WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDINGS AND EXPERIENCES OF EMPOWERMENT IN AN ORGANISATION: A QUALITATIVE FEMINIST APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study explores women's understandings and experiences of empowerment so that they could empower themselves by using their own knowledge to see through factors that serve to disempower them. At a time when empowerment and its future is under intense discussion in South Africa, it seems wise to move away from quantitative studies which do not facilitate the development of comprehensive theory in industrial psychology. This study provides a qualitative feminist analysis of women's understandings and experiences of empowerment in an organisation. Written protocols, interviews and a workshop were used as data collection tools and seven women from one organisation participated in the study. The research revealed that women understand and experience empowerment in a number of ways. These understandings and experiences are affected by various factors: organisational factors; personal characteristics and abilities; their relationship with others at work and at home; and societal factors such as double standards for men and women and role expectations. The breadth and scope of the results imply that any attempt to empower women should include relational, motivational and feminist perspectives on power and empowerment. In addition, the results indicate that providing a space in which the women could explore the network of disempowering practices in their lives, was empowering for the women. Through the process of the research, the participants' understandings of empowerment evolved from viewing empowerment as something that is predominantly external (for example, influenced by others and organisational factors) to something that is internal (for example, influenced by motivational factors). This study cautions against seeing empowerment as something that is solely internal because by doing so women are placing the responsibility of empowerment upon themselves thus setting themselves up for failure. However, through the process of seeing empowerment as internal, the women were able to move towards a feminist understanding of empowerment in which not only is empowerment external ("out there") or internal ("within") but includes acknowledging one's own responsibility in empowerment as well as external societal factors that serve to hamper women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We had the experience but missed the meaning,

And approach to the meaning restores the experience

In a different form.

(T.S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages*, 1941)

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INTRODUCTION

Empowerment in organisations has been the focus of increasing attention in Industrial Psychology literature and especially in managerial practice during the last decade (Chiles & Zorn, 1995). Due to the rapid transformation taking place in South Africa, organisations are increasingly concerned with how they can encourage empowerment amongst their employees. Women and Black[1] people in particular, are becoming the focus of empowerment interventions given the proliferation of affirmative action programmes. However, to date many affirmative action programmes have failed to produce significant change by increasing the presence of women in management (Still, 1993). This is because many affirmative action programmes rest on an assumption that women have a skill deficit. Thus it is believed that training women in skills traditionally exercised by men will help address the imbalances between the sexes. This has continued to perpetuate the masculine as a norm against which women are negatively judged and has tended to individualise and often psychologise women's absences and silences in management (Treleaven, 1994).

The failure of many affirmative action programmes to produce significant changes by increasing the presence of women in management (Still, 1993) means that affirmative action programmes have been directed towards developing the competencies of the individual woman and have often assumed she needs to overcome psychological traits which are undesirable in positions of responsibility and decision-making. Traditional masculine psychological characteristics (for example, competitiveness, aggression, rationality) are given privilege over those attributed to the feminine (for example, cooperation, nurturance, intuition). These gendered polarisations have produced a web of systemic practices and normative values which permeate organisations (Burton, 1991 and Blackmore, 1992, cited in Treleaven, 1994). Treleaven (1994) argues that the systemic effects of gendered practices are evidenced at the individual level where women are alienated from the organisational culture and at the organisational level where there is an absence of women in leadership positions.

In terms of the employment and Occupational Equity Bill, `Black' people refer to Indian, Coloured and African people.

Women in organisations often doubt their intellectual competence and frequently feel alienated in organisations (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). Women have tended to view their education and career as peripheral to their central interests and development. Women have more difficulty than men in asserting their authority or considering themselves as authoritarian; in expressing themselves in public so that others will listen; in gaining the respect of others for their minds and ideas; and in fully utilising their capabilities and training in the world of work. In addition, women frequently feel unheard even when they believe they have something important to say (Belenkey et al., 1986). These attitudes evidenced at the organisational level are a reflection of wider societal issues. History dictates that through all societies the patriarchal ideology based on the superior position of men pervades all aspects of life. "It is a common belief that women are generally associated with certain so-called natural abilities and that they perform efficiently in those roles related to domesticity" (Naidoo, 1997, p.30).

Naidoo (1997) goes on to argue that this has resulted in division of labour in South Africa being based on these stereotypic gender roles. Challenging tasks such as management positions are not easily available to women (Naidoo, 1997). Frequently, jobs undertaken by women are arguably extensions of work undertaken in the household unit. She goes on to note that this is reflective from the available statistics: "Women constitute approximately 54% of the population and 2/5 of the paid workforce, that is 39.4%. Although they account for 39.4% of the workforce, they account for 68.4% of all service sector employees and more than half of all clerical and sales positions" (Naidoo, 1997, p.30). Women also occupy a significant majority of `pink collar jobs'. These include nurses, occupational and radiotherapists, social workers, hairdressers, teachers and domestic workers. Furthermore, women are greatly underrepresented in the following occupations: artisans and apprentices, communication and related occupations, engineers, judges/magistrates and metal and engineering industrial workers. In addition, women represent less than 1% of board members in the corporate world in South Africa (Naidoo, 1997).

Disparities between males and females in organisations also exist in the area of responsibility and remuneration. Naidoo (1997) notes that male managers were found to have twice as many subordinates as their female counterparts. In addition, for every male earning less than R60 000 per annum, there are eight females and twice as many men

earn more than R100 000 per annum than women. Young, Samarasinghe and Kusterer (1993) reveal how women's disadvantage in earnings and working conditions are exacerbated by other variables in their lives. They have limited access to various resources and under the pressures of societal change, traditional community support systems are disintegrating. However, Blumberg (cited in Young et al., 1993) argues that as women's income increases, so control over their lives increases, self-esteem is increased, the level of decision making in the home increases and they are better able to educate their daughters. If women are involved in participation and planning processes, their confidence in the system is increased and they become less dependent on fathers and husbands for economic survival.

As well as having to deal with inequity between men and women in organisations, Naidoo (1997) notes that a further feature of South African women in organisations is that they enter the job market under different conditions: by virtue of their membership of a particular racial group and with different levels of education and job training. "A vast difference exists between black and white women. Gender inequality in the corporate world takes a specific apartheid-related character; there is inequality within inequality, or put in another way some are more unequal than others" (Naidoo, 1997, p.31). Women do not constitute a homogenous group but their subordination remains linked to their race and class differences. White women generally have access to higher status and better paid jobs whilst black women are over-represented in low sector jobs with limited prospects for growth or promotion. It must however be acknowledged that while both black women and white women are confronted with the `glass ceiling' phenomenon, white women are more limited than their white male counterparts. "Black women in comparison to white women have thus suffered from many disabilities, some of which are common to white women and some specific to them. Although they were oppressed as blacks, they face the double oppression of being black women workers" (Naidoo, 1997, p.32). Black and white women share the experience of national oppression, the burdens of inequality and sexist behaviour and economic subordination. "It must thus be acknowledged that the historic, social and economic inequalities will mean that women by virtue of their race groups will start in different places and require differential treatment to attain equality of opportunity and result" (Naidoo, 1997, p.32).

However, because of these historical, social and economic inequalities, issues on gender in South Africa need to address both the universal issues affecting women as well as the specific forms that apartheid has given to gender domination in South Africa. International experience has shown that the separation of race and gender only serve to marginalise black women in favour of black men and white women. Nonetheless, specific gender-related plans of action need to be established in order to erode the structures and behaviour patterns created by centuries of discrimination against women. Naidoo (1997) argues that organisations need to be as committed as possible in order to harness their human resource potential effectively. This would involve employing women into significant decision-making, meaningful positions in the organisation and ensuring that all women in the organisation experience empowerment.

In South Africa, equality on the basis of race and gender is already receiving considerable attention under the new constitutional dispensation. "The dual recognition of race and gender in the Constitution accepts that inequality and discrimination in South Africa has been based on both race and gender, and not race or gender" (Naidoo, 1997, p.33). The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) has prioritised the plight of women in terms of their disempowerment in relation to employment. Furthermore, an office has been established in the President's office to deal with the improvement of the status of women (Naidoo, 1997). The primary goal of this office is to ensure that gender concerns are integrated into all aspects of departmental work.

While government has championed the cause of women, its imagination has not been entirely captured. Definitions of empowerment and what the government hopes to achieve are still vague or non-existent. Furthermore, it is still strongly argued that women should adopt male qualities, such as assertion, in organisations that disregard them in their formal structures. The office of the Public Service and Administration has committed itself to a number of programmes designed to change the status of women in South Africa (Naidoo, 1997). Firstly, they are committed to ensuring that within four years at least 30% of senior and middle management recruits in government departments will be women. Secondly, they are committed to developing a culture that respects and promotes gender equality. They envision this programme as running over two years and including training trainers to become gender sensitive, developing gender sensitive training materials and establishing accelerated development programmes for women.

Thirdly, over the next two years they envision establishing support programmes for women with the aim of opening up training and advancement opportunities for women. Once again, this seems to indicate that women's silences and absences in management are due to a skill deficit and not to patriarchal formal structures.

Fourthly, they want to repeal all discriminatory rules and practices. Fifthly, they want to take positive action to improve employment opportunities for women over the next ten years. Finally, during the course of the next year they wish to establish a central database to further gender research and identify employment practices in need of improvement. Government departments are thus making impressive plans for working towards gender equality at the community level by putting programmes in place which support and advance the status of women (Naidoo, 1997) but seem to be ignoring the fact that women should be valued as women and not as women who have male qualities, in order to be empowered.

Furthermore, a Commission for Gender Equality has also been established. The main aims of this Commission are: "to give teeth and muscle to combat discrimination and abuse against women" (Naidoo, 1997, p.35); to ensure that women's issues remain on the agenda; to ensure that the rights of women will be respected and implemented; to monitor and review policies and practices relating to women at all levels; to develop educational and informational programmes on gender equality; to review all legislation regarding gender equality; and to investigate any gender related issues.

Even with a number of government programmes in place, the effects of centuries of oppression has taken its toll on women and the chain of cognitive consequences that disempowerment triggers need to be explored. The potential of women in South Africa has only just begun to be recognised. It is important to realise that women's oppression as a social injustice must be overcome, that it is necessary for women to organise themselves in order to overcome oppression and that the struggle for gender equality is part of the struggle for overall change in South Africa and not a contradiction of it (Naidoo, 1997). Women need to be more active in the formulation of their demands and empowerment should mean that women have a choice in what they want to do.

In the past, empowerment has tended to be discussed either from a management perspective with an emphasis on empowerment as a relational construct or from a psychological perspective with an emphasis on empowerment as a motivational construct. The former looks at organisational factors which serve to disempower employees while the latter looks at how empowerment comes from within the individual with an emphasis on social psychological theories such as Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy, stress and coping literature, social support theories and learned helplessness theory. In addition, it will be argued that there is a third perspective, namely empowerment from a feminist perspective. Feminist literature considers power-for and power-with as alternatives to power-over.

Conger and Kanunga (1988) note that understandings of empowerment as a construct are limited and often confusing. Empowerment as a construct has not received the same analytical treatment from scholars as the construct of power (or control). Too often, management scholars have assumed that empowerment is the same as delegating authority or sharing power with subordinates and hence, that the construct requires no further conceptual analysis beyond the power concept (Conger & Kanunga, 1988). It does not adequately address how empowerment is experienced by women and raises important questions. For example, does power sharing automatically empower women, what psychological mechanisms are at play in fostering empowerment, are power sharing techniques and participation techniques the only way in which women can experience empowerment and are the effects the same?

