

**AN INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF
ADULTS WORKING AS UNIVERSITY SUPPORT STAFF**

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requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Work means different things to different people and the different meanings they make of their work has the unique ability of contributing to a sense of identity. Support staff have to negotiate their personal identities and social identities to develop a work identity in the complex South African context that has its unique challenges. Exploring how support staff make sense of their experiences, when it comes to their identities, reveals what identity work strategies they use.

An interpretative phenomenological method of inquiry was employed as an initial research method to explore the aspects that impact on the identity formation of support staff at Rhodes University. The study aims to investigate how support staff have constructed a work identity through their constructions of their experiences. Six participants were recruited through a purposive sampling method and data were collected using semi-structured interviews.

The study revealed that support staff use the following identity work strategies to negotiate their identities: Financial, Personality, Career mobility, Roles, Status and Esteem, Subjective wellbeing. These themes were derived from the narratives of the participants, using the emphases in the data and suggest that support staff use identity work strategies both outside and within the workplace, when constructing their work identities. The study illustrates that as people ascribe different meanings to work, they will define and negotiate their identities in the workplace based upon those meanings. Identity work is indeed challenging for support staff because they need to use identity strategies that are enhancing to their self-esteem. Identity work is a challenging task because of the many tensions and demands of modern society, as adults negotiate their needs to provide for families and to find ways to construct their job status in positive ways.

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DECLARATION

I, Thembela Nomonde Zini, declare that this research is a result of my own work, except where otherwise stated. I have given the full acknowledgement of the sources referred to in the text. This study has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.

Thembela Nomonde Zini

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DEDICATION

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. Jude 24-25 NKJV

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Chapter Overview

The chapter begins with a rationale for the present research, followed by the research objectives being introduced briefly. The chapter ends with an outline of the chapters of the research.

1.2. Rationale of the research

The research aims to contribute to the literature on experiences of adults who work as support staff and how this influences their identity formation. It is concerned with strategies used by support staff by exploring their narratives related to identity.

According to Gini (1998), adults spend a large part of their time at work, so it is the work a person does for a great deal of time that becomes an intrinsic part of making meaning of their lives. Work is something adults will be preoccupied with for most of their lives, whether they love the job or not; and work can provide meaning to some, while it can be a means to an end for others (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Furthermore, Weiss and Rupp (2011) state that people live their lives at work while they find meaning and identity from the work they do, therefore work is an important part of what it means to be human. Therefore, work means different things to different people and greatly impacts how they make sense of their lives.

People's definitions of work must also be examined to understand the relationship between work and identity, because any work that is labelled as demeaning may not be in the nature of the work itself but in the perspective of the worker (Ghidina, 1992). It is apparent that an important source of self-definition in the society in which we live lies in the work that we do, however, many support staff occupations do not afford a definition of self that is agreeable to the worker, according to Ghidina (1992). This is especially so in neo-Liberal work contexts, where conditions in South Africa have led to casualisation of labour and outsourcing, with workers often having temporary

contracts or being paid by tasks (Anseeuw & Pons-Vignon, 2012). This leads me to believe that there lies a possible tension between a need to earn a living by working, in this case in a support staff job; and developing a self-concept that then feels acceptable to the individual and community. This is because society has ascribed different levels of status and prestige to certain occupations. Occupational roles provide a connection between the individual and the social structure, making room for self-definition and definition by others due to the close relationship between work and identity, role and self, the person and others (Ghidina, 1992). For me, this is of particular importance because the majority of South Africans embrace the collectivist culture. Collectivist cultures are characterised by the view of self that depends on others, in developing a self-concept (Eaton & Louw, 2000).

Harding (2013) maintains that to labour is doing and to work is becoming. To labour may be perceived as being unrecognised or to have recognition withheld, assuming work could lead to some form of recognition given. There is a privileged position that exists in being professionals, managers, academics because some aspects of that work allow individuals to work on the self and constitute an identity, which may not be the case for support staff (Ghidina, 1992). In contrast support staff may develop their sense of self using various identity management tools and investigating the nature of these is the purpose of this research.

Furthermore, it would be very interesting to find out whether support staff see themselves as labourers who are unrecognised or workers who have the opportunity to construct their identities, since they are not professionals whose work assumes the opportunity to construct an identity. It would also be interesting to find out if support staff find work to be fulfilling therefore an expression of self, or if it is seen as a threat to their dignity: thus performing it from a distance so that the work required by the role is done without them being defined by it (Goffman, 1961, as

cited in Ghidina, 1992). Identity management is done by all workers because many types of work may contain demeaning or dirty aspects that require one to make the job more admirable. This process is greater in low-status jobs because the way the person relates to their work may not align with who they are, creating a greater need to manage one's identity (Ghidina, 1992). Identity management would then become an important aspect in the identity construction of support staff.

The objective of the research is an interest in exploring workers' identities because of what Gini (1998) postulates about work and its capacity to give people the opportunity to define themselves, express themselves, essentially to become and create an identity. Kirpal (2004) states that work allows individuals to take up work roles that will result in them taking on an identity that helps them assimilate into an organisation and other groups, and thus engage in identity work. Furthermore, Roodt and Jansen (2015) state that work identity and identity work are important in understanding people's involvement and attachment to their work.

Considering what is said by Gini (2001) about people being significantly influenced by their work in creating the people they wish to be; work can be a place of development and working on the self, as people recognise themselves through their work. Work gives people the opportunity to define themselves and allows others to define them too. This study attempts to explore the ways that support staff define themselves and if they perceive themselves according to their job roles, considering that support staff jobs lack the prestige of higher-grade jobs (Ghidina, 1992). This study would also like to argue that identity work done by support staff is challenging for various reasons, including but not limited to the attached low societal esteem and the nature of the work.

In conclusion, as a researcher, I have been motivated to conduct this research because of an interest in the narratives of people who work as support staff. This interest was ignited by the short conversations in corridors, front desks, or offices of workplaces, when engaging briefly with

cleaners and security guards. These conversations left me wondering about the person behind the role and job description; and how they made meaning for themselves.

1.3. The unique South African context

According to Roodt and Jansen (2015), the work context of South African employees is established upon a backdrop of a highly polarised and extremely divided society, when it comes to work-related issues. South Africa has at least eleven main ethnic groups that speak different languages, forming different social and cultural identities. These ethnic groups have unique cultures, values, and belief systems that have developed based on their geographical regions (Thabede, 2008). The different cultural identities may present challenges in constructing individual work identities. Some regions in South Africa are urbanised, boasting of good infrastructure while others have an underdeveloped infrastructure. The generational differences see the younger generation preferring to be urbanised as they tend to be better educated than the older generation, who are typically located in rural areas and less educated. The levels of education and societal development between the different regions are also varied. Most of these inequalities mentioned are a direct result of the apartheid era that denied black people access to the mainstream economy forcing them to create an informal economy (Mabilo, 2018). The extremely polarised workforce is the result of the apartheid system, where the labour market has also undoubtedly suffered due to requirements of jobs today, with a majority who are economically inactive, inadequately trained, and thus economically disempowered individuals (Anseeuw & Pons-Vignon, 2012).

South Africa has a large number of unskilled or low-skilled workers while also having a shortage in skilled labour, creating a human resource dilemma. To rectify to an extent some of the wrongs, the post-1994 regime developed legislations, for example the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (Act 4 of 2000), Skills Development Act (Act 97 of

1998), hoping that these would offer the previously disadvantaged opportunities to participate in the market they were previously barred from. Unfortunately, due to various economic downturns globally this has created another set of challenges including elevated levels of unemployment, especially for the youth, that may impact work identity, as workplaces try to implement fairer labour practices (Roodt & Jansen, 2015).

The challenges facing South Africans, as they engage with the complexities that working in such a society, bring to light the question of life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Møller (2006) stated that South Africans may be satisfied without the material gains under the democratic government, which can be attributed to the years that citizens were patient with the government's reconstruction and development plans. An appreciation of life has been inherited and still exists with the older black generation. The study found that the households of those who were satisfied earned and spend more than those who were not satisfied. Satisfaction is closely related to knowing that a regular income is expected and that members of the household will not go hungry. Casale and Posel (2010) found that income influences subjective well-being and the employment status is a significant predictor of individual satisfaction. It is interesting that education had little significant effect on satisfaction in these studies, thus contrasting with arguments for the benefits of further education; illustrating that satisfaction might be accounted for by other factors such as employment. However, both of these studies were more than a decade ago, so the political and economic situation has changed, perhaps with impacts on the ways people make meaning of their employment situations.

1.4. University context

A study done at a school in Cape Town explores the ethics of outsourced labour in post-apartheid South Africa, by looking at the experiences of security guards and cleaners (Horwitz,

2019). The study is particularly of significance because it recognises the detrimental effects of outsourced labour on individual workers and more broadly on society. The study argues that institutions of higher education need to practice their ethics mindfully and one of those ways is to be respectful towards outsourced workers' rights. This is because institutions of higher education are microcosms of society and need to act in ways that reflect this. The labour of workers employed by outsourced companies is not permanent and for the workers it does not offer benefits such as medical aid and pension, which are associated with permanent employment. This is of significance to the current study as workers at Rhodes University are not outsourced, so it is possible that the impact of permanent employment on identity work as evidenced in Horwitz (2019) is significant.

1.5. The research objectives and chosen methodological approach

Research question: How has the experience of working in a support staff job contributed to the formation of identity and self-concept of a selection of adults at Rhodes University?

The objectives of the research are to:

1. Explore how participants construct their identities and self-concept in relation to their support staff jobs;
2. Explore how working in support staff jobs has contributed to their identity and self-concept as an adult in South Africa;
3. Describe what experiences have informed participants' choices of working as support staff.

This study thus explores the identity construction of support staff. Initially this study was designed to make use of an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), to explore thoroughly how people make sense of their worlds by taking a look at their experiences and what meanings they draw from them (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Once the IPA narratives were collected, we realised that a narrative identity approach would also be helpful.

Narrative identity postulates that people construct their identities by telling the stories of who they are, how they came to be, and who they envision themselves to be in the future. It is in the telling of these stories that people make sense of who they are in the context of social and cultural settings (McAdams, 2013). The use of narrative identity with its emphasis on storytelling and sense-making, combined with the phenomenological nature of IPA was suited to this study, as it is not imposing a theory of how identity should be constructed, rather it gives a glimpse of what it means to be human in a support staff job.

1.6. Outline of the chapters of this research project

This study is organised into six chapters.

Chapter 1: An introduction that provides the rationale and context of the study and briefly outlines the objectives of the study.

Chapter 2: A literature review that is focused on the existing literature regarding the topic and the identity management strategies that have been explored empirically.

Chapter 3: The research methodology section that outlines the most appropriate methodology including the research design used in exploring the research question.

Chapter 4: The findings section that provides the outcome of the analysis which includes an in-depth understanding of who the participants are, how they have come to be and who they wish to be and, the identity work strategies that support staff make use of in their jobs.

