of exploring relationships. 'Agency' refers to the capacity that women have to make independent choices (Acker 1990; Butler 1993; Bourdieu 2000; McNay 2003a).

Career aspiration

The career aspiration is viewed as the goals toward a career quest. The aspiration story is generally expressed in a given context that highlights some of the constraints and ways in which individual recognise their value and are recognised by others. When women in this study tell a story about their career aspirations they tell a story about being and how they make choices about their development and growth.

Career quest

Career quest is thought to be similar to identity quest however has a particular focus on how work is situated in a person's life, whereas identity quest is focused on a broader question of how one identifies themselves in a broad range of contexts. The notion of a career quest is explored in this study by analysing the process through which participants tell their story about how work has meaning in the lives. According to Riceour (1984) the story of quest develops through many exchanges, this study captured a particular exchange and highlight how the research makes sense of the experience of women at varied life stages and how participants make sense of their career quest or search for meaning in their work and life.

Counter narrative

Counter narratives are sometimes described as having a different form to dominant or more prevalent narratives and are posed against the dominant narratives (see Andrews 2004; Chase 2005). Andrews (2004) argues that we develop our identities as women and men (understanding of self) by telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell. These stories are told by employing dominant and counter narratives (Chase 2005).

Discourse analysis

'Linguistic forms of discourse analysis pay attention to detail of grammar and how they function in communication. Other forms pay attention to themes and messages' (Gee 2010: 206). Georgakopoulou (1997) defines discourse analysis (DA) as a form of inquiry that is primarily concerned with spoken texts (conversations and the form, structure and content of spoken text). There are many forms of discourse analysis, including those that focus on interactional sociolinguistics (Cameron 1998) and those that focus on gender discourse.

Dominant discourse

Alvesson and Karreman (2011) argue that discourse analysis provides a way to explore dominant organisational activity, because it makes it possible to focus on and highlight everyday and routine organisational activities, such as conversations and other forms of talk and text that occur within organisational cultures.

Discourse identity

The word identity is used to describe many different ways of understanding. Gee (2010) defines identity as different ways of being in the world at different times and places and for different purposes. Discourse analysts such as Gee (2010) interchange the word 'identity' with 'socially situated identity' to emphasise that identity can be explored by looking at how we recognise and act out our different social roles or different social positions in society.

Dominant narrative

Dominant narratives refer to the story this is most prevalent or the story that overrides others within a particular cultural context. For example, dominant themes may be identified in people's stories about illness (Riessman 2008). Denning (2006) suggests that dominant narratives are drawn on to communicate complex and culturally significant cultural meaning known as counter narratives. Dominant and counter narratives are woven together (Chase 2005).

Effectiveness

Effectiveness is defined in this thesis as a dialectic process (a dynamic process created by individuals and the structures within an organisation). Effectiveness can be actualised when individuals and organisations perceive the outcome of their performance to be desirable.

Equal opportunity

The concept of equal opportunity holds that citizens should be equally placed to obtain social and political benefits (Scruton 2007). It is sometimes argued that social conditions exert control either positively or negatively over the access that individuals or groups have to institutions. Equal opportunity means that the advance of any particular person or group is possible despite their social conditions, for example, it is recognised that women remain a minority in senior managerial positions; however, it is argued that they have equal opportunity to engage in these roles.

Embedded

Constructs that are evident in social norms and beliefs and in the social interactions of language can be seen as 'embedded'.

Embodied

Blue (2009) argues that rhetoric is a form of 'embodied' politics and counter discourses are learnt by engaging with experiences that are outside the dominant or mainstream rhetoric. Exploration that is deeper than cogitative, that has the capacity to generate an understanding of the meaning of body awareness through explanations of the experience of body awareness, is sometimes referred to as 'embodied'. Menary (2008) argues that narratives can be embodied in the consciousness of individuals and groups.

Feminist theory

Feminist theory is sometimes described as a complex historical genealogy which explores the rights of women to act as independent agents (McRobbie 2009). Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic and social rights for women.

Gender discourse

Gender discourses focus on the way gender (masculine and feminine and transgender) dialogue is presented in the text and talk shared in social contexts.

Gendered narrative

Gendered narratives are explored in this thesis as a construction that highlights the gendered dialogue that women draw upon when talking about their experience of development and growth.

The situated significance of gendered narratives are explored in this thesis by analysing how they are co-constructed via an interview situation and constructed differently at different life stages.

Gender theory

Gender theory is based on the assumption that the biological differences between the sexes (males and females) do not account for the masculine and feminine gender differences, but that differences need to be understood by exploring the way social structures operate, structures described as having an exogenous origin (Scruton 2007). In essence, this theory proposes that masculine and feminine genders are shaped by society.

Glass ceiling

The glass ceiling metaphor is frequently used to describe the obstacles and barriers women experience when seeking promotions to the top levels of organisations (Burke and Vinnicombe 2005; McLeod 2008).