This failure to reflect women's experiences of empowerment is evident in the research on empowerment which has been a field, ironically, largely documented by men. In order to give women voice, an emancipatory social research calls for empowering approaches to research where the researcher and the researched collaborate and negotiate meaning. By broadening women's knowledge of empowerment, women are able to critically reflect on the ways in which they experience empowerment or disempowerment. Lather (1991) argues that research conducted in an interactive, dialogical manner serves to foster a sense of collaboration, provides the potential for deeper probing and a reciprocally educative encounter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will look at how an innovative form of empowerment awareness can begin to address the challenges faced by women in organisations by looking at how women in organisations understand and experience empowerment. This chapter will begin with an overview of understandings of empowerment (relational, motivational, and feminist) with specific reference to women in organisations and finally, this chapter will look at developing critical, empowering approaches to method and the study of empowerment.

2.1 UNDERSTANDINGS OF EMPOWERMENT: RELATIONAL, MOTIVATIONAL AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

One of the goals of this research was to investigate how women understand empowerment and how they experience empowerment in light of these understandings. From the above, we can see that women face unique challenges at the organisational, societal and individual levels by virtue of their gender. There are also various ways of looking at empowerment and various different frameworks have been developed in order to understand empowerment in organisations. Although there is still a lack of consensus as to how the concept should be defined and operationalised, all the theories and frameworks seem to share an emphasis on the construct of power. It is how power is understood and instilled in people that is debated. Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that in order to critically examine the notion of empowerment, the constructs of power and control must be considered. "The construct of empowerment offers a heuristic framework for exploring the dynamics and perceptions of power, how power can be shared, and important communicative processes in the workplace" (Chiles & Zorn, 1995, p.22). Because the construct of power has been widely researched and is considered central to the study of empowerment, issues of power will be pivotal to this research. Conger and Kanunga (1988) note that in order to critically examine the notion of empowerment, the root constructs of power from which empowerment is derived, must be carefully considered.

Academic discussions of power have emphasised the multidimensionality of power. However, according to most definitions, interpersonal or social power is the ability of an individual to affect the behaviour of another (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). Grossman and Stewart (1990) argue that power roles legitimate such relational concepts of power by conferring the right and responsibility of power on individuals who are already powerful. Power may take many forms and may be informal or formal, sanctioned or unsanctioned, physical or symbolic, direct or covert, interpersonal or organisational, and the like. Grossman and Stewart (1990) note that discussions of the inner experience of power tend to emphasise the sensation of strength and domination. This rather narrow conceptualisation of the connection between strength and power serves to highlight the incompatibility of women and power because traditional definitions of femininity so often include weakness, helplessness and vulnerability. In addition, Grossman and Stewart (1990) note that the powerful woman is often the victim of negative stereotypes. Power is however, viewed as acceptable for women where the power is related to motherhood. Furthermore, the goal of motherhood is ultimately to relinquish power as the children reach adulthood. Thus, a woman's role is to empower others and in so doing, give others power. As the saying goes, "a mother is not a person to lean on, but a person to make leaning unnecessary".

As noted earlier, careers in which women have tended to occupy high status positions have been in the helping professions. Grossman and Stewart (1990) argue that this reality is perhaps because these types of careers are defined in terms of circumscribed power. Their goal, like motherhood, is to relinquish power over others and in so doing empower them. In short, the power of women is defined, delimited and prescribed, and power of this nature does not have the empowering quality or personal aggrandisement of other, more masculine, powerful occupations.

Empowerment has been used by social scientists to explore issues of powerlessness amongst minority groups such as women, blacks and the disabled. Rappaport (cited in Zimmerman, 1995) conceptualised empowerment as a process whereby people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them. Empowerment is therefore seen as an enabling process. Enabling implies creating

conditions for heightened motivation for task accomplishment through the development of a strong sense of personal efficacy. It will be argued that empowerment is not something done "to" or "for" someone (although it helps) but rather a process which women undertake for themselves. This definition recognises that although empowerment involves the removal of external factors of powerlessness, it also recognises that empowerment is initiated by the individual and that these two factors interact to create empowered outcomes. In addition, it will be argued that empowerment requires a critique of the dominant ideology.

Hartline and Ferrell (1996) note that although the effects of empowerment have not been empirically verified, studies that have examined similar constructs provide evidence of empowerment's positive influence on task autonomy and decision making latitude. Chiles and Zorn (1995) suggest that empowerment can be seen as a manifestation of management efforts to enhance employee commitment and productivity by encouraging participation and involvement in organisational decisions. Empowerment can be viewed as a solution for enhancing corporate competitiveness as well as a means of creating more humane organisations within a particular context. Bowen and Lawler (cited in Hartline & Ferrell, 1996) suggest that empowered employees feel better about their jobs and are more enthusiastic about carrying out tasks. Conger and Kanunga (1988) assert that there has been a growing interest in the concept of empowerment and management practices amongst researchers and practitioners. They argue that this interest is due to several factors. Firstly, leadership studies and management skills indicate that empowerment is a chief component in managerial and organisational effectiveness. Secondly, studies on power and control within organisations reveal that individual productivity and effectiveness develop with a sharing of power. Thirdly, empowerment techniques have been found to play an important role in team building, group development and maintenance. However, even with the focus in organisations moving towards empowerment, there is still a paucity of research on empowerment (Chiles & Zorn, 1995).

Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that the literature on empowerment can essentially be understood in two different ways. These two broad perspectives offer conceptualisations of empowerment that will be discussed as well as integrated with

other literature on empowerment in order to gain a holistic understanding of empowerment and its interactional nature. Firstly, empowerment can be viewed as a relational construct and secondly, empowerment can be viewed as a motivational construct. Empowerment as a motivational construct is derived largely from psychological research whereas empowerment as a relational construct is derived largely from research into management perspectives. In addition, it will be argued that empowerment can be discussed from a feminist perspective. A feminist perspective on empowerment includes considerations of how women construct themselves, a critique of the dominant ideology and the manner in which this ideology structures power relations and constructs in the first instance. While the relational and motivational perspectives on empowerment discuss power in organisations in terms of a hierarchical pecking order and struggle for power, as power-over, more feminist literature considers power-for and power-within as alternatives. The three perspectives on empowerment to be reviewed are therefore: empowerment as a relational construct, empowerment as a motivational construct and empowerment from a feminist perspective.

2.1.1 EMPOWERMENT AS A RELATIONAL CONSTRUCT

When empowerment is viewed as a relational construct, power is seen primarily as a relational concept used to describe the perceived power or control that an individual has in relation to others. Power is therefore seen as a function of the dependence and or interdependence of individuals (Blau cited in Conger & Kanunga, 1988). In addition, power is viewed as arising when an individual or group's performance outcomes are contingent on what others do and how they respond and not simply on their own behaviour. Power is therefore viewed as the influence one has over another. The relative power of an individual over another is a product of the dependence of the individual on another. For example, Hartline and Ferrell (1996) operationalise empowerment as the extent to which managers allow employees to use their own initiative and judgement in performing their jobs. Empowerment, in this sense, refers to a situation in which the manager gives employees the discretion to make day to day decisions about their job-related activities. By allowing employees to make these decisions, the organisation relinquishes power over many aspects of the employee's job thereby empowering their employees.

As a relational construct, power can be understood at two interactive levels: the organisational and interpersonal levels. At the organisational level, the primary sources of power are derived from an individual's ability to provide some performance or resource that is valued by the organisation or an individual's ability to solve, or cope with some organisational problem. This power is linked to the individual's status, position, responsibility, managerial style or expert knowledge. When empowerment is viewed as relational, organisations have focused on the development of strategies of power sharing and the reallocation of resources in an attempt to increase the power of individuals with very little and decrease the power of more powerful individuals. As a result, organisations have invested large amounts of money on participative management techniques such as quality circles, management by objectives and goal setting by objectives (Conger & Kanunga, 1988).

At the interpersonal level, an individual or group's primary source of power is arguably derived from their structural position in the organisation; the personal characteristics of the individual (for example, referent power); the level of expertise

held by the individual; and the opportunity that the individual has to access specialised knowledge or information. Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that depending on what resources the individual controls, their level of power can be construed as legal (their position in the organisation), coercive (control of punishment), normative (control of symbolic rewards) or expertise (control of information). Implicit in these assumptions are that individuals or groups in the organisation who have power are more likely to achieve desired outcomes than those that do not.

Empowerment as a relational construct therefore involves the process whereby a leader or manager shares his or her power with subordinates (Conger & Kanunga, 1988). The emphasis is therefore on the notion of authority sharing. Burke (1986, p.51) would concur with this, when he writes: "to empower, implies the granting of power – delegation of authority". In addition, empowerment as a relational construct is viewed as a process which is external to the individual and influenced by the organisation. Empowerment in this sense is viewed as a one way process which flows from organisation to employee and where managers confer empowerment upon employees. Conger and Kanunga (1988) assert that this treatment of empowerment from a relational perspective has resulted in organisations simply equating employee participation with empowerment.

Miller (cited in Grossman & Stewart, 1990) found that women experienced power as inherently relational. That is, power is experienced by women within the context of human relationships and comprises significant dimensions. Because relationships endure over time, power relationships were found to shift and change over time. Power was therefore found to be dynamic, more processual than static or definitional. In addition, because power is viewed as one aspect of human relationships, it is closely linked to women's experience of themselves as social beings and thus, closely linked to one's sense of identity.

Because power is viewed in these writings as linked to women's emotional connections with other people, it has the ability to evoke anxiety, ambivalence and conflict. However, these writings neglect to consider how much women's anxieties as power holders is derived from relational issues and how much from other issues such

as a fear of loss of power which is a traditional male concern. Another shortcoming of these writings is that if power is so closely linked to anxiety, how can women possibly enjoy power with the risk of loss of identity. This view is too simplistic. Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that this approach is fundamentally flawed and that the contexts appropriate for fostering empowerment and the actual management practice that enhance empowerment have been neglected. It does not adequately address how empowerment is experienced by employees and raises important questions.

It is therefore necessary to look at the psychological literature on empowerment which views empowerment as a motivational construct. Power and control are viewed here as motivators that are internal to the individual. Several psychologists have dealt with the issues of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), social support (Argyle, 1989) and learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale,1978) which provide evidence to show how individuals can experience a sense of empowerment and mastery over their environment.

2.1.2 EMPOWERMENT AS A MOTIVATIONAL CONSTRUCT

Empowerment as a motivational construct asserts that power and control are motivating belief states that are internal to the individual. This suggests that individuals' power needs are met when they perceive that they have power over a certain situation and believe that they have the capabilities to adequately cope with the situation. Alternatively, individuals' power needs are frustrated when they feel unable to cope or experience a sense of powerlessness. Power as a motivational construct thus refers to an individual's need for self determination, or a belief in personal self-efficacy. From a motivational perspective, power has its roots within an individual's motivational disposition and any technique that strengthens this self determination need or self-efficacy belief will make them feel more powerful (Conger & Kanunga, 1988). Thus it is argued that power sharing is not a sufficient condition for empowerment. Rather, psychological theories need to be explored.

From a motivational perspective, empowerment can be understood in terms of four psychosocial theories. Empowerment will be discussed in terms of Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy, stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), social support theory (Argyle, 1989) and learned helplessness theory (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978). In addition, it will be demonstrated how the construct of self-efficacy, effective coping strategies, effective social support structures and the elimination of learned helplessness can increase empowerment.

2.1.2.1 EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-EFFICACY

Perceived self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs in his/her capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources and take the action needed to meet given situational demands (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is not concerned with the actual skills one has but rather what an individual can (or thinks they can) do with whatever skills s/he possesses. Self-efficacy is therefore, behaviour specific because it emphasises the use of specific types of performance and cognitive strategies in specific situations.