Chapter 5: The discussion chapter that discusses the main findings of the study and how they relate to the current literature on identity work and its strategies in the South African context.

Chapter 6: The conclusion section that will briefly summarise the exploration of identity construction of support staff as evidenced by the findings of the study and provide suggestions and reports on the limitations of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Identity has become a lens that investigators use to study various phenomena: seemingly identity has become a construct linked to ideas concerned with motivation, as well as meaning making. Scholars have been interested in organisational, managerial, professional, and occupational identities and the negotiation of the self in the workplace (Alvesson et al., 2008). Alvesson et al. (2008) believe that identity in the different ways it is understood provides innovative ways to understand various organisational phenomena and can give insight on issues relating to organisations. Ashforth and Mael (1996) maintain that what makes identity an interesting concept is that through identity, meaning is attached to an object, by going to the core of an individual's constructs. Furthermore, by drawing from various schools of thought when it comes to identity, the authors state that developing a model of organisational identity enables the development of a subjective context for individuals. Watson (2008) notes that over time the understanding of identity as a fixed entity has been challenged; and identity is now to be understood as a dynamic interplay between people and their environments. This creates a constant need for inquiries related to identity.

To understand work identity construction and its importance in people's lives, it will be beneficial to explore identity work and identity work strategies using a narrative theoretical lens (a subsequent development in response to the findings that were generated). This chapter reviews the construct of work identity, identity work, and identity work strategies. The chapter concludes with a summary of narrative identity and its significance to the study.

2.2. Social Identity Theory and work identities

Social identity theory (SIT) rests on the notion that identity is founded on a social group or category and the group that people belong to influences how they are perceived, how others will know them, and how they will view themselves (Hogg, 2012). SIT postulates that the self is reflexive, in that it can take itself as an object and can categorise, classify, or name itself in certain ways, in relation to other social categories or classifications through this process (Stets & Burke, 2000). Simply put, individuals answer the questions "Who am I?" and "Who are we?".

According to Trepte and Loy (2017) individuals identify with some categories or groups through a process of categorisation, by evaluating the groups they feel they belong to (in-groups) and those they feel they do not belong to (out-groups). The worth of the in-group and out-group is determined by the categorisation, evaluation and comparing of value that the individual engages in, with both groups. The engagement between the self-concept and social categorization, group evaluation and value of group membership makes up the social identity. When a person has a positive social identity, they will experience positive self-esteem, however when they experience a negative social identity, they will develop cognitive strategies to create a more positive view for the in-group. When the self-concepts of support staff engage with the social categorisations and group evaluation that exist in their work contexts, support staff are likely to form a work identity that is either positive or negative.

According to Saayman and Crafford (2011) a person's self-concept derives from two principal sources, their personal identity and social identities. Personal identity includes people's traits, achievements, and qualities that highlight their differences. Social identity includes the group affiliations that are recognised as being part of the self, that is concerned with the person belonging to the group. Personal identity may also be seen as the characteristics that highlight the

differences between individuals and others, while social identities are the result of individuals seeking to be included in social groups. It is likely that in work contexts, there will be contributions from both personal and social identities. Therefore, the tension that exists between social and personal identities will contribute to the negotiation of work identity, because of the threat to individuality that social identities engender (Brewer, 2003).

2.3. Work identity and other identities

According to Stets and Burke (2003), self-concept is the various meanings we draw about ourselves based on how we view ourselves, which can be influenced by what we and others think of us. The self-concept is the combination of identities: identities being the traits and characteristics, roles, and social group memberships that define the core of the way individuals think about themselves. Essentially self-concept and identity answer the question “Who am I?” and this includes both the social and personal identities (Oyserman, 2001). Stets and Burke (2003) state that the self consists of multiple identities that manifest through the interaction within social structures, thus a work identity is constructed by the interaction of the self with individuals’ work experiences.

Bothma and Roodt (2012) note that identity forms as a result of the interaction between the self, self-concept, personal identity and social contexts such as work. Work provides context to draw meanings, beliefs and values leading to the formation of work identity. Work identity is a process of forming an identity in relation to a job and by responding in ways that are deemed appropriate for that job. Walsh and Gordon (2008) state that an individual’s work identity is a work-based self-concept that includes occupational and other identities that form as a result of the roles individuals play and how they behave in their workplaces. Furthermore, work identities are

developed when individuals identify with their jobs and organisations and may be expressed in the ways they identify with parts of the work environment (Kirpal, 2004).

One could ask why such an emphasis on work identity? The answer would be that when individuals identify with the organisation and its goals through the tasks they perform, then individuals are able to achieve productivity and a sense of belonging to the workplace, increasing self-esteem and work identity (Buche, 2006). Work identity according to Saayman and Crafford (2011) is how individuals see themselves in relation to their work. How people manage their identities is not only the act of embracing and avoiding certain aspects of work, but involves creating and maintaining definitions of work that are positively self-enhancing (Ghidina, 1992). Therefore, the definition of a job does not begin and end at the simple definition of a paid position of regular employment, but can be used as an important tool in workers constructing their identities.

2.4. Identity work

Identity work is the process individuals engage in that allows them to form, repair, maintain and strengthen the ideas they have of themselves which make them who they are and are consistent with who they see themselves as. This definition focuses on a conscious effort of doing identity work that includes encounters and events that aid the awareness of a need to form an identity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Kirpal (2004) is of the idea that identity work is the achievement of the individual from the negotiation meanings between the work environment, external and societal influences and expectations that produce a work identity.

Saayman and Crafford (2011) state that identity work is achieved by resolving the tension between personal and social identities since they propose that the tension between individual and

situational demands set the scene for identity work. Thus, when we understand the factors that influence work identity, we will better understand the factors that improve or hinder identity work.

Identity work involves the process of adjusting to the environment and responding in ways that best represent one's characteristics, in order to ease the tensions (Brewer, 2003). Lloyd et al. (2011) state that an individual's identity formation is continuous and subject to change based on the environment in which people find themselves. This leads to a realisation that identity is dynamic and very much a result of a complex interaction between an individual, their experiences of their context and their constructed identities.

2.5. Identity work and identity work strategies

Various studies will be reviewed to broaden an understanding of what identity strategies are used by workers from different backgrounds and work grades. Walsh and Gordon (2008) in their extensive review of literature to that point, discuss how individuals create their work identities and how organisations and occupations contribute to this formation. Individuals choose to what extent they will identify with their organisations by defining what their organisational identity is, through a subjective process. This can be done by listening to the views of others about the organisation and interpreting these for themselves as part of the organisation's central character. Individuals compare their beliefs with that of the organisation to see if there is alignment between the two. Should the characteristics give members status that positively influences self-concept, then individuals will identify with the organisation as members. When being a member of an organisation affords the individual the opportunity to differentiate themselves from those that are not part of it in a positive way, they are most likely to use the organisational identity in forming their work identities. They also suggest that individuals in lower status jobs typically look outside

their organisations to create their work identities: this may be evidenced by individuals perceiving their work as a calling or adapting a boundaryless strategy.

Kreiner et al. (2006) present findings on the negotiation of work identity among Episcopal priests from the United States of America (USA), giving insight into three categories of tactics that the priests use to manage their identity, namely: differentiation, integration, and neutral. Differentiation tactics are conscious efforts to separate personal and social identities. Separating roles from identity are used to separate social and personal identities, with the aim of preserving individuality while strong occupational demands persist. Integration tactics are the opposite of differentiation tactics as they merge occupational and personal identities. Due to the challenging nature of the occupation, the study found fewer integration tactics than differentiation tactics. Neutral or dual function tactics are those that facilitate integration or differentiation, by seeking refreshment through behaviours that are removed from work identity. It is important to note that these tactics are used over time, thus identity work is an ongoing process of negotiating the personal identity, the work, and the various social identities one holds.

2.6. Support staff work, identity work and identity work strategies

Ghidina (1992) presented a study in northern New England (USA) that looked at how low-status workers manage the relationship between work and identity. Low-status jobs can be described as uninteresting, dirty, or degrading: because of this there may be an inconsistency between the identity of the worker and the image projected by the performance of the work. The study argued that this inconsistency puts workers in a position to create social and psychological ways to tolerate their work and invent strategies to guard their self-concepts from external inconsistencies that may exist because of their work. It is also postulated that all jobs have aspects that are not enjoyable, and people will use strategies to make the work look better than it is. The

assumption is that low-status jobs require the use of these strategies more because of the differences between the nature of the work and the construction of the self; hence the needs of workers to manage their identities. It is also argued that society tends to evaluate people by social status, and this means having a low-status job can position individuals at a less respected level and may compromise their sense of dignity.

Support staff typically have dirty work as part of their job descriptions (such as cleaning toilets) and because they are not considered professionals, their work may go unnoticed or may not be highly regarded by society. This is quite significant in identity work, as work identities are formed by individuals as they identify with their work (Kirpal, 2004). Low-status workers have to negotiate the status of their jobs with others, even if they have a definition of their jobs that is not threatening to their own self-esteem (Ghidina, 1992).

Fuller and Unwin (2017) argue that individuals in lower status jobs can use their expertise in their work to create positive work identities through a process of job crafting. Job crafting involves engaging in the daily activities in a caring manner, therefore, crafting an identity as caring workers in the effort to develop an esteem enhancing identity. These efforts are characterised by the construction of work roles as relational, interactive, and interpersonal, which may be very different from what the job description is. The findings of the study done in the United Kingdom (UK) show that porters craft their work as care, regardless of their job descriptions not including care; and their jobs being viewed as being at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. At times even with the lack of positive feedback from colleagues, porters practiced care and ensured patients were taken care of. The porters made use of relational resources in engaging with the workplace and job however, not all of them were found to be job crafters because it is ultimately the choice of the individual how they will engage with the work.

Duemmler and Caprani (2017) conducted a case study among retail apprentices in Switzerland, to examine the identity strategies the apprentices use to manage their work identity as they work in a low-prestige occupation. Apprentices were uncertain about identifying with their jobs because of the daily experiences of working in a low prestige job. Low prestige workers may feel the following in their jobs: pride, recognition and satisfaction; however, Duemmler and Capriani (2017) argue that the perceptions of society make it challenging to create and maintain these feelings. Therefore, they must find positive meaning in their work through strategies such as social mobility, or self-valorisation to mobilise identity work.

2.7. Identity work strategies used by South African employees

Above, I have illustrated studies that show various strategies used to negotiate and regulate the tensions that exist in forming a work identity, as in (Kreiner et al, 2006); and this is especially relevant to the South African context.

Saayman and Crafford (2011) present a model that looks at identity tensions, situational demands, and individuals' agency that mobilises identity work. The negotiation of identity is a result of navigating the demands and tensions of a multifaceted world; therefore the conceptual model proposes ways that individuals manage tensions between their personal identities, jobs that have tasks, social identities, individual agency, and the influences of social practice. Identity work according to Saayman and Crafford (2011) is ongoing and fluid due to the interconnectedness of these five dimensions that facilitate identity work.