Identity Quest

'Through inquiry, dialogue and interaction, we engage in the exploration of the stories that have formed us, in this stories beneath the surface of those stories, and learn to create and re-create new narratives for our lives. This process of creating and recreating our identities is one of continuous exploration, and of reconstructing and re-forming the existing patterns of our lives into new configurations in the light of new insights, understanding and of the ever-changing circumstances around us (Beattie 2009: 4). According to Beattie (2009) the understanding of identity is a continual quest that is constructed through inquiry, dialogue and

interaction. The way identities are understood by women of varied life stages and the researcher is explored in this thesis.

Inter-subjective theory

Benjamin (2005) highlights that a critical feature of inter-subjective theory is that this theory aims to explore how a person becomes capable of enjoying recognition with another. The present study questions whether groups of women are recognised by themselves and others in different ways. There is an exploration of women's narratives to gain insight into how they believe they are recognised in the workplace and constrained and draws on a subjective and inter-subjective form of analysis.

Multi-theoretical perspective on identity

A Multiple theoretical perspective on identity is derived from an analysis of themes or stanza's (Gee 2000). Stanzas explore patterns in the narratives (Gee 2000). Themes also explore patterns but have a focus on patterns evident across a group where stanzas have a focus on individual narratives. The way in which the women in this position their career aspirations and reconstruct their story is considered to be significant to their professional identity. Gee (2000) defines as a multi-theoretical perspective on identity formation will also be explored within the data analysis. Gee (2000) defines the 'kind of person' one is recognised as 'being' at a given time and place from moment to moment in interaction. Four types of identity: natural identity, institution identity, discourse identity and affinity identity are defined by Gee (2000). This study is particularity interested in what Gee (2000) termed Natural or N-identity (eg: stage of life), their Institutional Affiliations or I-identity (eg: professional women manager or senior manager) and their Discourse of D-identity (eg: assertive, reserved) and their way of showing association and affinity or association A-identity (eg: member of a professional group). It is important to note that identities are ambiguous and unstable and can shift across a person's internal state and the four perspectives are interrelated (Gee, 2000, 1).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is seen as a form of meta analysis (Chase 2011). It is described as an umbrella theory that is drawn upon in this thesis. Elements of Chase's (1995) approach to analysis of the dialogical nature of narratives are drawn upon to explore the way in which women draw upon a dominant and counter narrative. Bamber (2011) describes narrative

enquiry as a way to explore how narratives are positioned and this notion of construction of stories and positioning narratives is also drawn upon in this thesis to highlight the gendered interpretations of the narratives that are constructed by women at varied life stages. 'Importantly, for narrative, it has come with an extra consideration: an increasingly apparent need for the two camps of narrative analysis and narrative inquiry, that have more or less happily lived apart to work together and cross-talk. The expressivists … the narrative inquiry scholars, use narrative as a means to an end (in my terms as a method) and on that basis their interest lies in the about, the what and the who of narrative: what stories tell us about the teller's self … for the other camp, the narrative analysts, those who prioritise the how of narrative telling's and for whom the study of narrative can be an end in itself' (Georgakopoulou 2006: 125). Georgakopoulou (2006) identifies varied perspectives on what narrative inquiry as opposed to narrative analysis's, this thesis is embedded within an inquiry approach however also draws on narrative tools of analysis. Bresler (2006) describes narrative as a methodological field, in this study it is both a theoretical grounding and a methodological approach.

Narrative Identity Theory

Narrative inquiry is seen as a theory that encompasses a philosophy (theoretical perspective) about narrative identity that involves a view that life is constructed through story. Narrative identity theory has been presented as a way to explore the how women of different life stages experience of being more or less effective as professionals in their work and in their life more generally and in maintaining a work/ life balance. Bamberg (2003) highlighted that narrators construct situated positions that provide insight into the choices they make.

Narrative theory

Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2008) describe narrative research as a qualitative framework and suggest that what 'narrative' encompasses is considered to be is highly contested. Generally speaking, narrative theory is explored in this study by drawing on key definitions by Riessman (2008) and Ricoeur (1992). Ricoeur (1992) characterises the self as a 'narrative project' through which individuals interpretively weave a story that unites the disparate events, actions and motivations of their life experiences. Riessman (2008) provides a comprehensive discussion of narratives and distinguishes between forms of narrative. Riessman (2008) provides examples of the way varied narrative methods have a different emphasis and interrogates how investigators who adopt particular methodological features

can be seen to draw on what is describes as four distinct approaches. The four approaches include analysis of: thematic, structural, dialogic/performative and visual. Each of the methodological approaches has different features.

Narrative identity

Ricoeur (1992) characterizes the self as a 'narrative project' through which individuals interpretively weave a story uniting the disparate events, actions and motivations of their life experiences. Through these stories, and sometimes a re-storying process (see Anderson 2005), we create our identities and share our identity narratives.

Organisational discourse analysis

Organisational discourse analysis captures dominant organisational activity and the communicative character of human interaction. There is an emphasis on how human beings interact through language (Alvesson and Karreman 2000).