Hartline and Ferrell (1996) note that one of the primary outcomes of empowerment is increased employee self-efficacy. As employees gain more power over how their jobs

are performed, their levels of self-efficacy may increase because they decide the best way to perform a given task. Similarly, empowered employees are likely to be more adaptive because of the increased flexibility that accompanies empowerment. Therefore, empowerment should have a positive influence on the attitudinal and behavioural responses of employees. The increased discretion and flexibility experienced by empowered employees make them feel better about their jobs, reduces the stress they experience in performing their jobs, increases their confidence in performing job-related tasks and increases their ability to adapt to changes in their work environment.

Previous research suggests that self-efficacy has positive influences on job satisfaction and adaptability (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). McDonald and Siegall (cited in Hartline & Ferrell, 1996) found a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and job satisfaction. They argue that the feelings of competence and confidence that accompany self-efficacy make the job more enjoyable. Increased competence and confidence should also increase employee adaptability as employees should be more willing to adapt to various work place situations.

Empowerment as a motivational construct refers to "a process whereby an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced" (Conger & Kanunga, 1988, p.474). Empowerment involves the strengthening of beliefs of self-efficacy or weakening beliefs of powerlessness. Conger and Kanunga (1988) note that personal efficacy stems from internal need states such as the intrinsic need for self determination, the need for power and the need for self-actualization. However, Conger and Kanunga (1988) adopt a need theory approach to explain the phenomenon of empowerment. They agree that everyone has an internal need for self-determination and control but that differences in the strength of these needs among individuals can be explained by examining the underlying motivational process.

Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that the successful completion of a given task depends on two types of expectations. Firstly, that effort will result in the desired level of performance and secondly, that performance will result in desired outcomes. Understood in terms of Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy, the first expectation refers to the self-efficacy expectation and the latter as the outcome expectation.

"When individuals are empowered, their personal efficacy expectations are strengthened. However, their outcome expectations are not necessarily affected" (Conger & Kanunga, 1988, p.476). For example, if we accept that empowering means enabling individuals, then it implies that we need to raise women's convictions about their own effectiveness rather than raise their hopes about desired outcomes. Even if women fail to achieve desired outcomes, they can still feel empowered if they have a strong efficacy belief.

Self-efficacy theory posits that one's task motivation is contingent on beliefs about one's ability to perform a specific task (Bandura, 1986). The more one believes they have the ability to perform a task successfully, the more likely one is to be motivated to attempt it. Developing self-efficacy is therefore seen as increasing empowerment. Bandura (1997, p.477) is quite scathing of the term empowerment and argues that empowerment and self efficacy are one and the same:

> There is much talk of "empowerment" as the vehicle for bettering personal lives. This is a badly misused construct that has become heavily infused with promotional hype, naïve grandiosity, and virtually every brand of political rhetoric. "Empowerment" is not something bestowed through edict. It is gained through the development of personal efficacy that enables people to take advantage of opportunities and to remove environmental constraints guarded by those whose interests are served by them.

Bandura (1986) suggests that four factors influence self-efficacy: enactive attainment, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. Enactive attainment refers to an individual's genuine mastery of a task related to his or her job. When employees are given complex or challenging tasks to perform, they are given the opportunity to test their efficacy. Initial experiences of success instil in the individual a sense of ability and the individual therefore, feels more empowered. Enactive attainment is therefore, the experience of mastery of a task that creates a feeling of confidence in the employee.

Vicarious experience is the observation or visualisation of another's mastery of a task that can persuade one to attempt to master the task. Individuals can experience a sense of being empowered through vicarious experience. Vicarious experience refers to the observation of similar others successfully completing a task. If employees observe a supervisor successfully completing a task, they may believe that they can behave in a similar manner or that they can achieve some improvement in their own performance. Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that vicarious experience is not as effective as enactive attainment in empowering employees. Bandura (1986) however asserts that modelling can have a significant impact on efficacy expectations.

> People convinced vicariously of their inefficacy are inclined to behave in ineffectual ways that, in fact, generate confirmatory behavioral evidence of inability. Conversely, modelling influences that enhance perceived self-efficacy can weaken the impact of direct experiences of failure by sustaining performance in the face of repeated failures (Bandura, 1986, p.400.)

The third source of efficacy information as outlined by Bandura (1986) is that of verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion includes verbal feedback, words of encouragement and other forms of social persuasion. Verbal persuasion is communication from another that is used to convince an employee that s/he has the competence to perform a task. Employees are more likely to experience a sense of empowerment if they are persuaded verbally that they have the capabilities to effectively master a task.

Finally, Bandura (1986) asserts that one's personal competence expectations are affected by one's emotional arousal state. States that arise out of fear, stress, anxiety and the like can lower feelings of self-efficacy and thus, empowerment. On the other hand, individuals are more likely to feel competent when they are not beset by debilitating emotional states. It thus follows that empowerment processes that provide emotional support and that create a supportive environment can be more effective in strengthening self-efficacy beliefs. Emotional arousal can serve as inspiration or the stirring up of positive emotions and the alleviation of debilitating emotions such as stress in difficult situations.

These four factors can be experienced alone or in interaction with other individuals which suggests that self-efficacy (and therefore empowerment) can be personal or interpersonal. Chiles and Zorn (1995) note that self-efficacy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for empowerment in organisations. Whilst one may have a strong sense of self-efficacy and be motivated to act, one may not be allowed to act. For example, women who have a strong sense of self-efficacy may still be prevented by management of realising their potentialities. If women are consistently denied promotion opportunities or have limited access to resources, they cannot act on more challenging tasks.

As an enabling process, empowerment influences both the initiation and persistence of employee behaviour. "The behavioral outcomes are of special significance to organizational leaders. Empowerment processes may allow leaders to lessen the emotional impact of demoralizing organizational changes or to mobilize organizational members in the face of difficult competitive challenges" (Conger & Kanunga, 1988, p.476). Empowerment processes could therefore enable leaders and managers to set higher performance goals and help employees to accept these goals. Furthermore, these processes could also motivate employees to persist despite difficult organisational obstacles.

Management theorists have argued that specific organisational obstacles may lead to the lowering of self-efficacy beliefs among employees. Block (cited in Conger & Kanunga, 1988) explained how bureaucratic contexts and authoritarian management styles fostered disempowerment by encouraging dependency, denying self expression, manipulation and setting meaningless organisational goals.

Conger and Kanunga (1988) identify four categories of contextual factors that contribute to the lowering of self-efficacy beliefs in employees. Firstly, organisational factors including organisational change and transition, competitive pressures, start up ventures, an impersonal bureaucratic climate, poor communication systems and highly centralised organisational resources. Secondly, supervisory styles such as authoritarian or high control management, negative management with emphasis on failures and management which fails to offer reasons for actions or consequences.

Thirdly, noncontingent reward systems can also lead to feelings of powerlessness. Reward systems based on noncontingent, arbitrary reward allocation, low incentive value of rewards, a lack of competence based rewards and a lack of innovation-based rewards may also contribute to feelings of powerlessness.

Fourthly, poor job design including a lack of role clarity, a lack of training and technical support, unrealistic goal setting, lack of appropriate authority, low task variety, limited participation in organisational decisions, lack of resources, lack of network forming opportunities, highly established work routines, high rule structure, low advancement opportunities, lack of meaningful goals and limited contact with senior management. Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that these contextual factors should be the focal point for diagnosis and the interventions aimed at rectifying sources of powerlessness among employees.

Organisational theorists have identified a number of management practices that heighten a sense of self-efficacy. It has been suggested that organisations should design selection and training programmes that ensure skill building and that company policies and cultures promote self-determination, collaboration over competition, high performance standards, nondiscrimination and meritocracy (House, 1981). In addition, Conger and Kanunga (1988) assert that organisations that provide multiple resources at a decentralised level, that have open communication systems and that create network forming devices are more likely to be empowering.

Thus, self-efficacy beliefs impact on the quality of women's functioning in a number of diverse ways. In the first instance, self-efficacy has an impact on choice behaviour. Choice behaviour refers to whether or not women choose to engage in a task or avoid it. Secondly, self-efficacy has an impact on effort expenditure and persistence. A highly efficacious individual is more likely to expend maximum effort and persistence in the face of a challenging task. Thirdly, self-efficacy impacts on women's thought patterns and emotional reactions. An inefficacious women is more likely to respond with stress and react emotionally to failure. Finally, efficacious women are producers of their own behaviour.

People make choices all the time in deciding what courses of action to pursue. "Decisions involving choice of activities and social milieus are partly determined by judgements of personal efficacy" (Bandura, 1986, p.393). While people tend to avoid tasks that they believe exceed their capabilities, strong self-percepts of efficacy lead people to engage in activities that foster growth of activities. Self-inefficacies on the other hand, lead people to avoid enriching environments and activities resulting in a retardation of the development of potentialities. It thus follows that reasonably accurate appraisals of one's own capabilities is important for successful functioning. Performance efficacy judgements therefore have an impact on individual choice. If a woman believes that she can perform a task successfully, she is more likely to engage in that task. Bandura (1986) argues that efficacy judgements that are the most functional are those that slightly exceed what one can do at any given time. Therefore, women with a strong sense of self-efficacy and faith in their capabilities are more likely to embark on projects that are enriching and challenging. On the other hand, women who perceive themselves as inefficacious are more likely to avoid challenging activities with the resultant effect that their own development is retarded. Therefore, by increasing self-efficacy in women, women will be more willing to engage in more risky projects.

Efficacy judgments also determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles. The stronger their self-efficacy, the more vigorous and persistent are their efforts. Bandura (1986) argues that because knowledge and competencies are achieved through sustained effort, perceived self-inefficacy can lead people to give up easily. Once again, this is personally limiting for women because they cannot achieve if they continually abort the process. In addition, perceived self-inefficacy results in a retardation of growth and development. Self-development is aided by a strong sense of self-efficacy to withstand failures and some uncertainty to spur preparatory acquisition of knowledge and skills. Thus if women can develop a strong sense of self-efficacy then they can cope better in the future.

People's judgements of their capabilities also affect their thought patterns and emotional reactions (Bandura, 1986). Self-referent misgivings create stress and undermine effective use of the competencies people have by diverting attention away from how best to proceed to overcome failures. If, for example, a woman does take on a challenging activity but finds herself failing to meet specific deadlines, it may result in stress which

exacerbates the failure and draws her attention away from how best to proceed in order to overcome this failure. For example, if an inefficacious woman chairs a board meeting and it is not as successful as she had anticipated, she may be overcome with doubts about her ability and is more likely to react with stress which will prevent her from seeking solutions to overcome the failure in the future. Perceived self-efficacy also shapes causal thinking in that those who perceive themselves as highly efficacious are inclined to attribute failure to insufficient effort whereas those of comparable skill but lower self-efficacy attribute their failure to deficient ability (Bandura, 1986). This thinking is also related to effort and persistence. If a woman sees her initial failure as being due to insufficient effort, she is more likely to try again. Whereas, if she attributes her failure to personal inability, she is more likely to avoid trying again.

People who perceive themselves as efficacious set themselves challenges that "enlist their interest and involvement in activities; they intensify their efforts when their performances fall short of their goals, make causal ascriptions for failures that support a success orientation, approach potentially threatening tasks nonanxiously, and experience little in the way of stress reactions in taxing situations" (Bandura, 1986, p.395). Research has shown that people with high efficacy, act, think and feel differently from those with perceived inefficacy. They produce their own future rather than simply foretell it. This has implications for the empowerment of women in organisations because if women can mobilise themselves through perceived self-efficacy, they can empower themselves.