Research done by Lloyd et al. (2011) aimed to answer the question "who am I at work?" particularly in a post-apartheid South Africa; and made use of grounded theory to create a model that would explain how individuals form their identities. Lloyd et al. (2011) created a three-layered model to explain factors that influence individuals' constructions of their work-based identity in a

post-apartheid organisation. The three-layered onion model explains how life spheres, life roles and work facets are significant to work-based identity formation.

Adams and Crafford (2012) conducted a study at a global manufacturing company to explore strategies for identity work using grounded theory. They identified four broad themes that people employ to negotiate their work identities namely: personal philosophies, relationships, career management, negotiating balance.

Table 1

Similarities of identity work strategies

Critical elements in defining work-based identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Lloyd et al. (2011)	Identity at work: Exploring strategies for Identity Work. Adams and Crafford (2012)
Culture	Work life Integration Strategy
Family	Managing Relationships
Religion	Living Personal Ethic
Job Identification	Living Personal Ethic
Profession	Career Mobility
Team Role strategy	Relationships at work

The identity work themes in the Lloyd et al. (2011) study that do not speak to those in the Adams and Crafford (2012) study are: the Workplace Role, Breadwinner or Provider, and Political themes.

The following are the identity work themes that are mentioned by Adams and Crafford (2012) but not similar to the strategies mentioned by Lloyd et al. (2011): Relationship, Education and Managing boundaries.

What is interesting about these two studies is that they look at work identity in South Africa at a similar time period with unspecified work grades. The studies cited above are said to be the

first of their kind in South Africa further reinforcing the idea that studies such as this one are necessary because of their exploratory nature and specificity.

Bothma and Roodt (2012) conducted a study among middle management in South Africa that aimed to investigate whether there was a difference between work-based identity (WI) and work engagement (WE) and concluded that WI and WE should be understood as separate constructs. The study found that if WI is improved then WE also seems to improve and the opposite is true; however, they do not depend on each other to exist. The study also found that with the influence of the effect of task performance, WI and WE is not as strong as was found, but it exists. When employees want to leave their jobs (turnover intention), this means they have less WE and possibly a compromised WI. There is a strong relationship between alienation and turnover intention: as employees engage in withdrawal behaviours, they will want to leave the organisation. The study therefore recommends that organisations should create a space for employees to feel part of the of the organisation and its success by promoting social identification with the organisation.

Sefelafala (2012) identified three themes from the qualitative component of their study exploring the work and life experiences of private security guards in Johannesburg. Firstly, the boredom theme evidenced in identity work, as security guards noted that the job denies them being themselves and adherence to values that matter to them. Security guards used the relationships with people at work to combat the boredom. Secondly, the uniform and public perceptions of the uniform create a boundary that identifies one with a group and give rise to other forms of identities. The uniform is not a source of pride and dignity, but removes honour and pride through leading to undesirable opinions of society about the self. Lastly, they identified the crisis of recognition from

other workers and society due to being on the lower end of the social ladder. These themes speak to the identity work that support staff may be met with, because of the nature of their work.

Mkhize (2018) presented a study on the subjective wellbeing of black females who are self-employed in South Africa from various industries in Kwa Zulu Natal (KZN) using Spillover Theory. The central themes identified by the study are: perceptions of subjective wellbeing, multiple role strain, roles performed by women, experiences of conflict, ability to cope, support structures and self-reliance, as well as feelings of guilt. These themes provide a clear reflection on the personal and social identity tensions that women have to manage, in their attempts to attain wellbeing while faced with life stage challenges.

Ceriani (2018) presented a study that looks at the perceptions of work and motherhood within two organisations in Durban, KZN. The study reports that working mothers engage in dynamic identity work that is influenced by the discourses around motherhood and work. The critical perceptions of the mothers, behaviour and their efforts are some of the tensions they have to work through.

Gossayn (2018) explored the methods of three working mothers in Johannesburg to construct their identities, by analysing how the mothers negotiate the tensions and demands of work identity, using the Saayman and Crafford (2011) model. The study looks at work life balance from the perspective of identity, since being a working mother adds an identity status to women. The study found that women find it difficult balancing motherhood and work, but the benefits are said to outweigh the disadvantages. Women also often experience guilt when they are unable to spend time with their children, however work is seen as a positive part of their lives that makes them better mothers and this is significant for making meaning. Women tend to formulate strategies to assist them in balancing their lives as work has a positive impact in their lives. These

two studies reveal a perspective of work identity and identity that is unique to women and mothers, making sense of their experiences as workers.

As noted in chapter 1, Horwitz (2019) conducted a study at a school in Cape Town among security guards and cleaners. The workers reported that they would be happy to work for the school because of the better income, job security, working conditions, the possibility of better positions and upskilling. From the stories they tell of their work experiences, the workers go the extra mile even though they often feel excluded from the school community and its benefits because they are outsourced. The workers build relationships with the school community and other staff members who organise additional work opportunities for them on weekends. The feeling of exclusion from the school and its people is compensated by the relationships that have been built. This study evidences the tensions of constructing an identity while managing the tensions of social and organisational difficulties that exist for the support staff, however more research is necessary to explore the nuances for such workers.

2.8. Narrative Identity as a theoretical lens

Earlier, I outlined the complexities of both the context and oppressive nature of much work in SA; as well as concerns that the above constructs around identity might not be applicable in support staff work settings. Work identity for this study will be explored from a narrative perspective, by looking at the stories people tell about themselves and their work (McAdams, 2011). Using a narrative identity lens will give the study insight to the internalised and evolving story of the self that support staff use, to make sense and meaning of their lives and identity work. This is because narrative identity is an individual's story told to themselves and others in a social and cultural context that evolves (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The purpose of the story is to

answer the question "who am I?" and "how did I become this person?" so it is linked to the purpose of work identity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003).

Narrative identities stem from stories. Stories are social because they need to be told by someone to an audience and these stories are about humans who interact over a period under certain circumstances in this instance over their working career as support staff (McAdams, 2008). The stories people create to make sense of their lives serve to place them within the complex social world with various tensions requiring management (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Stories are told by individuals by retrieving memories and reconstructing them in a way that best serves the purpose for which they are told (McAdams, 2008).

The narrative identity lens is suitable for this study as it takes into account that identity is subjectively constructed with the cultural and social contexts in mind, with the purpose of explaining how individuals came to be the people they are and where they are going (McAdams, 2011). Narrative identity is said to develop through people telling their stories within cultural parameters in social contexts (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The stories that people construct to make sense of their lives are important in resolving the tension between who they are and who they imagine themselves to be in their minds and chronologically, who they are, were and might be in social contexts of family, community, workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture (McAdams, 2011).

Self-understanding is an integrative concept created by story-telling to bring together different ideas, characters, and happenings and elements that are quite different for the person. Synchronic integration in life stories functions to make sense of life, by organising a wide range of different and possibly conflicting roles and relationships that explain how a person has come to be who they are. Diachronic integration in contrast, gives us an idea of how one person can be

different over time (McAdams, 2011). The stories told by people facilitate an understanding of the self as a result of how they organise and configure the self in the story (McAdams, 2019). Working on these stories to create an integrated meaningful product is key in facilitating identity work as individuals manage the tensions of their personal and work identities (Saayman & Crafford, 2011).

Narrative identity is a developmental product that will be worked on continuously for the rest of the individual's life as they incorporate new experiences and perspectives of who they are (McAdams, 2019). The stories people tell change over time as new memories are made and make their way to narrative identity as motivations, goals, and social positions mean new meanings are attributed to the stories (McAdams, 2008). Human intentionality is at the heart of the narrative, as people are intentional agents that interact with each other over time to reach some desired end (McAdams, 2019). Stories have high and low points that are emotionally charged. Positive scenes and negative scenes in the story are organised differently, presenting different challenges and fulfilling different functions in the life story. Stories will include important self-defining memories that are clear and emotionally charged events in a person's life: and these may reflect recurrent life concerns, as these are key components of narrative identity (McAdams, 2008). It is believed that the cognitive processing of negative events leads to insight and positive consequences for psychological well-being and health (McAdams, 2018).

Stories about who people are at work, how they experience navigating the tensions of their personal and social identities within the complex society and cultural context they exist in can thus be understood through narrative identity. The theory allows for thick stories to exist and will offer insight to the worlds of support staff.

The aim of the current study is to understand how support staff have become the people they are, how their experiences and the social context have contributed to their work identities,

and how their social identities have influenced their descriptions of the people they have become over time.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the design and methodology employed in the study. A motivation for choosing interpretive phenomenology analysis (IPA) will be given. This includes a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of IPA and its principles as a methodology used in this study. A motivation for choosing a qualitative research design and IPA in particular will be given. Details of the participant sample that was used, sample technique, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis and reflexivity will be discussed.

3.2. Research Design

The aim of the research is to explore themes related to identity and self-concept that adults in support staff jobs have constructed in their positions. The focus of the research is to gather an understanding of the themes that contribute to the identity formation of adults who occupy support staff jobs; leaning towards the inductive nature that qualitative research applies, as it gathers data to build concepts instead of testing hypotheses. The choice of using a qualitative approach is informed by the rich descriptions that are gathered in qualitative inquiry, as it focuses on meanings in context: which asks for a data to be collected through interviews where observations and interpretations can be made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study aims to facilitate an understanding of the individuals' experiences making a qualitative approach the most suitable for the aim of the research. Qualitative approaches are interested in understanding how people make sense of their experiences, and the meanings made of their experiences. IPA specifically is most suitable because it focuses on how the everyday experiences can be significant for people (Smith et al., 2009). IPA also focuses on the significance of the experience to the participant therefore adopting a person in context stance (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

3.3. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA relies on phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography as theoretical orientations to inform its epistemological framework and research methodology. These will each be explored below, after a brief outline of IPA.

According to Smith and Osborn (2008), IPA is concerned with understanding how people make sense of their experiences by looking at what those experiences mean to them. IPA approaches research from the bottom up rather than top down, as it does not impose any assumptions on participants or test hypotheses (Reid et al., 2005).

IPA views the participants as experts in their experiences and the role of the researcher is to gain an understanding of the experience as told and experienced by the expert (Reid et al., 2005). According to Eatough and Smith (2008), IPA looks at all aspects of the lived experience which may include wishes, desires, feelings, motivations, belief systems and how they are evident or not in behaviour and actions. IPA considers how people make sense of their life experiences and in this case how support staff make sense of their identities using their experiences as support staff at Rhodes (Smith et al., 2009).