Positioning analysis

Positioning analysis provides a means to explore how women's stories reflect their 'socially situated identity'. Socially situated identity theory (Gee 2010) has a focus on the way discursive forms of language are constructed. Positioning analysis is based on an interaction's approach with origins in social psychology (Harre Van Langernhove 1999). In the social sciences, the concept of positioning was used for the first time in a text by Holloway (1984) who analysed discursive practices and the construction of subjectivity in the area of heterosexual relationships. Riessman (2001) highlights the significance of positioning analysis to narrative methods of analysis. Particularly when drawing on analysis of personal narratives as a positioning analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning.

Recognition work

'The work we humans do through talk and interaction to seek to get recognised as having a specific socially situated identity … All the contestation, negotiation and ambiguities round such identities and the ways in which we humans "bid" for them (try to get them recognised and accepted) and relate to and contest with each other over them' (Gee 2010: 210).

Subjectivity

Butler (1990) suggests it is important to acknowledge the existence of multiple identities, or subjectivities, she may share some of these identities with other women. Embodied narrative inquiry is considered a methodological field (Bresler 2006). This thesis explores how language is drawn upon to construct a form of agentive subjective quest for meaning. A career quest and an identity quest.

Social construction of reality

The central concept of the social construction of reality is that persons and groups interacting in a social system form, over time, concepts or mental representations of each other's actions, and that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other.

Stories – big and small

Stories are units of analysis an can be seen to take many forms, two of these forms are big and small; 'narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself' (Riessman 1993: 1).

Small stories focus on the language used in everyday exchange, the stories used in everyday language, and focus on the local issues that provide an in-road into the way people talk about themselves and their identity in a particular context (Bamberg 2011). In stories with a 'big' focus, individuals take stock of larger segments of their life (e.g. autobiographies) (see Freeman 2011).

Appendix 2

Interview questions/ semi structured prompts provided:

- **Please describe your experience of growing and developing as a professional.**
  - When your journey started?
  - Significant highs and lows?
  - What was happening in your life at the time?
  - What happened?
  - How did that happen?
  - Do you distinguish growth from development?
  - How did you feel during certain stages?
- **Really important times:**
  - What was happening then (provide example?)
  - Why did you take this particular course of action? (Provide example?)
  - What other experiences were happening in your life at that time (provide example?)
  - Can you recall a critical moment or a number of critical moments that have shaped your career direction?

Further areas of interest

  - What has been most important in your work?
  - What picture would best describe what you value in your professional /personal/social life? Are these different?
  - What is your greatest fear in your professional life?

Work /Life Balance- What drives or motivates you?

  - What are some of the things that come to mind that inspire you in your work?
  - Who are some of the key figures or moments in history that have inspired you
  - How do you find a balance between your work/ professional life/social life and domestic life?
  - What does Connect, Unfold, Nourish, growth mean to you?
  - Have there ever been times of conflict in balancing the various aspects of your life?
  - We often here about people facing problems around managing their organisational and personal life has this been part of your experience? If so how have you managed it?

Appendix 3: participants consent form

Victoria University
PO Box 14428   **Telephone:**   **School of Management**

MELBOURNE CITY MC VIC 8001   (03) 9688 4000

Australia   **Facsimile:**

(03) 9689 4069
Email:
Your.Name@vu.edu.au

Footscray Park Campus
Ballarat Road
Footscray
ATTACHMENT A INFORMATION SHEET
Victoria University of Technology

Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into *an exploration of the experience of growth and development within the workplace.*

The aims of the project are to explore:

- **How professionals experience development and growth in their working lives**

This analysis is intended to:

- Provide research that explores the understanding of the experience of professional development from the perspective of the individual

- Develop a series of themes of what professional development is experienced as being.

- Develop a map of the domain of the personal experience of professional development.

- Compare understandings gained from the above with existing literature in the area.

ATTACHMENT B CONSENT FORM

Victoria University of Technology

Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research
CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I,

of

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study entitled:

<u>An Exploration into the Experience of Growth and Development within the workplace.</u>

being conducted at Victoria University of Technology by:

Dr Beverley Lloyd-Walker, Prof. Elaine Martin and Susan Mate.

I certify that the aim of the experiment, together with any risks to me associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the experiment, have been fully explained to me by: Susan Mate

and that I freely consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which have been explained to me.

Procedures:

- Participation in a series of interviews, approximately three of one-hour duration, which may be audiotaped, over a period of twelve months.
- Interviews will be conducted at my work place or another venue organised by the researcher if appropriate.
- A semi-structured interview procedure will be involved
- I will be asked to focus on my career and discuss what has aided and what has got in the way of my effectiveness. I will be asked what happened in the situation and what was happening around me at these times.
- I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching and may not be of benefit to me.
- My anonymity is assured.
- Confidentiality is assured. However, should information of a confidential nature need to be disclosed for moral or legal reasons, I will be given an opportunity to negotiate the terms of this disclosure.
- The security of the data obtained is assured following the completion of the study.
- Any information that may identify my organisation or me will not be used.
- The research data colleted during the study may be published.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this experiment at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: ....   }

Witness other than the experimenter: }   **Date: ....**

....}

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher (Name: ph. 9919 4000. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University of Technology, PO Box 14428 MC, Melbourne, 8001 (telephone no: 03-9688 4710).