2.1.2.2 EMPOWERMENT AND STRESS AND COPING

Empowerment as a motivational construct can also be understood in terms of stress and coping literature. The work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) on stress and coping was chosen as a theory as it fits well with self-efficacy theory and has practical applications. Gutierrez (1994, p.205) defines stressors as "life experiences which exceed the individual's capacity to respond effectively". She goes on to argue that the effects of these experiences can be short and intense or long and sequential. The degree to which one is impacted by these stressors is dependent on feelings of loss of control, the experience of shattered assumptions and the initial denial of the severity of the situation (Gutierrez, 1994). Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p.141) define coping as "the person's constantly changing cognitive and behavior efforts to manage specific external and/or

internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources". This definition of coping recognises coping efforts as dynamic in that they are constantly changing. Coping is therefore seen as process oriented. Coping efforts are also both behavioural and cognitive in nature. People act and think in different ways in order to meet specific situations. Furthermore, in order for coping mechanisms to kick in, the situation must seem taxing or overwhelming to the individual.

Stress and coping theory places emphasis on two factors: situational and personal factors. Personal factors are all those which the individual brings to the situation and include such things as history and experience. The patriarchal society in which we live has great implications for women both personally and situationally as women experience stress from a number of sources. One of the primary causes of stress in working women is the balancing of their work and life roles (Gutierrez, 1994). Women frequently find themselves trying to successfully balance the roles of homemaker, mother, working woman and wife. With the disintegration of support in society, more and more women are experiencing stress in their lives and at work.

Thus, stress at work influences stress at home as well as personal stress. Situational factors are characteristics of the physical and social environment. Hostile organisational environments that are characterised by dominant male ideologies cause great stress for women. Women who experience disempowerment at work are more prone to stress as they may experience a sense of "being out of control". In this context, empowerment is the process whereby an individual can respond to stress by taking positive action to change their situation in an active, outwardly focused way.

Theories of empowerment and stress and coping are similar in a number of important ways. They both place emphasis on the interaction between the person and the environment. They both recognise that the social environment contributes to the social and emotional well-being of the individual (Gutierrez, 1994). The coping process focuses on this interaction by recognising that external stimuli affect psychological functioning. Empowerment theory focuses on this interaction from the standpoint of control, competence and wellness, that is, empowerment recognises the interaction between the environment and the individual and how the individual attempts to control this interaction in a competent and healthy manner.

Empowerment theory suggests that "empowering interactions and institutions can be an important mediator of stressful life experiences by encouraging healthy and action oriented responses to the social environment" (Gutierrez, 1994, p.208). Empowerment therefore, results in better coping where effective coping strategies also result in a greater sense of empowerment.

Increased Empowerment
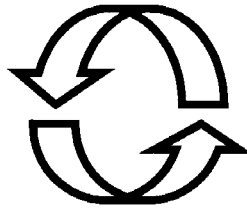
Better Coping

Figure 1:   The   cyclical   nature   of   effective   coping   strategies   and empowerment

Another major similarity between coping and empowerment perspectives relates to their orientation towards the fit between individual and the environment. The coping process focuses on how this fit can be enhanced by making changes on the psychological level as well as by adjusting the environment. Empowerment focuses on how environments can be modified to improve this fit as well as the psychological processes involved in doing so. Both perspectives also emphasise an individual's experience of control over their social environment. It is this loss of control that primarily results in the psychological effects of stress. In order to experience a sense of control, individuals must have the resources and ability to express and act upon their goals and desires according to empowerment theory (Gutierrez, 1994). Empowerment theory relates to the ability to feel in control as linked to one's personal, interpersonal and political power. Research on empowerment has also indicated that social interaction can have a positive effect on the experience of loss of control (Gutierrez, 1994).

Gutierrez (1994) notes that the development of specific skills also improves coping and facilitates empowerment. Through skill development, individuals can strengthen their social power through problem solving, community and organisational change, life skills development and interpersonal skills (Gutierrez, 1994). Social skills can

facilitate coping as they enable individuals to utilise social support more effectively and allow greater control in interactions with others. Furthermore, joint problem solving is facilitated and can assist coping by providing a framework with which to deal with stress. Cognitive skills can provide a means of regulating internal events and assist in effective situation appraisals.

Guiterrez (1994) notes that a critical difference between empowerment processes and coping is the emphasis on comprehending the social environment. Coping processes recognise that accurate appraisals can enhance coping but neglect to recognise the role that critical consciousness can play in one's reaction to stressful events. Guitterez's (1994) notion of critical consciousness can help us understand the distinction between appraisal processes and coping strategies which result in empowerment. Critical consciousness can be distinguished from appraisal processes because it does not focus specifically on personal experience. However, coping involves appraisal of self as well as environmental demands. When engaged in the process of appraising the nature of the stressor, the individual adopts either problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping depending on their own personal coping style. As advocated earlier, different coping strategies are more appropriate for different situations and it is the choice of a suitable strategy which will result in more efficacious coping.

Empowerment theory therefore advocates that individuals who develop a sense of critical consciousness and who interact with similar others may be more likely to identify external causes for their stress and therefore, be more motivated to engage in efforts to change the social structure of the stress. The major area of difference between these two perspectives centres on the role of the group and critical consciousness.

Coping literature focuses on the individual and has tended to ignore the role that organisational efforts can play in increasing individual, group or community power. Empowerment theory on the other hand, identifies organisational interactions and individual actions as crucial to the change process which begins to explain why some victims of stressful events have taken political action (Gutierrez, 1994).

Empowerment and coping are of significance to managers who are interested in creating structures and programmes which can mediate the effects of stress and encourage empowerment amongst women employees. This perspective is of particular importance for individuals, groups and communities who have been marginalised in society and are therefore likely to experience severe stress due to societal injustice and inadequate resources. The empowering process involves harnessing managerial strategies and techniques to overcome feelings of powerlessness and hence stress. This incentive could include participative management, goal setting, establishing feedback systems, modelling, competence-based reward systems and job enrichment (Conger & Kanunga, 1988).

Conger and Kanunga (1988) assert that frequently, employee's stress, anxiety and tension on the job can be reduced by role clarification, reducing information overload and by offering technical assistance. Furthermore, feelings of self doubt as a result of failure on specific tasks can be reduced by the employee attributing this failure to external and unstable factors such as inadequate support systems rather than attributing it to their own efforts or abilities (Weiner cited in Conger & Kanunga, 1988). Furthermore, a perspective which extends information on stress and coping to include empowerment can help us to better understand how individuals, communities and groups can become more efficacious, active and participative in social change.

With more women entering the job market, women are confronted with stressors that are shared with men as well as stressors that are unique to their gender (Dunahoo, Geller & Hobfoll, 1996). Dunahoo et al. (1996) note that although men and women share particular work related stressors, they may perceive and react to these stressors differently according to their social support structures and coping mechanisms. Dunahoo et al. (1996) argue that organisational factors that affect both men and women's experiences of stress at work include issues such as role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload and lack of autonomy. However, research has shown that there are specific stressors for women in organisations. Job-related stressors that are unique to women include the fact that there are limited promotion opportunities for women.

Dunahoo et al. (1996, p.187) note that "regardless of the fact that the opportunities for the acceptance of women in the workplace are improving, the glass ceiling effect

remains, and women still are not well integrated in many organizational systems". Even in traditional female professions such as nursing, the management tends to be male dominated. In addition, there is a tendency for women to be confronted with discrimination and sexual harassment from the "men's club" mentality that dominates organisations (Dunahoo et al., 1996). Furthermore, women's earnings are typically lower than those of men (Dunahoo et al., 1996).

Dunahoo et al. (1996) argue that the existence of discrimination, sexual harassment and the glass ceiling are variables which indicate that there is a lack of support for women at the organisational level. At the individual level, workplace support has been found to be more effective in limiting work-related stress for men than for women (House, 1981). Dunahoo et al. (1996) note that despite the fact that men and women reported receiving the same support from colleagues and supervisors, men benefited more from these support systems. This may be attributed to the idea that men benefit more from work relationships because they interact with their colleagues on a more informal level which House (1981) suggests may be most effective in the reduction of work stress and its negative consequences. In addition, Dunahoo et al. (1996) suggests that because individualistic characteristics are highly valued in male dominated environments and because men subscribe to these characteristics, support among men may be more effective and more genuine since it can involve mutual exchange and spontaneous acts rather than role required behaviour.

Dunahoo et al. (1996) make a distinction between individualistic characteristics as highly valued by men and communal qualities as being highly valued by women. Because individual characteristics are highly valued in male dominated environments, they suggest that an emphasis on individualistic characteristics may present an important obstacle to women in organisations.

> Conflicting expectations at work place women in an irresolvable dilemma.
> If they want to retain people's approval, they must demonstrate such
> qualities of female gender roles as warmth and expressiveness. If they
> want to succeed professionally, however, they must act according to the
> individualistic, power-centered model by being assertive, competitive and
> firm (Bhatnagar; Grant cited in Dunahoo et al., 1996, p.189).

At the individual level, there is evidence that interventions aimed at increasing job control and self-autonomy can have a direct beneficial impact on women in organisations (Jones & Fletcher, 1996). The relationship between job control and health outcomes has been the subject of increasing research because it takes into account the effects of occupational demands on stress levels. "According to the theory, high job demands may not be stressful if the job (or the non-work environment) also provides good levels of support and low constraints" (Jones & Fletcher, 1996, p.34). This has important implications for women because many women in organisations have demanding non-work environments and levels of social support at the community level are decreasing because of the pressures of societal change.

2.1.2.3 EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Argyle (1989) broadly defines social support as the existence of relationships with colleagues, friends or others who can be relied upon to help when needed. Women working in organisations can find themselves more and more isolated in a male dominated environment. They feel increasingly lonely and secluded from colleagues and the outside world (Winnubst & Schabracq, 1996). As their social relations decline, so does their job satisfaction and they become more prone to stress. Gonzalez, Goeppinger and Lorig (1990) argue that there are three dimensions to social support. Firstly, the quantity or availability of social support versus the quality or adequacy of social support. Secondly, formal support and informal support where formal support refers to contrived support and informal support refers to that received from a spouse, friend and the like. The third dimension relates to the perceived availability or actual occurrence of social support. The central issue of social support however, relates to how social relationships, irrespective of the specific dimension, operate (Gonzalez et al., 1990).

The link between social support and empowerment theory has not been studied in any depth. Gutierrez (1994) notes that the literature on empowerment and coping describe the involvement with similar others as an important process and that good social support can significantly mediate stress. The findings of many studies suggest that social support does have a positive effect on well being (Gonzalez et al., 1990). The

link between social support and empowerment can be seen as important because it has been shown to increase self-efficacy through enactive attainment, reduce stress and counteract learned helplessness.

Social support appears to influence empowerment in that women who have strong social support systems in place are more likely to experience less stress at work and are more likely to take on challenging tasks. There are several means by which organisations can foster increased support both for individuals and communities. These means rely on strategies or techniques useful in bridging the gap between other theories (such as self-efficacy theory, learned helplessness theory and stress and coping theory) and practice. For example, modelling is an appropriate, theoretically derived practice which has implications for, and is derived from, both self-efficacy and social support theories.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) assert that some of the current confusion about social support arises because there are at least two ways in which social support might be relevant to adaptation. Firstly, it is often assumed that being part of a social network is essential for people to feel good about themselves (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For women in organisations, being aware of similar others with similar problems and knowing that one can rely on them to be of assistance in times of stress, can greatly increase risk taking behaviour as well as confidence levels. Secondly, social support acts as an immediate buffer to stress and its consequences. Women in organisations are therefore less likely to perceive situations as stressful if they have a strong social support network. Although there is support for this idea, it is difficult to produce the interaction between social support and stress methodologically. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) note that social support can help to prevent stress by making harmful experiences seem less consequential or provide resources for coping when stress occurs.