3.4. IPA and phenomenology

Phenomenological studies are concerned with how people experience being human by looking at how they perceive their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2015). Husserl (1859 -1838) is one of the major philosophers that contributed to IPA. He is the founder of phenomenology who states that the experience should be investigated in the way that it occurs (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl's goal was to find ways that could facilitate a process whereby someone might know their experience of a particular phenomenon in detail, with depth and rigour that will allow them to identify the essential qualities of that experience. By doing this Husserl postulates that the details

of the experience would be more than the circumstances at face value and would allow other insights into the experience (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl famously argued that we should go back to the thing itself, the thing being the experiences of people transformed into consciousness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenology is not interested in categorizing and reducing experiences to abstract laws, rather to study a phenomenon on its own (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is different as a set of techniques in that the researcher it not only enters into the world of the participant but makes interpretations of it (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

3.5. IPA and hermeneutics

Hermeneutics refers to the theory of interpretation that was developed by German philosopher Heidegger as a prerequisite to the meaning-making nature of phenomenology (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2018). IPA researchers attempt to understand what their participants have experienced and through interpretation: thus hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation is key to IPA. IPA studies recognise the role of the researcher in accessing the participant experience and how they will interpret it (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2018).

The hermeneutic circle is based on the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole at different levels. This means that to understand any part of a phenomena you look to the whole, to understand the whole you to the part (Smith et al., 2009). Essentially, a person's sense making can only be understood in context. Smith (2004) refers to a double hermeneutic that the researcher enters into by trying to make sense of the participant as they make sense of their experience. The researcher can attempt to access the meaning of a text by entering the hermeneutic circle and acknowledging previous assumptions and bracketing as they engage the participant. IPA requires that the researcher reflects on their own experience and assumptions on the topic at hand and not only to engage with peoples' experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). A researcher accesses the

experiences of their participants whatever interpretations will be made from these experiences will depend on the researchers' context (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The circle is left where the researcher analyses the data, but recognises that they are now influenced by the newly found knowledge. The circle is entered again by engaging with the participants through listening to transcripts again with this new knowledge and acknowledging both the whole and the parts, as interpretation continues (Smith et al., 2009).

3.6. IPA and Idiography

Idiography is a study of in-depth analysis of individual cases, rather than a population thus it resists making conclusions about human behaviour (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is founded on idiography because of its commitment to in-depth analysis of individual experience of participants in their unique contexts. Idiography rests on the idea that exploration should be done case by case before any generalisations are made and for this reason IPA uses small, purposive samples (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This study is committed to exploring the individual experiences of the participants in their support staff roles, through a commitment to the individual stories shared by participants. Each case is analysed on its own to facilitate the depth of analysis that IPA requires.

3.7. Sampling

To answer the research question, participants were selected through a purposive sampling method to ensure that a relevant sample of people with experience as support staff was used (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The targeted group included individuals 18 years old and not more than 65 years old who work in grade 1-5 jobs at Rhodes University. What is important to note with using IPA in this study is that the participants not only represent a population but offer a unique perspective (Smith et al., 2009). The sample size is six and is kept low because the study aims to

draw in-depth details from the perceptions and understandings of individual support staff (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Furthermore, there is no desire to generalise the findings to a larger population (Langridge, 2007).

It was also important for the research sample to be homogenous as is required for IPA research; and to achieve this, the participants were recruited from Rhodes University only. To have access to staff members as research participants for the study, permission was requested from the Head of Human Resources at Rhodes University (Appendix B). The acting Head of Rhodes University Division of Human Resources granted permission to recruit participants from staff members (Appendix C). An information letter was then sent to the union NEHAWU and the Head of Housekeeping who would forward it to staff members, together with a letter requesting access to staff members (Appendix E and D respectively).

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Psychology Department of Rhodes University and the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC); the letter is attached (Appendix A). According to Brinkman and Kvale (2008) informed consent involves letting the participants know the aim and nature of the study, as well as the possible risks and benefits that may result from their participation. Informed consent means the participants have volunteered participation and they are aware of their right to withdraw. The intentions of the study were explained to the participants to ensure that they fully understand their participation in it, and was done thoroughly for IPA in particular since the analysis of outcomes includes the use of verbatim extracts (Smith et al., 2009). After this explanation provided in the person's home language, informed consent was given by participants who signed and returned the forms (Appendix F).

Confidentiality in research according to Brinkman and Kvale (2008) means that identifying data of the participants will not be included in the study. Participants were made aware that private data identifying them will not be reported; this was to maintain confidentiality.

The ethical principle of non-maleficence means that the researcher should do the least possible harm to the research participants. There were no anticipated risks of harm to participants, however the sharing of their experiences may have elicited emotions and therefore referrals could have been made to Employee Assistance through the Human Resource Department should any psychological support be needed. In terms of benefits, the study may offer representation of participants' experiences in the academic world and allow the voices of the participants to be heard through the sharing of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

3.9. Data Collection

Interviews are widely used in qualitative research and are common in IPA. Interviews give the researcher first-hand experience of the participants' reactions, which can prove to be useful in exploring the lived experiences of the participants (Willig, 2008). Semi-structured interviews are used mostly as a method of data collection in IPA because they allow the participant to share their experiences in detail (Langridge, 2007). IPA requires participants to express their ideas and feelings freely from their perspective (Smith et al., 2009).

Data were collected for this research project using semi-structured individual interviews to ensure that participants could openly share their experiences in detail. Semi-structured interviews fall between the open-endedness of unstructured interviews and the predetermined nature of structured interviews. In this study questions were prepared as a guide and initiator of the conversation to allow the participant to tell their story (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

The researcher invited the participants to the interviews via email, once they had agreed to participate in the study. An interview appointment was set with permission from their Line managers (Appendix G). The participants gave consent for their responses to be used in the research without identifying data and further explanation of the use of verbatim words was given. The interviews were conducted by the researcher by adopting a conversation style to the interviews in the person's home language, which in most cases was isiXhosa. The interview questions were shared with the participants to give them time to reflect and think through their responses before the researcher recorded the interviews (see Appendix H).

3.10. Organisation of data

The researcher had to organize the data that had been collected. This was done by transcribing and translating the interview responses. The researcher listened to the interviews a couple of times while reading the transcription to ensure that they had captured the data as accurately as possible given the data collection method. Verbatim translations were made by the researcher, whose first language is also isiXhosa. Names of participants were kept anonymous to ensure confidentiality, so a number was assigned to each data reporting purposes.

3.11. Data Analysis

It was important that the data analysis do justice to the meanings participants had revealed about their worlds (Smith, & Osborn, 2003). The researcher approached the analysis process using the Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) perspective that guidelines to IPA analysis can be adapted to the researcher's objectives. Langridge (2007) presents a four-stage analysis method that was also used as a guideline for this analysis.

In this study the researcher started the analysis process by reading the transcript a number of times with the aim of familiarising herself with the data. The researcher made comments that

revealed anything of interest related to identity on the margin of the transcript. After familiarizing herself with the data the researcher looked for excerpts in the data that best answered the phenomenological questions: what is like to be human in a support staff job, what insights can be gathered from what the participant is saying, what in the data is telling me about being human in the job?

These excerpts were written in a two-column table; on the right hand side as the researcher, I made notes about what was significant in what the participant was saying, highlighting direct quotes, taking note of expressed emotions and interpreting what the participant is saying that was perhaps not explicit. From the interpretations made, themes began to emerge in each case and were labelled according to what they revealed about the data. Data from each case were subsequently clustered under the different themes, which were clustered into groups, depending on whether they spoke to similar aspects of identity work strategies. Final commentary from these themes was written up using verbatim extracts.

3.12. Evaluating the research

Yardley (2000) describes 4 broad principles that are applicable in assessing the quality of an IPA research study. These are: (a) sensitivity to context, (b) commitment and rigour, (c) transparency and coherence, (d) impact and importance.

Yardley (2000) notes that it is important to have a good understanding of the philosophical background of the methodology. As the researcher, being immersed in IPA was helpful in the recruitment process, the sampling and engagements with gatekeepers as this had the potential to impact the participants' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). An example of this would be requesting Line managers to allow participants to be interviewed during office hours. It is important that the researcher familiarize themselves with the current literature on the topic to

ensure that they approach the study with the sensitivity it deserves. The use of language, social interactions and culturally respectful ways are at the centre of meaning making, which IPA is concerned with. When doing IPA, one must pay attention to the language and the context of the words used as this is important in interpreting meaning (Yardley, 2000). Sensitivity to context was displayed by the researcher allowing the participants to respond in their home language when the need arose, being aware of the cultural nuances that participants draw from, which may be useful when interpreting data.

When engaged with IPA one needs to commit to being attentive to participants while collecting data and pay attention to each case during analysis (Smith et al., 2009). This means the researcher works carefully case by case, having to be immersed in the data for some time by reading the transcripts over and listening to the recordings thoroughly (Yardley, 2000).

Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the study as it relates to the suitability of the sample bearing in mind the research question, the quality of interview and the completeness of the analysis. The sample in this study was appropriate to the question that seeks to explore the lived experiences of support staff as such studies are said to be kept small and homogenous (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith et al. (2009) state that the transparency refers to how the researcher has explicitly described the stages of the research process. Transparency has been achieved according to Yardley (2000) in this study by clearly describing the data collection process and analysis, making use of quotes so that the reader can identify patterns revealed by the analysis. Yardley (2000) states that coherence is achieved through the appropriateness of the research question, the philosophical perspective, the method of investigation and analysis used in the study. Simply put coherence according to Smith et al. (2009) refers to whether the argument makes sense. To achieve coherence

the researcher has chosen IPA as the methodology that best addresses the research question and provides a rich body of data, to enable the narrative accounts of participants to have been elicited and presented.

Impact and importance can be the test of validity; whether this study tells the reader something worthwhile. It is important that a study reaches the objectives of the analysis and the findings are applied in the relevant context and population (Yardley, 2000). The findings of research were designed to address the objectives of the research by exploring and documenting how support staff construct their identities. The findings were not intended to be generalised to a large population, but rather should be used to build insight into support staff in similar contexts.

3.13. Limitations of study

The idiographic nature of IPA is to pay attention to specific experiences or phenomena and not focus on generalising findings. IPA also encourages the use of homogenous samples due to the in-depth analysis that is expected from IPA studies (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The homogenous sample of the study was initially support staff of different genders, racial groups and languages in the different departments of the University. The study was not able to meet this level of diversity due to Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing restrictions that limited the number of staff present on the University campus. The sample was thus limited to staff members that were working on campus, resulting in the current somewhat restricted sample. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other populations but may give insight to similar contexts.

3.14. Reflexivity

Reflexive researchers would be those that are able to critically look at their role in the research process. The aim of reflexive practice is to improve the quality of research by ensuring that it is valid and accounting for the limitations of the knowledge produced, which would lead to

a transparent research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The art of being reflexive in research aids the ethics of research and ensures that any form of researcher bias would be accounted for. As the researcher in this study, reflecting on the motivation for a study that focuses on support staff was important, as it provided an opportunity to acknowledge the role of subjectivity and its impact on the study that I had to constantly be aware of.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section consists of a description of research participants, while the second section describes and discusses the findings according to the emerging themes from the research question.

4.1. Description of Participants

Six grade 1-5 employees were interviewed for the research. Three participants are kitchen attendants at a Residence Dining Hall, while three are cleaners at a Residence. All participants are black, isiXhosa-speaking females.

Table 2:

Description of participants

	Age	Place of origin	Education	Previous work Experience	Current Position
P 1	42	Makhanda	Grade 12	Cleaner	Kitchen attendant
P 2	58	Makhanda	Grade 5	None	Kitchen attendant
P 3	48	Makhanda	Grade 12	General worker	Kitchen attendant
P 4	41	Makhanda	Grade 11	Caregiver	Cleaner
P 5	35	Makhanda	Incomplete diploma	Security officer	Cleaner
P 6	60	Makhanda	Computing diploma	Shop assistant	Cleaner

Participant 1: P 1 failed Grade 12 and never completed her high school learning. She has worked in Plettenberg Bay but she did not want to reveal what type of work she did. She has a son and takes care of her nephew as well. She has been at Rhodes for 10 years, of those seven were paid on a casual worker basis.

Participant 2: P 2's highest level of education of Grade 5. She has been working at the Rhodes Residence kitchens for 21 years. She was hesitant in sharing her personal details, however from the data we can conclude that she has children.

Participant 3: P 3 has only worked in Makhanda. Grade 12 is her highest level of education. She is the breadwinner in a household of five. She has been working at Rhodes for 5 years as a kitchen attendant.

Participant 4: P 4 is married with two sons. Her highest level of education is Grade 11. She did her schooling in Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth. She worked at a local old age home before she began work at Rhodes over a year ago. She has only worked in Makhanda.

Participant 5: P 5 did some of her schooling in Makhanda and part of it in Port Elizabeth. She lives with her grandparents and extended family. She was a casual worker for approximately 2 years before she became permanent at Rhodes, she has been working at Rhodes for 11 years. While waiting for her permanent post she worked as a security guard for less than six months in Port Elizabeth.

Participant 6: P 6 has worked in Makhanda since she started working and she has two children. She has a Grade 12 and a short course in Computer Literacy. She has been working as a housekeeping cleaner for 9 years.

To summarise, each of the participants is female and living in Makhanda. They have varied levels of schooling, from incomplete through to having completed grade 12, with two having studied at diploma level. They have different lengths of time as Rhodes University employees, some having been employed casually first, with their lengths of service varying between one and 21 years (the person with the longest time period had the least formal education).

4.2. Research Question Responses

This section aims to answer the research question: How has the experience of working in as support staff has contributed to the formation of identity and self-concept? As a

phenomenological study the interest of the research is to look at how the experience of working in a support staff job has shaped the workers' worlds.

The perceptions of work that support staff have and why they engage in the job as they do rests on the following themes that have been grouped into 6 categories. The themes were pertinent in the participants' constructions of identity. In what follows, the excerpts in italics are attributed to specific participants by noting the participant number.

4.2.1. Financial influences

This theme speaks of finances as a motivation and influence in how participants and their families view themselves as they negotiate their identities.

a) Financial freedom

Financial freedom is a pervasive theme among 5 of the 6 participants, since they revealed that their salaries have afforded them the ability to afford certain things for themselves, contribute to household expenses and they also appreciate having permanent employee benefits.

I thought to myself I would be able to support my child financially in future. P 5

Me working has made a difference in my family. There are things I never thought I would have. P 3

The level of financial freedom that is experienced by participants contributes to subjective wellbeing, as noted by P3: an income has contributed to less worry about finances. Other participants such as P 5 report that the financial freedom experienced from the job has improved subjective wellbeing where she is able to afford a better lifestyle and support her child in the future.

b) Remuneration

For participants who have worked previously, working as a cleaner or a kitchen attendant has provided them with better remuneration than in their previous jobs. A big part of being happy in

the job comes from the salary difference and the appointment being permanent, thus providing some security. P 3 recalls being happy with this job, however she is aware that she should not be content with her position and should apply for other positions should and when the opportunity arises.

I've never earned so much. I don't know this amount of money as a wage so when I get paid, I do something at home. P 3

I realised that the money I would get here is more than the money I would get at (previous employer). P4

Participants indicated some concerns with better pay, which is only possible in the future depending on the opportunities that will be made available and if participants apply for them.

c) Provider

For all participants the job has offered them financial stability not only for themselves, but this is a benefit for their families too. It is important to note that when talking about finances participants include their families: an indication that there is a possible assumption that the finances belong to the family not only to themselves. The role of being a provider in their families contributes immensely to their constructions of who they are and why they do the work they do. P 6 reflected on her identity being influenced by her ability to provide, extend her house and finance her children's education. Other participants are the sole providers in their families and working in this job means they can maintain this part of their identity.

I can also get my own things like build a house. P 5

I have managed to take my children through school. P 6

My family knows on the 25th Gugu is getting paid and there will be a difference. P 3

P 2 not only recognises that her job has placed her in a position to provide for her family but she reports that she meets people at work who tell her she is at work to work and provide for her family.

This illustrates that the social influence also contributes to how people relate to their jobs and reinforces the idea that she is a provider.

When I got the job I felt good than to be sitting around in the township. So, I found people at work who would tell me that I am here to get a job and ensure my children would succeed and become what I envision for them. P 2

The job is perceived to meet the needs of the family, contribute in making the family home better in various ways and financing their children's education. There is therefore a future-focused dimension in being seen as a provider.

4.2.2. Personality factors

In this theme, the elements of emergent personal characteristics are described. These relate both to at work behaviours and to interactions with others that participants display as they negotiate their work identities.

a) Conflict averse

All the participants revealed that they do not like conflict; however, P1 notes that if there is an issue that requires her to respond she will respond by suppressing her conflict-averse characteristic. Some of the participants reveal that conflict gives them anxiety, evidenced by overthinking and being cautious of what one says in order not to offend others. Getting into conflict at work appears not to be encouraged as it is perceived that would jeopardise their job, work relationships and therefore their wellbeing.

If I see that someone has offended me I will not respond. I will think it through over some time then keep quiet because I don't want to fight with people at work. P 3

At the same time listening to each other and I wish we would be submissive towards each other, we are at work. Things at home should not be brought here, I avoid those things though. P 5

Participants reveal that they are uncomfortable with hostile work environments or interactions that would lead to conflict, affecting their productivity and relationships at work. This is done by moving on from disagreements quickly. This feature might be emphasised due to their sense of their positions in the workplace; and perhaps not feeling that they should add to any difficulties.

b) Personality dynamics

Participants are aware that in the workplace one encounters different personalities and one has to learn to negotiate these relationships by being accommodative to them and find ways of resolving conflict that is healthy.

Yes, there are those things at work you work with different types of people and what I taught myself was to learn people. What you can say to one person you may not say to another, not offend people by trying to speak appropriately. P 6

Participants are aware that being in the workplace influences one's behaviour and how they engage with other members of staff. Participants interestingly all presented themselves as the one who would have to adjust and accommodate to the other person, revealing that they are apologetic in nature.

4.2.3. Status and esteem

This theme describes the status and esteem issues that participants are faced with as they negotiate their work identities. These relate both to experiences at work and interactions with others in their communities.

a) Being seen

All participants reported a desire to be seen. Firstly, to be seen and recognized for the effort they put into their work. Participants would also like to be seen as human deserving of as much respect as other employees in other grades because they are part of making their jobs easier. Then, the work they do as cleaners is difficult work and there is a desire that it may be recognised for it in various ways. Participants recognise that their work makes a significant contribution to the functioning of the institution. This is evidenced by P 5 who reports her job to be important because it is helpful, it makes a difference and would like to be recognised for the work she does as this would encourage her to do more.

Participants felt that HR should provide them with the space to be able to share their issues and difficulties and assist them with solutions that would benefit both parties when it comes to wages and positions. P 5 reports that she would like to be seen as a person and not as lower class, to be acknowledged seems to be important to her and perhaps that is something lacking in her experience so far.

We want to be acknowledged as cleaners, and not be taken as lower class you see. We also want to be acknowledged without us they would not be here, actually everyone. We want to be seen as people too. P 5

Finally, participants would like to be seen by the students and treated with respect, as they would their parents. P3 reports that at times mistakes are made in the kitchen with the quantities of food and this means students may not receive what they want timeously. There is a genuine desire to be seen as humans who are capable of making such mistakes and be given compassion for such incidents.

b) Respect

Participants who work as cleaners report that students lack respect and they would like students to treat them with the same respect as they would their parents; because they too are parents and see the students as their children. This illustrates the collective relationships that they desire.

When you see a parent cleaning this bathroom, use another because they are still busy. I cannot go in while they are working, that is disrespectful it is and looks down on me P 4

Part of participants' job descriptions includes tasks that they felt students take advantage of, for example flushing toilets; and they experience them as disrespectful, through not being considerate of their roles as cleaners.

c) External Social influence

Participants report that there are mixed responses to their work and roles from members of their communities and family. Some people respond positively, and participants do not feel undermined, rather people will encourage them to seek opportunities now that they are working at the institution. P4 reports that she was undermined when she worked as a caregiver at an old age home and now that she works at Rhodes she does not experience being undermined. This illustrates their sense of gaining some status from being associated with the organisation's status.

I have not met anyone who has been shocked or is weird about it because any work you start at the bottom. My aunt usually says I should try and study and move up. P 4

I tell people I work at Rhodes at Housekeeping, at the rooms and the person will respond with a "Yhu!" people work hard there. P 5

I do not associate you with being a cleaner. I thought you would say maybe you are teaching. P 6

However, P5 experiences negative comments from the people she interacts with because of the laborious nature of the cleaning work is. The way others view P 6 is such that she is not seen as a

cleaner, this leaves her feeling discontent with her job. The perceptions of others whether good or bad appear to have a marked impact on how participants relate to their jobs.

4.2.4. Career mobility

In this theme, the role of career mobility in participants' constructions of work identities is discussed.

a) Hopes for future opportunities

Participants have a desire to access opportunities inside the institution because they are already in the system. Being a cleaner is not the end goal for most of the participants as they often apply for different positions and would like to study further in order to ensure their quality of life improves. It seems people in the Makhanda community see Rhodes as a place of status and opportunity from the response given to participants about their employer. There is a general assumption from those outside of Rhodes to believe that there are opportunities and upward mobility of careers is possible.

When I say I work at Rhodes there's no undermining much. They would just say you try getting other opportunities because at least at Rhodes there are those opportunities. P 5

At least my life is at a better place but it's not where I envisioned it but at least it's better at Rhodes. But I have not stopped looking for opportunities when they are developing here at the kitchens. P 3

My interest was that at least by the time I leave I would be in another position, but things did not go that way. P 6

This is however not always the case, as for P 6 who reveals that it brings her sadness to be in the same position she had started in when she started working as a cleaner. She had hoped she would work her way up to better positions. This reveals that even with the hope that one would be met with opportunities at Rhodes there are some cases where these hopes do not come to fruition and employees have to manage the emotions that come with that.

b) Education

Rhodes being an institution of higher education is also perceived as a place of educational opportunities to study further. P 3 has hopes that she can study further and work in a better position one day because she sees herself doing more with her life. The idea that further education will result in better positions is also something participants believe. These expectations are sometimes met as is the case for P 6 who was able to complete her Grade 12 at Rhodes when she joined the institution.