Sometimes women who become aware of their disadvantage are unable to cope with it. Recognising disadvantage and using it as an impetus to action requires the support of friends and of some validating system. Clayton and Crosby (1992, p.94) argue that "when a woman perceives support for remedial action, she may be more likely to identify discrimination - both to others and to herself - than if she expects no support".

They go on to say that a number of studies have indicated that consciously or unconsciously, victims of injustice moderate their responses depending on the availability of social support. Steil (cited in Clayton & Crosby, 1992) found that children who were disadvantaged by an unfair prize system were more likely to blame the system when attitudinal support was available from their peers. Similarly, Martin, Brickman and Murray (cited in Clayton & Crosby, 1992) found that the presence of resources increased the probability that underpaid employed women would express willingness to engage in protest action.

Therefore, by establishing social support strategies, organisations can contribute to increased feelings of empowerment amongst employees. A number of strategies can be employed (Gonzalez et al., 1990) but the strategy most useful for organisations is mutual aid networks whereby networks are established between individuals who share common problems, face common tasks or have compatible interests and backgrounds.

2.1.2.4 EMPOWERMENT AND LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

Learned helplessness is a fourth theory derived from social psychology and relevant to the empowerment of women. The cornerstone of the learned helplessness hypothesis is that learning that outcomes are uncontrollable results in motivational, cognitive and emotional deficits (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978). The cognitive deficit refers to the idea that the mere existence of uncontrollability is not sufficient to render an individual helpless. Rather, the individual must have an expectation that the outcome will be uncontrollable in order to experience helplessness. The motivational deficit consists of the aborted initiation of voluntary responses as a consequence of the expectation that the outcome will be uncontrollable. Finally, the learned helplessness hypothesis claims that blunted emotional reactions are a consequence of learning that outcomes are uncontrollable. Thus, learned helplessness has important implications for women in organisations who learn that outcomes are unrelated or noncontingent on their actions which in turn results in faulty cognitive, motivational and emotional functioning.

Learned helplessness encompasses some of the same concerns as self-efficacy and stress and coping theories. For example, learned helplessness includes behaviours as well as thoughts and feelings. While self-efficacy theory emphasises behaviours,

stress and coping theory consider thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Gonzalez et al., 1990). However, learned helplessness does not directly suggest appropriate coping behaviours or theory-derived interventions as do self-efficacy and stress and coping theories. On the other hand, learned helplessness may better explain human responses to situations of powerlessness where there is a notable lack of relationship between employee behaviours and outcomes.

An important stage in the empowering process therefore involves diagnosing and identifying conditions which lead to feelings of powerlessness and lack of control. Conger and Kanunga (1988) identify four areas in which powerlessness could be fostered: organisational factors, supervisory factors, reward systems, and the nature of the job. For example, organisations that are undergoing major changes and transitions are more likely to lead to feelings of powerlessness being experienced by employees. These changes may be caused by financial emergencies, staff changes, rapid growth, labour problems, technological changes or any major change in organisational strategy (Conger & Kanunga, 1988).

Supervisory/management practices that lead to feelings of powerlessness include bureaucratic organisations with patriarchal management styles and rigid rules and routines. Conger and Kanunga (1988) note that these factors inhibit self-expression and limit autonomy. The third factor which may foster powerlessness is the organisation's reward system. When meaningful, valuable rewards are not offered by organisations, or where rewards are not contingent on jobs well done, employee's sense of disempowerment increases. Furthermore, when jobs are stressful or provide very little challenge and meaning also leads to feelings of powerlessness and lack of control. An additional job routine factor that may lead to powerlessness is where there is role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload (Conger & Kanunga, 1988).

Empowerment includes a strengthened performance-effort expectancy and a heightened belief in personal efficacy (Conger & Kanunga, 1988). When employees experience a sense of empowerment, they display persistence of behaviour to accomplish work objectives (Conger & Kanunga, 1988). Conger and Kanunga (1988) note that empowering practices can be viewed from two perspectives. The formal/organisational perspective or the informal/individual perspective.

> ...when organizations engage in participation programs, they establish formal systems that empower organizational members through the sharing of formal power and authority. But in order for this sharing of power to be effective at the individual level; employees must perceive it as increasing their sense of self-efficacy - something a manager can accomplish through more informal practices (Conger & Kanunga, 1988, p.478).

Work on learned helplessness has revealed that loss of self-control seems to represent the core of the helplessness experience. Motivational deficits occur when a person has learned that relief is independent of responding, the expectation that responding will produce relief is negated and response initiation wanes. Self-limiting beliefs held by many women can prevent them from experiencing empowerment.

Carr Ruffino (1993) asserts that self-limiting beliefs adopted by women include a tendency to suppress ambitions and goals; a reticence to talk about one's abilities and achievements; avoiding being the focus of attention; a lack of confidence in one's ability to handle financial matters, mathematical or technical projects; avoiding office politics or avoiding making use of power; a lack of curiosity about the inner workings of organisations; a tendency to capitulate too quickly to the wishes of others; a tendency to personalise events and criticism; a tendency to react to risky situations by focusing on the loss or danger; placing emphasis on developing oneself rather than working in a team; and a tendency to fear success in the corporate world. Carr Ruffino (1993) asserts that these traits or behaviours can be appropriate in certain situations, but are frequently self-defeating in patriarchal organisations. Women therefore need to become critically aware of self-limiting beliefs that may be hampering them.

A second major barrier for women in organisations which stems from individual faulty beliefs is fear of success. "The fear of success is generally a women's problem and is based mainly on the belief that if she becomes a successful career woman, she will not be viewed as a desirable mate" (Carr Ruffino, 1993, p.18). Carr Ruffino (1993) argues that many women reach adulthood with a number of these self-limiting beliefs and fears that they absorb from their culture through books, newspapers and television. These self-

limiting beliefs are usually based on what women perceive as the expectations of others about how women should behave.

These expectations of others about appropriate roles and behaviours for women help form women's behaviour (Carr Ruffino, 1993). When the majority of women conform to these expectations, it becomes impossible to determine whether such behaviour is innate or learned. When people believe that behaviour is innate, they tend to treat women in a stereotyped manner which leads to women feeling powerless and disempowered.

Obligacion (1996) proposed a general model of powerlessness in order to ascertain what structural factors predispose women to the perception that external and uncontrollable forces determine life's outcomes. Obligacion (1996) found that personal powerlessness does generate sequences of maladaptive cognitions. He found that powerlessness leads to feelings of low self-esteem where women find it difficult to develop a measure of self worth. Also, because these women feel that they are the helpless victims of fate, they feel useless with the resultant effect that they lack confidence in their capabilities. On the other hand, Obligacion (1996) found that women with a strong sense of self-efficacy developed high self-esteem based on beliefs of control and self-determination.

In addition, Obligacion (1996) found that self-esteem impacts on the success expectancies of women: "If people attribute a successful outcome to luck (an uncontrollable external factor), their future success expectancies are unlikely to increase because of implied randomness and uncertainty. On the other hand, success expectancies rise when outcomes are perceived as responsive to manipulation" (Obligacion, 1996, p.118). Consequently, success expectancies impact on the motivation for self-improvement.

Powerlessness is therefore a self-fulfilling dynamic. Empowerment increases personal, interpersonal and political power for purposes of enhancing quality of life (Guitterez, 1994). Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale (1978) note that cognitive modification entails a recognition of dysfunctional thoughts, contradicting these thoughts and challenging causal reasoning. Cognitive strategies therefore require complementation from socialisation processes such as building social networks, mutual support, information

sharing, role modelling and political mobilisation. Young et al. (1993) note that organising support services for women should also empower them. Women leaders can propagate sharing information and collaboration as alternative values to ruthless competition. These structural actions combined with cognitive transformation, can facilitate women's battle against the apathy and helplessness flowing from the perpetually numbing experience of powerlessness (Obligacion, 1996).

Cognitive disturbances occur when a person learns that an outcome is independent of a response and results in the individual having greater difficulty in learning that responses produce that outcome. Furthermore, Abramson et al. (1978) argued that when individuals are confronted with an uncontrollable outcome, they make an attribution about its cause and show certain predictable deficits in subsequent behaviour.

Peterson and Bossio (1989) identify three criteria for learned helplessness which can be used to judge the degree to which a particular behaviour represents learned helplessness in an organisation. Learned helplessness is recognised as present when an individual displays inappropriate passivity: the failure to meet the demands of a situation through action even though coping is possible. In addition, learned helplessness follows uncontrollable events. It is important to note that there is not a causal relationship between learned helplessness and uncontrollable events. Also, learned helplessness is mediated by particular cognitions which are developed during an individual's exposure to uncontrollable events which are then inappropriately generalised to new situations.

Situations in which women believe that they cannot solve solvable problems are instances of personal helplessness (Abramson et al., 1978). On the other hand, situations in which women believe that neither they nor others can solve the problem are instances of universal helplessness. Bandura's (1986) conceptual distinction between efficacy and outcome expectancies relates to learned helplessness in a number of ways. Firstly, personal helplessness entails a low efficacy expectation coupled with a high outcome expectation. Alternatively, universal helplessness entails a low outcome expectation. Abramson et al. (1978) argue that universally helpless women tend to make external attributions for failures, whereas personally helpless

women tend to make internal attributions. For example, personally helpless women would view failure on a mathematical skills task as being due to the fact that they do not have the relevant mathematical skills and not due to chance (a male colleague could solve the task).

In addition, self-efficacy can be distinguished from learned helplessness and locus of control related constructs because in the latter two constructs, powerlessness is experienced in generalised situations and across generalised behaviours. Learned helplessness asserts that a sense of helplessness occurs when women feel that their actions have no effect. An example of how learned helplessness may operate within organisations is presented by Malcomson (cited in Peterson & Bossio, 1989). She found that hospitals may produce passivity amongst nurses by ignoring their attempts to make policy recommendations. She states that the helplessness per se is reinforced. "You will learn that nothing you do or say makes any difference here or you will be one of the ones who will only last six months" (Malcomson cited in Peterson & Bossio, 1989, p.251).

Organisations need to take cognisance of their employees' suggestions and offer constructive feedback on these matters. Women who experience a lack of control over their lives, in general and across different situations, feel disempowered. On the other hand, locus of control refers to a person's generalised perception of the source of control over reinforcements. For example, whether a woman experiences control over her work as internal, that is, determined by her own behaviour and actions or external, determined by others. Therefore, both learned helplessness and locus of control imply that a woman's perceptions are generalisable affecting more than one aspect of her live. Alternatively, self-efficacy theory asserts that beliefs or expectations are related only to one's ability to carry out specific behaviours in specific situations. Furthermore, self-efficacy theory deals with one's perception that one can accomplish some future behaviour. Self-efficacy is therefore predictive in that one's efficacy predicts one's future performance.

Learned helplessness can also be related to theories on stress and coping. The more stressful the work environment, the more likely it is that women will experience a sense of uncontrollability. It also follows that without a sound social support structure,

helplessness may also occur. Learned helplessness occurs most frequently when women believe that they have little control over the situation. The implications of this for the empowerment of women in organisations are that firstly, organisations must attempt to ensure that actions are contingently rewarded. Secondly, Gonzalez et al. (1990) suggest that learned helplessness can be overcome by identifying and reconstructing thoughts and self statements. Organisations can foster this process by establishing good social support networks, small work teams and mentoring/coaching programmes. Thirdly, organisations must become aware that helplessness is not learned. It is not that a woman learns a particular behaviour but rather it is an expectation of what the outcome of her behaviour will be. She learns that responses and outcomes will be independent in the future and it is this expectation that produces helplessness (Peterson & Bossio, 1989).

Hoy (cited in Norman, 1989) suggests practical ways in which learned helplessness can be reduced or prevented and these have important implications for organisations that are concerned with empowering women in organisations. These practical ways of reducing or preventing learned helplessness include sharing responsibilities, sharing information on the strengths and weaknesses, learning self-advocacy, learning decision-making, setting goals and problem solving, modelling responses and changing attitudes.

Leadership and supervisory practices that are identified as being empowering include expressing confidence in employees coupled with high performance expectations, fostering opportunities for employees to participate in decision making, providing employees relative autonomy, and setting realistic, meaningful goals. Reward systems that best foster empowerment are those which emphasise innovative performance and high incentive values. Jobs that provide task variety, personal relevance, appropriate autonomy and control, low levels of established routines and rules, and high advancement prospects are more likely to empower employees.

Interventions that may be effective in lessening learned helplessness amongst women in organisations include some strategies similar to those derived from self-efficacy and stress and coping theories. These strategies include skills mastery, modelling, reinterpreting or cognitive restructuring as well as problem and emotion focused ways

of coping (Gonzalez et al., 1990). Organisations can contribute towards eliminating learned helplessness in women in organisations by helping employees accept the fact that self-statements mediate emotional arousal. In addition, organisations can assist employees in recognising the irrationality of certain beliefs. Also, they can help women understand that the inability to initiate or sustain desirable behaviours frequently results from irrational self-statements and they can help employees modify their irrational self-statements into positive, rational ones. By recognising and eliminating learned helplessness in the workplace, women will experience a sense of control over their behaviours which should result in empowering processes.

Learned helplessness therefore encompasses some of the concerns of self-efficacy and stress and coping theories. Self-efficacy emphasises behaviours while stress and coping emphasises thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Similarly, learned helplessness encompasses behaviours as well as thoughts and feelings. A limitation of the learned helplessness model, however, is that it does not suggest appropriate coping behaviours or theory driven interventions as do self-efficacy and stress and coping theories. Gonzalez et al. (1990) suggest that learned helplessness better explains human responses where there is no relationship between behaviours and outcomes.

2.1.3 EMPOWERMENT FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

As demonstrated in the sections of empowerment as a relational construct and empowerment as a motivational construct, power can be classified in a number of different ways. The traditional view of power is synonymous with domination and power is seen as "power-over". Meyer (1991) argues that in Western culture, the concept of power has been associated with violence, self-interest, ambition, conflict and repression. Here empowerment is viewed as the ability to make others do as one would like them to do. Kanter (1977) argues that the hierarchical form of large organisations tends to concentrate and monopolise decision making and the majority of employees are subject to commands from above. Thus, the term power has been equated with hierarchical domination.

A theory of empowerment relevant to less-powerful groups must incorporate mechanisms for change (Meyer, 1991). Meyer (1991) argues that for women, whose powerlessness is related to the immediately recognisable physical attributes, it is not enough to strive for individual or group power. Women cannot become integrated in the powerful group if they are repeatedly confronted with the fact that their actions are interpreted and valued in ways different from men. Meyer (1991) suggests that until women succeed in changing the power relation itself, they will experience the effects of inequality and subsequently disempowerment.

A feminist theory of power must incorporate concepts which are employed to define the relative power position of women and the characteristics used to define the value attached to women as a social category as well as incorporate mechanisms for change. Feminist theories of power therefore, need to be process oriented. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to look firstly at how women themselves describe the power relationship. Throughout history, the preferences of men have been projected onto women denying women the right to their own wishes, preferences and goals. Meyer (1991) notes that the same mechanisms may well be at work in theory building which makes it dangerous to leave this activity to men.

Naidoo (1997) argues that in order to understand the empowerment of women in organisations, it is imperative to understand the status of women in society as a whole.

Feminists view the patriarchal model of human society in two ways. The first emphasises the structurally peripheral position of women to the system of rights and duties in persons or things while the other is concerned with the symbolic devaluation of women. The first claim is related to the notion that although there are societies in which women have achieved considerable social recognition and power, in no society have women achieved publicly recognised power and authority that exceeds that of men. Rosaldo and Lampere (cited in Sanday, 1988, p.52) note that "everywhere we find that women are excluded from certain crucial economic or political activities, that their roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than are the roles of men".

The second view of the patriarchal model of society revolves around the idea that women are universally assumed to be closer to nature than men and that men occupy the higher ground of culture (Sanday, 1988). Belenky et al. (1986) argue that it is possible that the commonly accepted stereotypes of women's thinking as emotional, intuitive and personalised has contributed to the devaluation of women particularly in western oriented cultures which value rationalism and objectivity. It is generally assumed that intuitive knowledge is more primitive than so-called objective modes of knowing and therefore, less valuable.

Feminists are beginning to articulate the values of the female world and to reshape social science disciplines to include the woman's voice while continuing to press for the right of women to participate as equal in a male world. What this means is that women should be able to participate as women in a male world and not have to become like men in order to enjoy that right. As South Africa moves towards developing spaces and institutions in which gender, race and sexuality can be explored with the purpose of changing and challenging discrimination and prejudice, there is a need to exploit to the full the opportunities presented.

Meyer (1991) argues that power, as a topic, has been neglected in social psychology. Feminist theorists in particular have not found much help in traditional theorising while seeking to understand the dynamics of the male-female power process. Meyer (1991) outlines three factors that have contributed to this situation. Firstly, most theories have used metaphors chosen for their supposedly value-free format. Meyer (1991) argues

that the use of value-free metaphors has obscured the political nature of power and has made out that power is not about differences of interest. Secondly, these metaphors have been translated into social relations by relying on the laws, structures and processes operating in typically male institutions such as the army. This has resulted in women being removed from the agenda of power. Thirdly, Moscovici (cited in Meyer, 1991) notes that social psychological studies have focused on the reasons why people conform as well as on successful means to make them conform. This choice of perspective has also served to remove women from the agenda of power because the origins of change, the influence of the less powerful in the relationship and the shifting of power balances have been ignored.

Ramazanoglu (1989) agrees that there is a paucity of feminist work directly on the analysis of power. She argues that problems of power lie at the heart of feminism. Feminism is not a single theory of society, nor is it even a single theory of gender relations. Rather, feminism must rely on the insights of other models and theories if a critically informed and appropriate strategy for ending women's oppression in society is to be possible (Jackson, 1996). Feminist research in this study is understood as research which uses gender as the major category of social investigation, but which does not assert that other social categories such as race or class are irrelevant or even necessarily less important.

2.1.3.1 WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDINGS OF POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1986) examined women's ways of knowing and found that women's ways of knowing are fundamentally different from those of men. Research on women therefore needs to take cognisance of this and should seek to discover the different ways in which women construct and understand reality. Power of men over women is widespread. The basis of its legitimacy is questioned yet the question of what this power is based on remains disputed. It has been argued that feminism makes the exclusion of women from power and decision-making visible but that not all women are effected in the same way (Landes, cited in Ramazanoglu, 1989). For women especially, "power" is almost a dirty word (Miller, 1986). In order for women to acquire real economic, political and social power and authority, their potential as women needs to be realised. Miller (1986) argues that the tactics

necessary for effective action in the economic and political arenas requires extensive analysis and debate. In addition to these considerations, we need to raise the question of the nature and psychological meaning of power and self-determination or empowerment.

Lukes (1974) view of power seems a useful starting point for a feminist analysis of empowerment, because the author pays attention to both ideological and structural power. Lukes (1974) observations on power were first connected to relations between the sexes by Komter (cited in Meyer, 1991). Lukes (1974) distinguishes between three perspectives on power. The first perspective is that power is exercised in a direct, observable conflict over issues recognised as relevant. Because power can also be used to prevent issues from being raised, the second perspective on power considers decisions as well as non-decisions. Lukes (1974) critiques these two perspectives as too behavioural. Lukes (1974) "conceptualizes the different ways in which issues are kept out of an arena of conflict, whether through individual decisions, or through the operation of dominant values and institutional procedures. Genuine consensus does not necessarily exist because no grievances can be detected" (Komter, 1991, p. 55). Lukes (1974) therefore added a third perspective – latent conflict. Latent conflict refers to a hidden discrepancy of interest of those exercising power and those subject to this power and is latent in the sense that it would arise if subordinates would express their needs and wishes.

Miller (1986) asserts that the term "power" may well have been distorted since it has rested in the hands of the people who have lived with a constant need to maintain dominance. For this reason, it has acquired overtones of tyranny. Likewise, the concept of empowerment has been built on a base of the restriction of another group. As women struggle in the economic, political and social fields, it is important to consider some of the understandings of power and empowerment and see how these terms can be redefined.

For women, power is defined as "the capacity to implement" (Miller, 1986, p.116). The experience of separatism has led feminists to a transformation in their understandings of power (Hartsock, 1998). Power is seen, not as domination but as the ability to act and the capacity to perform. Feminists therefore, view power as

strength, energy, force and ability. Hartsock (1998, p.63) notes that: "important in all these descriptions of power is a vision of power as part of a process of change, a process that can be moved forward and directed". Although a large part of this venture involves the implementation of abilities women already possess, it also involves a need to implement the new abilities women are still developing. In traditional masculine views, power has meant the ability to advance oneself and, in so doing, to control, limit and even destroy the power of others. Thus traditional views of power have consisted of two components namely, power for oneself and power over others.

Power struggles have been rooted in this tradition. People with power have been viewed as dangerous. That is, one has to control them or they will control you. Miller (1986) argues that in the realm of human development this is not a valid formulation. Rather, quite the opposite. The development of an individual means that they are more able and effective and less dependent on others. Individuals with power logically should not have the need to limit or restrict the power of others. However, this is not the way power has been construed.

Schaef (1981) argues that men conceive power as limited whereas women see it as limitless. Power is therefore viewed by men in a zero-sum fashion and the more one shares power or gives it up to others, the less he will have for himself. From a feminist perspective, power is viewed as regenerative and expanding when shared. There is no need in this view to hoard power because it only increases when it is given away. Thus, while masculine perspectives view power as domination and control over others, feminist perspectives view power as personal power which is unrelated to power or control over others (Schaef, 1981).

Women have not come from a history of membership in a group that believed it needed subordinates nor have they a history of believing that power is necessary for the maintenance of self-image. However, women do have unique problems with power. Women's inexperience in using their powers openly as well as fears of power have taken on new dimensions. As women move into organisations they face new kinds of power struggles. This is because women are not well versed in the conventions by which men have been geared since childhood. Miller (1986) notes that these power struggles can leave women feeling particularly vulnerable which can be

very discouraging. However, women have created new ways of addressing these struggles. For example, women more readily turn to similar others for advise, they support each other as they develop more appropriate ways of dealing with power and sort out power's appropriate use and react to its inappropriate use in themselves and others.

The issues of women and power have to be addressed. There are however, problems with this confrontation. Ramazanoglu (1989) argues that power has been associated with the oppressiveness of patriarchal societies and feminists have looked for ways of sharing and co-operating and at new ways of empowering women rather than striving for power and position on male terms. This has resulted in confusion amongst the different strands of feminism on this issue.

Liberal feminists have viewed the movement of women into male-dominated occupations and into positions of political and economic power as an advance for feminism. On the other hand, radical feminists have rejected the notion that patriarchy can be challenged by competing with men on existing terms within patriarchal hierarchies (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Instead, radical feminists have looked at ways in which patriarchal societies have rendered women powerless and at how feminism could lead to the empowerment of women in different terms.

Ramazanoglu (1989) notes that there is no unified feminist theory of power. She attributes this to the fact that liberal, radical and Marxist feminists disagree over where power is located in society. Liberal feminists view power as diffused through society although not equally. Radical feminists generally locate male power in the structures and ideology of patriarchal society. Marxist feminists have a more contradictory and historical conception of male power. Marxist feminists view male power as being invested both in the organisation of systems of production and in the structuring of gender relations. "These differences have prevented any resolution of feminist theories of oppression in terms of a common political strategy for liberation" (Ramazanoglu, 1989, p.87).