I am a person who has hope. P 3

My job has helped me learn things I did not know, at home for example there are chemicals you get to know this one works for certain things. P 6

Informal education from the skills one learns at work, is also an important aspect of what P 6 has gained from working in her position.

4.2.5. Role influences

This theme highlights the different roles participants use to negotiate their work identities in making sense of their current work role.

a) Mother role

Participants' roles as mothers is evident in how they approach their work and the students at the student residences. P 4 draws her identity of being a housekeeping cleaner from her role of being a mother, she emphasises this numerous times and with emphasis. Although she is a straightforward mother at home, she tries to contain herself at work because she does realise the workplace is not her house.

If students would treat their parents with respect they should do the same for them. P 4

I am a mother with an eye (observant). P 4

These things help me because I get to see different kinds of people and as a mother you must be available to nourish all children. P 5

Participants approach their work with care because they are influenced by their roles of being mothers which are typically characterised by care and nurture towards their children. The aspects of this job that require participants to clean up after students can be disgusting and make them feel bad about themselves however, P 4 says she does it because she is a mother to the students. P4 is also the one who is observant and is able to assess the needs of the students and provide them with the motherly affection they need. She has also become understanding of the pressures students face, which often cause them not to be present and do things that are out of the ordinary, for example pouring milk into soup because they are distracted. The job is approached as a mother therefore participants feel compassion for students like they would to their own in their attempts to get an education.

b) Confidant

Participants are able to listen to students' challenges and offer advice or support in the place of their mothers or trusted friends.

I am trustworthy, more especially to my children. P 6

P 6 reports that she listens and seemingly there is an ability to contain or counsel others as they find her to be a safe space to tell their secrets. Participants position themselves as people students and colleagues can confide in and this brings more meaning to their jobs.

c) Family responsibility

One of the participants shared that she has a young child for whom she would like to care at home, she is unable to do this because of the shifts she works, which are complicated and result in her

leaving work late. She would probably arrive at home quite late and not be able to be the parent she would like to be to her child.

The shifts here are complicated. Sometimes we work weekends and knock off late and there's no one at home. P1

P1's choice to work in Makhanda was influenced by family responsibility as she had to take care of her ill parent. This seems to be quite a strong influence in her choice of work with her attending to her family. Other participants also reflected on the fact that the shifts make it difficult for them to attend to their families, community engagements and rest.

d) Community members

Participants who have learnt skills from their roles have also made use of these skills outside of the workplace.

For example at church if we have a function, I usually volunteer myself to be on the housekeeping side so other would cater and I would choose housekeeping because I know the work. P 6

Being a cleaner has taught P 6 about different chemicals and how they work which has helped her contribute to her church community when she volunteers, as she is able to relay that information there. She is able to enrich her community with the skills and knowledge gathered from working in her position.

e) Job tasks

Participants were not disturbed by the fact that they have to clean toilets and bathrooms as that is, their job description. However, participants who are cleaners were quite disturbed by having to clean up after the unnecessary mess of students in toilets and bathrooms.

What I do not like is sometimes going to the bathrooms and when you get there the students have left a mess, their messes that they should have cleaned up because they know mama is here. P 6

Participants are very much aware of the difficulties of the work they do, be it lifting beds or the dirty aspect of cleaning toilets, however these tasks do not seem to deter them from doing their jobs.

f) Previous roles

Participants who had worked in similar roles such as a caregiver, as is the case for P4 before working as a cleaner, have gleaned from that experience which includes doing dirty work. She is now faced with similar tasks as she is expected to clean after the students. Participants who have had completely different jobs such as P 5, used their previous work experience as a security guard to define their roles as a cleaner in the residence. She also sees herself as a protector, who is able to recognise visitors or people who should not be in the residence.

I was nursing the elderly I am used to it, but there are times when you do not feel good and you know how nursing work is like, it is dirty. P 4

I am a protector here like a security P 5 When I was in sales I worked with people and now I am working with students. I treat them the same way. P 6

Working as a cleaner has the service to people aspect in common for P 6, with her previous job of a sales lady. She believes she treats students with the same care and respect she would her customers in sales, as she takes care of the students in a cleaning capacity.

4.2.6. Subjective wellbeing

This theme describes the different attitudes participants use to evaluate their work experiences due to the subjectiveness of their experiences, and how these influence their negotiation of work identities.

a) Glad to have a job

Half of the participants shared that they are grateful to have a job that provides financial stability because it is a permanent job that means they can fulfil their financial commitments. Having a job also means that they are doing something worthwhile and not being unproductive in the community.

I love my job (emphasizes I love my job). There is nothing I don't like. P 1

I was excited because I got a position and it was a permanent post. P 5

Participants reveal that they enjoy doing all aspects of their jobs and they are happy with what the jobs affords them. Employment is something all participants experienced challenges in attaining and this may be the main reason they are happy with the work that they do.

b) Pleasure derived from work role

Three of the participants report that they experience their work as pleasurable and they enjoy it. P 3 loves cooking and sees her work as a way in which she can express that, and this is the reason why she is interested in her work. P 4 reports that she loves her job and relates with her position or cleaning the same way she does in her own house, which she enjoys thoroughly and does with pride.

The way I am very interested in my work, yes you work at the kitchens, but I told myself I came here to do this job and I keep being interested in this job. P3

I do not do my job because I am being forced, I do not know if it's because I am a mother who enjoys cleaning her home. P4

If I am asked something, I will do it, that is the type of employee I am. I do not want to not do as I am expected. P 1

In contrast some participants do not derive any pleasure from the job, but perform job tasks as required; whether this is because the position they hold is not the one they had initially wanted or because they did not meet their career mobility goals.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter has explored and described the experiences and identity management strategies support staff use in constructing their identities. The results are presented according to the emerging themes. The findings suggest that support staff draw from wider experiences both previously and the current lives in community to supplement their work identities. The identity work that they do is thus illustrated by the ways in which they make meaning of their jobs, their status gained from being employed in the organisation, as well as their family and collective roles.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore how the experience of working as support staff has contributed to the formation of identity and self-concept of adults working at Rhodes University. The study makes use of people's stories in understanding how they make meaning of their work in relation to their senses of self. The following discussion is based on the findings that reveal what identity work strategies are used by support staff. IPA was the initially chosen tool of investigation, however after engaging with the data the researcher found that from the way participants were making sense of their experiences, it would be beneficial to include a narrative identity theoretical lens. The combination of Narrative Identity and IPA gives the study a rich perspective on work identity.

The participants in the study reflect a cross-section of people who occupy a certain level of the South African workplace as illustrated by Roodt and Jansen (2015). Participants in the current study speak the same language, they are from the same rural geographical area, thus sharing the history of having been less educated due to limited access to schooling. The participants were raised in the apartheid era, therefore they had limited access to education and job opportunities of a different kind. All the participants in the current study are women and mothers who often experience the tensions of managing the demands and pressures of motherhood while working. To negotiate their identities, they have had to develop strategies to manage these tensions and demands. Being able to provide for the family is one of the major advantages of being working mothers and thus the benefits outweigh any disadvantages that may exist (Gossayn, 2018).

5.2. Identity Work, Identity Work Strategies and Narrative Identity

The findings reveal that identity work strategies that participants use range from the context of the workplace to their private lives and form part of their personal and work identities. This supports the notion that lower status workers often draw from sources outside of the organisation to create work identity and adopt a boundaryless strategy in their constructions of identity (Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

This study revealed that identity work takes place on both an unconscious and conscious level, as it is a sense-making process through the stories participants told about their work experiences. In particular the stories about their previous positions and how they started working in their current positions show how they have constructed their identities in light of these experiences. Participants reported challenging experiences of job-seeking and working, as is often the case in a country such as South Africa with such a high unemployment rate. These stories require much psychological work and sense making according to McAdams (2008); accounting for the rich stories that have been collected. It was difficult for respondents to make sense of some of the questions related to the job's role in influencing them as people; and they were also puzzled by ideas of self-concept and identity; seemingly not having been exposed to such constructs. Conducting an IPA study led to the research findings speaking for the individuals; using these narratives to draw out the identity work strategies of the participants enabled both their voices to be heard and the recurrent themes across narratives to be identified.

5.3. Financial influences

The study found that the type of job that offers a permanent salary, a salary that is able to assist participants in fulfilling their financial responsibilities and be a provider has been a strong influence in how individuals see themselves as workers. The permanent appointment rather than a

temporary or contract role seemed to be important as a provider of greater security; in contrast to contexts where the sorts of work described in the findings have been contracted out (Horwitz, 2019). Participants referred to finances quite often when talking about their identities. In Lloyd et al. (2011) and the current study the findings reveal that being a breadwinner means that the job is a source of provision for the family and thus contributes to identity work.

5.4. Personality factors

Participants understand that they need to adjust their relational behaviour to accommodate the context of their workplaces and the people in their workplaces. It is understood that in the workplace people encounter different personalities, requiring adjustments in communication and approaches. Through negotiating relationships, participants find ways of resolving conflict because conflict is something that most would rather not engage in at work. The personality factors highlight that participants negotiate their relationships with the knowledge that personality dynamics have a potential of creating conflict if not managed well. The personality factors theme is supported by the relationship work strategy reported in Adams and Crafford (2011) that speaks of the effort people make in managing their relationships, adjusting relational behaviour to manage conflict. It is interesting that the participants themselves needed to make adjustments, rather than seeking that other people should adjust their attitudes, indicating a positioning of being less powerful and having to accommodate others.

5.5. Status and esteem

The theme job identification and workplace role in Lloyd et al. (2011) seems to be a combination of what has been evidenced as the “need to be seen” in the current study. The findings reveal that participants have a desire to be seen and acknowledged in their support staff jobs even though they are less prestigious than other grade jobs. Participants also believe that the work they

do is important and adds value to the institution and the lives of the students and this deserves acknowledgement. The need to be seen and acknowledged for work done is evidenced in the job identification theme in Lloyd et al. (2011) that states that employees believe their job adds value to the organisation and produces growth and rewards to them.

It is argued that jobs that hold a high social status are fortunate enough to benefit from high esteem socially that the job offers, while low status jobs do not. This makes it more difficult for support staff to develop and maintain a positive sense of occupational identity than colleagues in higher status roles that have the associated social status (Fuller & Unwin, 2017). This is also supported by Duemmler and Caprani (2017) who argue that support staff can feel pride, recognition, and satisfaction but struggle with societal perceptions of their work. The current study illustrates some of these features.