Radical feminist approaches to the issue of power have been to turn away from aggressive and competitive western ideals of domination to uncover women's

feminine abilities of nurturing, creating, sharing and co-operation. This view challenges notions of government, political, community and domestic organisation that are dominant and propose new means of social organisation which are not inherently oppressive and hierarchical.

Feminists have therefore concentrated more on women's oppression than on how male power over women is constructed and maintained. The issue of power is a potentially divisive one since the power of women of different classes and races over each other remains problematic. Black or working class women do not have the same capacity for exercising feminine power as white or middle class women do (Ramazanoglu, 1989). A focus on power exposes the conflicting ideas of radical and Marxist feminism. While radical feminists need to ground their notions of female empowerment in the historical analysis of the organisation of production, Marxist feminists need to take radical feminist challenges into account.

While the different strands of feminism reconcile their differences and come up with a more cogent understanding of power, it is important to sustain the understanding that women do not need to destroy others in order to feel powerful. That is, women do not need to adopt the destructive qualities of power that do not necessarily form part of effective power (Miller, 1986). These destructive attributes are rather a means of maintaining a dominant-subordinate system. While women do need power for self-advancement, this does not involve restricting the development and power of others.

Unfortunately, women start from a position from which they have been dominated. Komter (1991) argues that power relations arising from gender have a number of characteristics namely, inequality in social resources, social position, politics and cultural influence; inequality in opportunities to make use of existing resources; inequality in the division of rights and duties; inequality in implicit or explicit standards of judgement, often leading to differential treatment; inequality in cultural representations: devaluation of women, stereotyping, etc; inequality in psychological consequences: psychology of "inferiority"; and social and cultural tendency to minimise or deny power inequality.

Miller (1986) argues that in order for women to move out of this position requires a power base in the first instance. This means that women need to resist attempts to be dominated and need to progress from this position to make empowerment possible. Miller (1986, p.117) notes that this is crucial because "dominant groups tend to characterize even subordinates' initial small resistance to dominant control as demands for an excessive amount of power!"

Finally, Miller (1986) argues that power has been distorted in another way. It has operated without the special qualities that women can bring to it. For example, women have been viewed as powerful when they adopt certain 'male' characteristics such as an androgynous management style. Women can bring more power to power by using it when it is needed and not as a substitute for co-operation. Feminism therefore seeks a new integration of the whole area of effective power and feminine strengths as it seeks to define them.

Because women have been defined in terms of what the dominant ideology wants women to be, these definitions have frequently been far removed from women's real nature and do not reflect what women want to become. For women to redefine themselves is a tremendous task and power is directly related to this venture. Without the power to put such determinations into action, women will continue to be controlled by others. Empowerment and self-determination needs to begin where women begin. This can be problematic in that understanding where women are, changes the meaning of the term, adding the special views of women.

Miller (1986) argues that women's fear of their own power and empowerment have been ingrained. Explorations of this fear may provide important clues to the routes to empowerment and power. Women fear power for a number of reasons. Firstly, women's use of power for their own purposes often results in negative reactions from men. Women have therefore internalised these criticisms and started believing that they are wrong. Acting for oneself is viewed as selfish, depriving or hurting others because she is not enhancing the power of others. Secondly, power is frequently related to destructiveness for women (Miller, 1986). A woman who uses power for herself frequently feels that in so doing she is disrupting the surrounding context. Thirdly, power is associated with abandonment. Because society encourages women

to remain in a position where others define the situation, "to attempt to change the situation threatens women with no place to go, no alternatives, and, worst of all, total isolation and complete condemnation" (Miller, 1986, p.122).

Fourthly, power is related to inadequacy and anger plays an important role in powerlessness (Miller, 1986). Women fear anger and a powerless position can provide a refuge from one's anger. Power is therefore seen as masochistic. Although women may be seen to blame the oppressor, they blame themselves even more. Thus, for women, it is more comfortable to feel inadequate than it is to feel powerful especially if a woman feels that her power is destructive. Finally, power is related to a woman's sense of identity. Women who use their power with some efficacy and freedom often feel it will destroy a core sense of identity (Miller cited in Grossman & Stewart, 1990).

For women struggling to balance their home and work lives, all the womanly qualities may seem of little help and no comfort.

> It seems to me that, at these times, the characteristics themselves are not trapping women or holding them back, it is rather the *use* to which the abilities are put and the clear fact that as soon as one acts on the basis of them one is easily led into subservience, lack of dignity, and lack of freedom. It need not be so, and the additions of power and self-determination are the two determining factors. (Miller, 1986, pp.123-124).

Miller (1986) notes that all of the valuable feminine qualities like participating in the development of others, being caring and nurturing, will still not get women into senior management positions. These qualities will not even provide empowerment. Indeed, these very characteristics are in conflict with success in the world as it is. It is therefore necessary for women to take a critical look at male dominated structures and propose new ways in which organisations can become more women-friendly.

2.1.3.2 WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

There is a paucity of fully developed theory available to help define the important issues involved in women's experiences of empowerment in organisations. Even less research has examined the meaning or inner experience of empowerment for women. As noted earlier most feminist theories have focused on the notion of power, and its relationship to empowerment has largely been ignored. In addition, Grossman and Stewart (1990) note that most of the feminist theorists who have explored the issue of women and power have focused on motherhood and women's involvement in relationships or both (Miller, 1986).

All of these theories rest on an assumption that women may experience power differently from men which is derived from their unique social experience of low social status, socialisation in interpersonal skills and the importance placed on relationships. However, consistent themes have emerged from these theorists' writings which have not emerged in more traditional analyses of power (Grossman & Stewart, 1990) and if we accept that empowerment is the process through which women gain power, then a consideration of these themes could provide clues for how women experience empowerment.

Firstly, power has been found to be inherently relational. That is, power (and empowerment) is experienced within the context of interpersonal relationships which have significant dimensions (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). Power is therefore not experienced in isolation but rather as a part of social structures and organisational relationships. Secondly, because relationships endure over time, the power relationship is dynamic rather than static or fixed. Thirdly, because power is viewed as one feature of interpersonal relationships, it is closely linked to one's experience of oneself as a social being. Fourthly, power is viewed as linked to women's emotional connections with people and therefore has the potential to evoke anxiety, ambivalence and conflict (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). These issues raise a number of important questions that need addressing. For example, how central are identity issues to women's experience of power in social relationships? How much do women's anxieties as power holders derive from relational issues and how much from other issues such as the fear of loss of power which is a traditionally more masculine concern? And how can women enjoy their own power if it is so intricately linked to anxiety and the risk of loss of identity?

In order to adequately answer these questions, the issue of women and work needs to be briefly examined. It has generally been assumed that the importance of status and prestige in men's occupational lives lies in the fact that status and prestige are simply euphimisms for men's capacity to wield power, command resources and spend money and are thus the primary motivations for men's work (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). In contrast, it has widely been assumed that the reason women work is for social contact, avoidance of boredom, earning supplementary income for their families and personal self expression, although many women do work to support themselves and their families. It is generally assumed that prestige, status and wealth have little importance in women's motivation for work. In addition, it has been suggested that women are less interested in power than men because power holding is inconsistent with traditional female sex roles (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). Grossman and Stewart (1990) argue that because of this, it may be difficult to persuade women to discuss their experiences of their own power openly and in fact, may be difficult for women to even acknowledge their experiences to themselves.

Davis (1991) claims that gender has been investigated in terms of the individual, the social structure and the symbolic orders. At each of these levels gender has not simply been regarded as a matter of difference between individuals and social organisations or human thought, rather as a power of asymmetry. Davis (1991, p.65) argues that whereas gender differences may be of some academic interest, for feminists the primary concern has been on how this difference "constructs asymmetrical power relations between men and women – relations involving domination and subordination".

Feminist scholarship is increasingly concerned with how these relations come to be constructed, maintained and undermined in the various areas of social life. Davis (1991) suggests two ways in which gender and power can best be theorised. Firstly, gender is viewed as pivotal and an attempt is made to develop a specifically feminist theory on power and gender. Davis (1991) argues that this view is based on three assumptions: that social experience can best be understood in terms of gender; that power has a gender; and that a specifically feminist perspective on power is required. The second view as outlined by Davis (1991) is where power is taken as the central concept and an attempt is made to expand traditional theories on power to include

relations between the sexes. This view assumes that social relationships can best be understood in terms of power; that power has no gender; and that a feminist critique of existing theories of power is required to make them applicable to understanding how power works in gender relations.

A combination of these two views seems to be most appropriate for this research. While feminist theories should be anchored in women's experiences – as women, as feminists but also as scholars grappling with specific questions about power and gender – they also need to be applied to specific settings and analysed with specific research methods. If we take these experiences as the starting point, then we need to develop theories which will help women to come to terms with concrete social practices of men and women in the contexts we are investigating. In addition, these theories must be based on a sophisticated and reflective feminist critique of how asymmetrical gender relations are being constructed, maintained and undermined in those specific contexts. Thus, a feminist theory on gender and power which is grounded in women's experiences is what is needed.

Although feminism offers a holistic perspective for understanding the experience of empowerment for women in organisations, critics of feminism have charged that feminism has ignored many women. They feel that "the feminist movement has failed to broaden its base and remains made up largely of white, highly educated women who have not adequately addressed the issues that matter to them: child care rather than lesbian and abortion rights, economic survival rather than political equality, the sticky floor rather than the glass ceiling" (Guttman, cited in Snyder, 1995, p.65).

2.1.4 OVERVIEW: TOWARDS A CRITICAL FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING OF EMPOWERMENT

Chiles and Zorn (1995) suggest that clear conceptual explications and empirical investigations are needed on what empowerment is and how it arises. This chapter has attempted to critically explore the kinds of personal, interpersonal and organisational phenomena that women perceive as influencing them to feel empowered in their jobs. Chile and Zorn (1995) note that researchers have approached the study of empowerment in organisations in varied ways. For the purposes of this thesis empowerment was explored from three perspectives: relational, motivational and feminist. These three views can be viewed as internal and external, individual and organisational, meaning and cause, a perception and a process. "Empowerment as a perception is the symbolic construction of one's personal state as characterized by competence, or the skill and ability to act effectively, and control, or the opportunity and authority to act" (Chiles & Zorn, 1995). Furthermore, empowerment is the process whereby this state is achieved.

Empowerment therefore involves a process whereby individuals interact with their environment to create empowered outcomes. In order to feel empowered in an organisation, women must feel capable of successfully completing the tasks of their jobs and believe that they have the authority or freedom to make the necessary decisions for performing the job (Chiles & Zorn, 1995). That is, women must feel that they have mastery over their environment and the environment must be conducive to empowerment. In addition, feminist perspectives on empowerment show that women have unique problems with power and that these problems need to be addressed by not only addressing these fears but also critiquing the dominant ideology and society that has placed women in this position in the first instance.

Chiles and Zorn (1995) note that a second important issue regarding the understanding of empowerment focuses on the roles of causality and meaning. Empowerment is not a one way process from organisation to employee nor is it something that managers do to employees. Rather, empowerment needs to be conceptualised as a symbolically manipulated experience. Chiles and Zorn (1995) contend that the symbol using and abusing capacity of people requires that individual's interpretations be emphasised. "Organizational and individual actions may facilitate empowerment and may in fact be

major influences on employees' empowerment-related beliefs and feelings, but employees' interpretations always mediate these actions" (Albrecht cited in Chiles & Zorn, 1995, p.2). A third distinction needs to be made between emphasis on competence and emphasis on control in conceptualising empowerment. In self-efficacy theory, the emphasis would be on one's perceived competence (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) while others (Burke, 1986, Mbatha, 1992) view empowerment as shared power, control and decision making authority. Chiles and Zorn (1995) contend that both a focus on control and competence is necessary in order to achieve an adequate conceptualisation of empowerment. Empowerment is therefore an internal, individual experience which is facilitated by an empowering organisation (external) (See Diagram 2).