Ghidina (1992) argues that people in low status jobs found that there was a lack of respect when they treated the organisation as family, with the aim of being seen as human rather than from their low status position. The findings of this study agree with Ghidina when it comes to respect, research participants sought to be respected as parents by students: this can be considered as humanising the work of cleaning. This seems to be similar to the ways that the porters in the Fuller and Unwin (2017) study humanised their work as being caring. In support of the need to be seen is the finding that porters performed better when given positive feedback about their performance continuing to perform well leaving and them feeling proud of their achievements (Fuller & Unwin, 2017). Duemmler and Caprani (2017) state that individuals reframe their work by focusing on the desirable aspects of the work and the prestigious part of their job. In the case of the current study the participants focus on the contribution of their jobs to the students' wellbeing and to the organisation, adding to the status of working at Rhodes University.

Participants' evaluation of their work is positive and they desire to be acknowledged for their work and their performance as Stets and Burke (2009) assert. This will influence participants' self-esteem, making them feel good. SIT maintains that a positive social identity is a result of the positive evaluation the individual ascribes to the in-group thus, improving their own self esteem as they evaluate themselves that same (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Gathering an understanding of how individuals construct and express their identities at work would assist organisations to put in place human resource initiatives that would promote higher levels of performance (Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

The current study found that participants experienced dissatisfaction with working on weekends as this meant less time with their families and engaging in community events. Gossayn (2018) also found that women experience guilt when they could not spend time with their families, even though work was seen as a positive aspect of their lives. Therefore, finding a balance between motherhood and work is challenging, and negotiating this balance requires women to formulate strategies.

Working in an institution such as Rhodes has given the participants access to the status of the university, as many aspire to work or study in the institution and perceive it as a place of opportunity. The work that they do in the institution is something to be proud of as it contributes to the functioning of the organisation. Lloyd et al. (2011) refer to a workplace role theme where individuals identify with the organisation, the importance of their work roles, and the value they add to the organisation. The findings in this study show that participants believe they positively contribute to the institution. Participants identify with the students as their children and the work they do as contributing to the functioning of the institution, this may account for them taking on the status that the institution holds. Identification with the organisation is important in work

identity (Kirpal, 2004). Thus, the organisation influences how people perceives themselves and will influence their work identities.

5.6. Career mobility

From the findings it was evident that participants have hopes of advancing their careers once they are working in the institution. As postulated by Adams and Crafford (2011) the career mobility strategy speaks of individuals being somewhat unhappy with their work environment opportunities but also wanting to find alternatives that will facilitate the growth they desire. In the current study participants are not necessarily unhappy with their jobs, but do desire other positions in the institution that will offer further growth and development. Similarly, security guards in Horwitz (2019) shared the same desire to be employed in the School as it would mean better opportunities become attainable. Participants in this study enjoy and are happy with the work they have, however some have plans to get promotions and leave their current support staff jobs. According to Duemmler and Caprani (2017) this is a social mobility strategy that individuals use to make meaning of working in a low prestige job.

The advancement of the participants' careers is something they wish to attain through further studies as the institution is one of education. Pursuing further studies is a way of participants securing career advancement by upskilling themselves in order to apply for better positions in the institutions. As found in Adams and Crafford (2011), an education strategy is a way to direct one's career and offers individuals the option of directing their paths towards a desired end. Some of the skills and knowledge the participants have acquired from their jobs count as informal education that they have been able to use in their communities, adding to personal identity as the things learnt at work can never be unlearned. Adams and Crafford (2011) also state

that when people can integrate what they have learnt at work into the home life, it makes work more beneficial.

5.7. Role influences

Narrative identity integrates different social roles, values, attitudes and performance demands as life happens (McAdams, 2008), which is evidently so in the stories of the participants in this study. The manner in which some of the participants have negotiated their work identities in their roles has been influenced by previous roles that were either very different from the role they currently occupy, such as security officer or similar such as working in a café.

The findings of the study were interesting in that the idea of individual identity or self-concept was difficult to grapple with for the individuals and they described their identities by referring to their roles of being a mother, or a provider, with little or no reference to themselves as individuals. This can be accounted for by the notion that people from collectivist cultures are more likely to describe themselves in very specific and contextualized ways, so for example they experience relatedness with the students as an important part of themselves as cleaners (Eaton & Louw, 2000).

Participants referred to the students as their children, which assumes that they perceive a family context at the residences. The idea of treating the residence as a family may be a way of humanising the work, therefore participants were regarded as human rather than positioned by their low status positions (Ghidina, 1992). However, the participants in this study did not reveal that it was challenging for them to produce results because of this humanising aspect, rather that whatever disrespect they experienced was because students did not see them as mothers, as was the case in Ghidina (1992). Participants engage with their work in a caring manner, by referring to the students as their children and assuming the characteristics of motherhood that include care.

The way they approach their work evidently is relational and interactive, requiring the use of interpersonal skills to negotiate the relationships (Fuller & Unwin, 2017).

The findings about their sense of family responsibility also reflects a tension between work responsibility and that of family, because participants are happy to be working and are committed to the work, however the time they do not have to spend with their families or participate in community engagements leaves them to deal with possible discontentment. Adams and Crafford (2011) highlighted the interaction between home and work created tension between social identities, particularly in demanding jobs. Furthermore, social identities influence personal identities and vice versa, thus the negotiation of social identities is influenced by individuals' values, which contribute to their personal identities. The family strategy in Lloyd et al. (2011) highlights a different aspect to family responsibility, which is as a source of motivation. The participants' responsibilities to their families motivated them to work and find ways of dealing with the tensions, because they are the sole providers in their families.

To summarise, participants relating to students as mother figures is evidence of using personal identity to influence social identity; therefore supporting the notion that a work identity is mobilised by managing the tension between the job, personal identity, social identity, social practice and individual agency (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Support staff adapt a boundaryless strategy as they create a work identity by looking outside of the organisation into their roles of being mothers to construct a work identity (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). As participants negotiate identity, they also use the tactic of integration that merges occupational and personal identities (Kreiner et al., 2006). It is also evident from this study that it is important to consider the relationships people have with their work and the meanings they draw from their jobs because it gives us an understanding of what motivates people to do their jobs. Participants report enjoying

the relationships they have with students. Relationships with people at work can be seen as a benefit to the job as they are something to look forward to, as seen in Sefelafala (2012).

5.8. Subjective wellbeing

The findings reveal that participants report being happy to be able to earn money, providing for their families, supporting the provider strategy noted above. A pleasure in work theme supports the findings about the workplace role that speaks of the positive manner in which people see themselves, because the participants are able to see the results of their work that contributes to their identity (Lloyd et al, 2011). In Ghidina (1992), a sense of ownership towards the buildings individuals were responsible for was used as a strategy in identity work, which supports the idea that cleaning the residence like their own house as some participants revealed, helped them to derive pleasure in their work. Deriving joy and gratitude from work is a form of creating meaning from work, thus mobilising a narrative work identity (Adams & Crafford, 2011; McAdams, 2013).

For most of the participants in the study, their identities are closely related to their abilities to provide for their families. Being able to help with household commitments is an important part of how they construct their identities, and this translates to the gratitude they have in order to make this possible. Participants reiteration of being happy with their jobs, whether because it is a permanent job or because they had previously struggled to get employed, is evidence that life satisfaction is important in this context related to a regular income and that households will be taken care of (Møller, 2006). The view that individuals create social and psychological ways to tolerate their work and invent strategies to guard their self-concepts from the external inconsistencies is evidenced by the study (Ghidina, 1992).

Being glad to have a job is different from doing a job because the person is passionate about it however; having an income influences subjective wellbeing and being employed

significantly predicts individuals' satisfaction, which explains why participants are happy to have a job (Casale & Posel, 2010). Perhaps it is too demanding to expect individuals who have sought work for the primary purpose of providing for their families to engage in other forms of identity work on a conscious level.

Participants in this study report that they are happy to be working at the institution. This is because their jobs are permanent, they have better incomes compared to their previous jobs and they hold on to the hope of access to better positions and being upskilled; as is evidenced by the security guards who would prefer permanent employment at the School in Horwitz (2019).

According to McAdams (2008), the person's story accounts for the sameness and continuity that is reported, as they engage with different contexts and roles. Identity is negotiated by managing the tensions and demands that exist in a complex world (Saayman, & Crafford, 2011). The findings from this study have evidenced a two-way influence that work identity is influenced by personal identities and personal identity influenced by work identity. However, there seemed to be a stronger influence of personal identity in the construction of work identity.

Work means different things to different people and the identity work that occurs because of the different meanings attached to work is a reflection of this. Support staff will engage in challenging identity work like all employees because they have to find ways of defining their work that is not threatening to their self-esteem. The notion that people are what they do does not then necessarily apply when it comes to support staff. They are cleaners and kitchen attendants, however the way they have negotiated their work identities has been strongly influenced by other identities and structures in their lives. Simply put, participants in this study see themselves as cleaners and kitchen attendants who are mothers, providers, and confidants who happen to work as cleaners and kitchen attendants. The current study agrees with Duemmler and Caprani (2017),

as they argue that participants may find positive meaning in their work, however this depends on how they manage the low prestige attached to their job. Thus, the strategies individuals use to negotiate their work identities are key in understanding how support staff construct their identities, considering the complexities of the society in which we live.

Narrative identity integrates different social roles, values, attitudes and performance demands as life happens (McAdams, 2008), which is evidently so in the stories of the participants in this study. The manner in which some of the participants have negotiated their work identities in their roles has been influenced by previous roles that were either very different from the role they currently occupy, such as security officer or similar such as working in a café.

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the students as their children assuming the characteristics of motherhood that include care. The way they approach their work evidently is relational and interactive, requiring the use of interpersonal skills to negotiate the relationships (Fuller & Unwin, 2017).

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To summarise, participants relating to students as mother figures is evidence of using personal identity to influence social identity therefore supporting the notion that a work identity is mobilised by managing the tension between the job, personal identity, social identity, social practice and individual agency (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Support staff adapt a boundaryless strategy as they create a work identity by looking outside of the organisation into their roles of being mothers to construct a work identity (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). As participants negotiate identity, they also use the tactic of integration that merges occupational and personal identities (Kreiner et al., 2006). It is also evident from this study that it is important to consider the relationships people have with their work and the meanings they draw from their jobs, because it

gives us an understanding of what motivates people to do their jobs. Participants report enjoying the relationships they have with students. Relationships with people at work can be seen as a benefit to the job as they are something to look forward to, as seen in Sefelafala (2012).

5.9. Summary

The identity work of support staff is influenced by personal, work and other social identities. It is a constant negotiation of managing the tensions and demands that are required from modern day workers in a context of job scarcity and widespread unemployment. The strategies of support staff are not unique to them, however the stories of these people provide nuances to how they use the strategies of identity.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1.1 Summary of findings

The aim of the research was to explore how the experience of working in a support staff job has contributed to the formation of identity and self-concept of adults working at Rhodes University. Identity for the participants is understood as an abstract idea, revealing that identity work is as much an unconscious effort as it may be a conscious effort for people who are familiar with the ideas related to the construct.

The research has been conducted in a country that strongly reflects the socio-political context in its workplaces. Participants negotiate their identities by using the strategies that reflect this reality and the tensions between their personal and social identities. The themes that emerged from the data can be understood as identity work strategies that participants use to construct their identities at work. Their stories of their work experiences give insights to how they relate to their work and thus create a work identity.

The six influences that the study has found to contribute to the identity work of support staff mobilise both personal and social identities. The financial influences of identity work revealed that one of the major reasons why people work is to make a living and therefore constructing an identity from this understanding is valid. Personality factors revealed the complicated negotiation that occurs when people are involved relationally in negotiating their work identity, such as dealing with conflict and social hierarchy. Status and esteem influences reflect the need to be acknowledged for the good work participants do that adds to the success of the University as they identify themselves with a highly esteemed institution. Participants have hopes of advancing their careers and working in other positions: and it would seem that greater notice needs to be taken of these in the organisation. Role influences are concerned with

participants making use of other roles they have occupied or occupy from other social identities, to manage their work roles. Lastly, subjective wellbeing indicates that for these participants being able to provide for their families is an important aspect of being happy with their jobs.

What is evident in the study is that as people ascribe different meanings to their work, how they will define and negotiate their identities in the workplace is based on those meanings. Identity work appears to be a challenging task for all employees, regardless of their work grade because of the many tensions and demands modern society presents adults with. Identity work is indeed challenging for support staff because they use identity strategies that are enhancing to their esteem related to the relatively low status of their jobs. The findings reveal that participants made sense of the question "Who am I at work?" through stories of how they started work, how it is going on the job and future prospects. They therefore do not separate their sense of self from the broader influences in their lives.

6.2.2. Recommendations

- A summary document of the research will be made available to the Human Resource Division at Rhodes University, as research has found that organisations can use insights related to identity to better understand their organisations and workers.
- More research on work identity and identity work in South Africa (especially given the ways in which the nature of much work is influenced by low pay and few prospect for advancement) should be encouraged because of the unique South Africa context, as this will add value to the organisational understanding and workers' job experiences.

6.2.3. Limitations

The findings of this study are not a representation of the experiences of all support staff at Rhodes University or otherwise as they are based on a small sample, with the aim of gathering a

deeper understanding of the experiences of the sample. Therefore, the findings cannot be used to make generalisations about the population of support staff.

6.2.4. Reflexive Comments

The current study has taught me that the support staff who participated in this study take much pride in their work and approach it with much enthusiasm and commitment. I have learnt the connection that workers have with their place of employment, colleagues and students can have a deep impact in how they make meaning of their work experiences.

My motivation was to give a voice to the stories of support staff as they often have their uniforms or job descriptions announcing to the world who they are. I am one who greets and briefly chats with cleaners when I pass them however, I hardly have long conversations with them as I would with my other colleagues because they often have to clean the area and move to another section they are assigned to. This study has given me the opportunity to sit and ask support staff workers about their experiences and gather insights into their worlds that I may not know. From this study I have found that the experiences that support staff use to narrate their stories are rich and shape their identities in a way that would make a lasting impact on lives.

In terms of researcher bias, I would say because I am a woman like the participants, I did empathise with some of their stories. Although I am not a mother, I understood how they had assumed parenthood of the students at residences because in the amaXhosa culture, one is raised to address all elders as their own parent. I am a student as well and they may have perceived me as one of their children whom they want to succeed, perhaps that influenced their willingness to participate in the study. The study has been rewarding for me and hopefully for the participants by sharing their stories.

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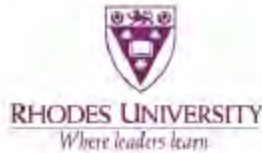
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Appendix A: Ethics approval



Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee
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e: s.marqele@ru.ac.za
NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045
<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>

10/03/2021

Thembela Zini

Email: g19z6175@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2020-1216-3433

Dear Prof Jacqueline Akhurst

Title: An interpretive analysis of the experiences of adults in lower grade jobs

Principal Investigator: Prof Jacqueline Akhurst

Collaborator: Ms Thembela Zini

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU-HEC). Your Approval number is: 2020-1216-3433

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloging number allocated.

Sincerely,

Prof Arthur Webb

Chair: Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee, RU-HEC

cc: Mr. Siyanda Marqele - Ethics Coordinator

Appendix B: Request to access research participants

To: Mrs S. Robertson

REQUEST TO ACCESS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Dear Mrs Robertson,

I am currently a student at Rhodes University doing my Master's in Counselling Psychology. As part of fulfilling the requirements of the master's programme I am required to do a research project.

The aim of my research is to gain an understanding and document the experiences of adults who are currently working as support staff (grades 1 – 5 jobs), with regards to how they construct their identities in relation to their work roles. I would like to kindly ask for your permission to:

- Approach staff members, via NEHAWU, to participate in the research
- To conduct interviews with the staff members, which should not be of longer than 1 hour's duration
- To do my interview sessions on the property of Rhodes University

In order for you to understand more about what I am trying to accomplish by conducting this research, my research proposal is attached.

Thank you.

Kind Regards,

Thembele Zini

083 2474 158

mstzini@gmail.com

Supervisor's information:

Prof. Jacqueline Akhurst

J.Akhurst@ru.ac.za

Professor in the Psychology department

Appendix C: Letter of approval from HR



Human Resources Division
Office of the HR Director
Administration Building, Grahamstown, 6139, South Africa
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140,
South Africa
t +27 (0) 46 603 8792
f +27 (0) 46 603 8046

23 April 2020

Thembela Zini
Psychology
RHODES UNIVERSITY

Dear Thembela

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH RHODES UNIVERSITY STAFF AND/OR STUDENTS

This letter is to confirm that your request to conduct research on "*An interpretive analysis of the experience of adults in lower-grade jobs.*" topic has been approved by the Ethics Committee. In my capacity as Acting HR Director, I do not have any objection should you wish to follow a coordinated approach by surveying and/or interviewing staff.

Yours sincerely



Mrs S Robertson
Acting HR Director

Appendix D: Letter requesting assistance with participant recruitment advert for research

To: Mr. T Boma (Chairperson of NEHAWU, Rhodes University branch)

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE WITH PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT ADVERT FOR RESEARCH

Dear: Mr. T Boma

I am currently a student at Rhodes University doing Master's in Counselling Psychology. As part of the programme I am required to complete a research paper. The main aim of my research is to explore themes with regards to identity and self-concept that adults have acquired from their involvement in support staff (grades 1 -5 jobs). The research seeks to document the experiences of such workers and their constructions of the meanings they make of their work.

I hereby request assistance from you to advertise this research via your email list of your members. A draft of the email to workers is attached on the next page.

To enable you to understand more about what I am trying to accomplish by conducting this research, my research proposal is attached.

Thank you.

Kind Regards,

Thembele Zini

083 2474 158

mstzini@gmail.com

Supervisor's information

Prof. Jacqueline Akhurst

J.Akhurst@ru.ac.za

Professor in the Psychology department

Appendix E: Information letter

Information letter regarding the research: An interpretive analysis of the experiences of adults working as support staff at a university

I am Thembela Zini, student at Rhodes University from the Department of Psychology. I would like you to take part in a research project I will be conducting. The purpose of the research project is to explore the experiences you have had as an employee in a support staff job and how these experiences have contributed to your sense of self and well-being. Your participation in the research will be one semi-structured interview with myself, Thembela Zini for about 45 – 60 minutes.

Your participation is voluntary and you will be given the freedom to withdraw from the research if you chose to. All identifying information that comes up during the interviews will not be used or made available to anyone. This is to ensure confidentiality is maintained. There will be no monetary or any other benefit from the study since this is a research for study purposes. However, a summary of the findings will be submitted to HR (without any identifying details), so you will be contributing to their learning more about your experiences. I trust that you will consider taking part in the research and would like you to contact me either by email or phone. I would be happy to phone you back, if you whatsapp me. We will conduct the interview at a mutually acceptable time; in a room in the Psychology Department. Should you have any questions regarding the research please do not hesitate to contact me. Please let me know if you would like the above description translated in isiXhosa.

Contact details:

Thembela Zini

Phone number: 083 2474158

Email: mstzini@gmail.com

Appendix F: Informed Consent

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(Participant)

Project Title: An interpretive analysis of the experiences of adults working as support staff in a university

Thembele Zini from the Department of Psychology, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to explore the experiences of individuals who are employed in support staff jobs and how these experiences have contributed to their identity and self - concept.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen my request to see the clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing towards an understanding of how individuals who have support staff jobs interpret their experiences with regards to their identity and self-concept.
4. I will participate in the project by sharing the experiences in the form of answering interview questions.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research.
7. There may be risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that
 - a. the following risks are associated with my participation: Sharing these experiences may result in me reliving some of the experiences, while some of them may provoke positive emotions, some may evoke emotions of distress.

- b. the following steps have been taken to mitigate the risks: Referral to Human Resource Wellness division for any counselling needs that may arise as a result of participating in the research.
- 8. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of her thesis and a summary report to be shared with HR and NEHAWU. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in supervising the research.
- 9. I will receive feedback in the form of a summary report that will be shared with HR and NEHAWU regarding the results obtained during the study.
- 10. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by Prof. Jacqueline Akhurst (supervisor on project).
- 11. By signing this informed consent declaration I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
- 12. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.
- 13. I will be requested for a voice recording for this study to be done

I, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

.....
Participants signature Witness Date

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics
 Ethics Coordinator: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za
 t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707
 Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

Appendix G: Letter to Line Managers requesting the use of office hours

PERMISSION TO USE OFFICE HOURS TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

To whom it may concern,

I am currently a student at Rhodes University doing Master's in Counselling Psychology. As part of the programme I am required to complete a research paper. The main aim of my research is to explore themes with regards to identity and self-concept that adults have acquired from their involvement in support staff (grades 1 -5 jobs). The research seeks to document the experiences of such workers and their constructions of the meanings they make of their work.

I hereby request that you consent to allowing (Insert name of participant) 1 hour 15 minutes off her duties on the (Insert date & time) in order to participate in the above-mentioned research.

Kind Regards,

Thembele Zini

083 2474 158

mst.zini@gmail.com

Supervisor's information

Prof. Jacqueline Akhurst

J.Akhurst@ru.ac.za

Professor in the Psychology department

Appendix H: Interview questions

Interview Questions

- Can you tell me about yourself briefly (age, family background, education)?
- Tell me about your journey of job hunting?
- When did you start working?
- Is this your first job? If not have you worked a similar job?
- How did you feel when you got this job? What did it mean to you getting this job?
- Has this feeling or what it meant to you changed?
- How would you describe yourself, who are you?
- Can you tell me how your job has helped you become the person you are today?
- How would you describe yourself as a worker?
- Would you say this is the same person you are off duty if not what changes?
- Is there any part of your job that makes you see yourself in anyway different from who you see yourself as?
- How would you say your job has influenced the way you have constructed your identity and self-concept?