Stage 1   **Stage 2**   **Stage 3**   **Stage 4**

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Critique dominant ideology *how is it hampering women? *how can organisations become more women-friendly? *what unique power fears do women have?	Engage in managerial techniques that give women a sense of power *participative management *goal setting *feedback systems *modeling *competence-based reward systems *job enrichment	Provide self-efficacy information to women from four sources *enactive attainment *vicarious experience *verbal persuasion *emotional arousal	Results in empowering experience of women
			Strengthens performance expectancy and belief in personal efficacy
	Eliminates conditions leading to a psychological state of powerlessness in women *organisational factors *supervision *reward systems *nature of job	Reduces learned helplessness	
		Effective coping	
		Strong social support network	

Which leads to behavioural effects such as initiation and persistence of behaviour to accomplish task objectives

Diagram 2:   A diagrammatic representation of the empowerment of women in organisations

If we accept that empowerment can be conceived as both self-initiated (internal) and initiated and controlled by others (external) then we must recognise that although empowerment may be influenced by others, it ultimately resides within the individual. Since individuals do not live in a vacuum but symbolically interact with their environment, empowerment is simultaneously influenced by self-initiated actions, interpersonal interactions and generalised perceptions of patterns of behaviours and symbols associated with the organisation. Personal and interpersonal influences on empowerment can be understood through Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy as self-efficacy explains how an individual's construction of individual action and interpersonal interactions influence feelings of empowerment.

Although empowerment has been discussed by various scholars, little empirical work has been done to date on how empowerment can be understood. Conger and Kanunga (1988) attribute this to an inadequate conceptualisation of the empowerment process. If we understand empowerment as a multilevel construct, then we can distinguish between three level of analysis. Firstly, the individual level of analysis. This level of analysis refers to psychological empowerment and integrates perceptions of personal control. Empowerment at this level is proactive and includes a critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment. The second level of analysis is at the organisational level. Empowerment at this level involves processes and structures that enhance employees skills and provide them with the mutual support necessary to effect community level change. The third level of analysis is at the community level. Empowerment at the community level refers to individuals working together in an organised manner to improve their collective lives and linkages among community organisations that help maintain that quality of life.

Individual empowerment forms the fundamental basis necessary for understanding the other levels of analysis (Zimmerman, 1995). Although individual empowerment can be distinguished from the other levels of analysis, it also influences and is influenced by these levels. By emphasising the individual level of empowerment does not mean that the organisational, sociopolitical or contextual factors are overlooked. Rather, individual empowerment is not simply self-perceptions of competence but includes active engagement in one's community and an understanding of one's sociopolitical

environment. Individual empowerment also includes learning about controlling agents and acting to influence those agents (Zimmerman, 1995).

The four psychosocial theories discussed earlier, self-efficacy, stress and coping, learned helplessness and social support have significant implications for the empowerment of women in organisations. The implications derived from these theories are relevant to healthful change at the individual, organisational and community levels. These three levels are interrelated in that change at one level may effect change at the others. All four theories share to a certain degree an emphasis on self-control. With the feminist perspective included, the theories also take cognisance of other variables such as socio-economic and environmental factors and ideologies.

The self-efficacy construct has served as a primary determinant of task motivated behaviour and performance (Harrison, Rainer, Hochwarter & Thompson, 1997). Self-efficacy contends that behaviour is strongly stimulated by self-influence. Self-efficacy is also related to goal setting and self-regulation. The self-efficacy construct thus has a high degree of relevance as a basic element of individual behaviour and attitudes in the work environment.

Theories of stress and coping offer a means of understanding empowerment as an interaction between individuals and the environment. Gutierrez (1994) notes that the literature on empowerment and coping describe the involvement with similar others as an important process and that good social support can significantly mediate stress. The development of specific skills also improves coping and facilitates empowerment. Through skill development, individuals can strengthen their social power through problem solving, community and organisational change, life skills development and interpersonal skills (Gutierrez, 1994). Social skills can facilitate coping as they enable individuals to utilize social support more effectively and allow greater control in interactions with others. Furthermore, joint problem solving is facilitated and can assist coping by providing a framework with which to deal with stress. Cognitive skills can provide a means of regulating internal events and assist in effective situation appraisals.

Research that demonstrates the most useful theories, the interrelationships among theories and how best to apply theory to the practice of empowering women in

organisations, has been neglected. There is a paucity of theoretically derived, empirically tested practice implications. Gonzalez et al. (1990) assert that this lack of research has resulted in efforts to empower women based on whatever feels right. Therefore, theoretically uninformed, pragmatic decision-making continues to dominate much of empowerment processes. In order to understand the empowerment of women in organisations, it is essential that all four theories and the implications derived from these theories are examined and explored. Women are players in the workplace and organisations need to understand how they can foster their development and empowerment. Organisations can only do this if they consider women's unique understandings of power and empowerment.

In addition to the theories and the implications derived from these theories, organisational changes also need to be considered in order to improve the situation for women in organisations. Firstly, job improvement could lead to women experiencing a sense of empowerment. This can be achieved through job enlargement; reducing repetition, physical overload or time pressures; and the like. Secondly, the organisation itself can change to accommodate women. For example, flattening organisations, decentralisation, reducing role conflict and ambiguity and better designed techno-structural systems such as job descriptions, career planning, grievance procedures and the like. Thirdly, organisations can offered increased social support by creating small work teams, encouraging trainers and managers to be gender sensitive and more supportive, and by establish coaching/mentoring programmes. Fourthly, women need to be involved in decision making. This can be achieved through surveys, suggestion schemes, and industrial democracy structures.

In sum, empowerment is a process that involves the individual, the environment and an interaction between the two. In order for women to feel empowered, we need to consider the psychological, motivational processes that facilitate our understanding and we need to consider and remove, external factors in organisations that may negatively affect the empowerment process. At the same time we need to examine the way in which society is structured. Women are disadvantaged in male dominated societies and a feminist perspective recommends that these structures and practices need to be critically examined. In order to genuinely empower women in organisations, we need to examine ways in which empowerment is fostered through improved cognitive functioning using

the theories of self-efficacy, stress and coping, learned helplessness and social support. In addition we need to draw on relational and feminist perspectives of power and empowerment in order to truly understand the empowerment of women in organisations.

2.2   AN EMPOWERING APPROACH TO RESEARCHING WOMEN

Until recently, women have played only a minor role as theorists in the social sciences. The authors of the major theories of empowerment have been men. The potential for bias on the part of male researchers is enlightened by the recurring tendency to select predominantly male samples for research. Donelson and Gullahorn (1977) argue that women have been neglected and misrepresented in psychological research and that this must be corrected before we can hope to have a psychology of people. This neglect has manifested itself in that women have not been studied as much as men and this neglect has been based on a number of implicit biases of male researchers. The omission of women from scientific studies is almost universally ignored when scientists draw conclusions from their findings and generalise what they have learned from the study of men to lives of women.

With the Western tradition of dichotomy and either/or thinking, masculine attributes are valued, studied and articulated while those associated with the feminine tend to be ignored. Theory has established men's experience and competence as a baseline against which women are judged, often to the detriment of women. Donelson and Gullahorn (1977) argue that professional women occupy a high achieved status but a low ascribed status because of the sexist devaluation of women. These negative evaluations are expressed in myths regarding women's competency and work commitment and these myths are used to justify unequal treatment. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) believe that conceptions of truth and knowledge that are accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by a male-dominated majority culture. By drawing on their own perspectives and visions, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history and set values that have become the guiding principles for men and women alike. Little attention has been given to modes of learning, knowing and valuing that may be specific to women. Dialogue and exchange of views would allow each individual to be understood in his/her own terms.

It follows that mutual understanding is most likely to lead to a creative consensus. When scientific findings are re-examined from the women's perspectives and values, new conclusions can be drawn and new directions forged. Lather (1986) argues that an emancipatory social research calls for empowering approaches to research whereby the

researcher and the researched become the changer and the changed. This is achieved through a feminist research process that enables the participants to change by encouraging self reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations.

Although feminism has had partial success in challenging male dominated society, a large part of society is still rigidly conventional in its support of the status quo. This is not surprising considering mainstream opposition to any kind of overt politics (Wilkinson, 1997). However, the question still remains, how do women challenge mainstream society? Wilkinson (1997) argues that one way in which mainstream society can be challenged is by challenging mainstream psychology since psychology has defined the context and used its institutional power to shape and control society as a whole.

Feminist psychology challenges the discipline of psychology claiming it is inadequate and damaging for women, and for its failure to see power relations as central to social life. Psychology's oppressions have therefore led to the social control of women through its central assertion that women are inferior to men.

> All apparent "differences" between women and men are characterized by psychology as "inferiorities", except where women's differences equip us so naturally to excel in our roles as wives and mothers ... this characterization of women as inferior has been used to confine women to the kitchen, the bedroom and the nursery. It has also been used (historically) to deny women access to education and to professional careers; and (more recently) to "explain" our limited successes within these spheres (Wilkinson, 1997, p.251).

A number of feminist traditions challenge the assertion that women are inferior to men and argue that psychology has done this in the way it presents women (Wilkinson, 1997). The first tradition claims that psychology is a poor science and that women have been mismeasured. That is, women have been constantly compared to men and any differences have been interpreted as female deficits. The second tradition argues that the inferiority of women is not intrinsic to women, but that women have internalised the oppression. Feminists argue that with the removal of

oppression, women would achieve far greater success and achievement. However, women have been socialised in this tradition of oppression and there is evidence to show that even when these constraints are removed, women may still oppress themselves (Wilkinson, 1997). A third tradition claims that a different perspective can be obtained by listening to women's voices.

This feminist approach agrees that women are different from men, and argues for a celebration of sex differences. The fourth tradition claims that women are neither inferior nor superior to men and that the question of sex differences should be displaced. The final tradition argues that the question of sex differences needs to be reconstructed. Feminists in this tradition argue that sex differences should no longer be theorised as differences between individuals, "but reconceptualized as a principle of social organization, structuring power relations between the sexes" (Wilkinson, 1997, p.261).

Feminist psychologists therefore claim that transforming society, at the very least, will result in a better world for women. By challenging the ways in which women are defined, feminism aims to end the social and political oppression of women. Women therefore need to become critically aware of the dominant ideology and the ways in which patriarchal society serves to disempower women. When women can become aware of the injustices, they can seek new ways of experiencing empowerment.

Lather (1986) outlines three interrelated issues in the quest for an empowering methodology: the need for reciprocity, dialectical theory building as opposed to theoretical imposition and the issue of validity in social emancipatory research.

Reciprocity implies a mutual negotiation of meaning and power (Lather, 1986). Lather (1986) argues that reciprocity operates at two points in emancipatory research namely, between the researcher and the researched and between data and theory. Between the researcher and the researched, reciprocity is a matter of both intent and degree. Reciprocity as a matter of intent has been found to create conditions which generate rich data (Lather, 1986) because the researcher moves from the status of stranger to friend and is thus able to gather personal knowledge from subjects more easily. The goal of social emancipatory research is to consciously use research to help participants

understand and change their situations. In order to do this, we need to look at the varying degrees of reciprocity which are built into research designs in order to empower the researched. A minimal degree of reciprocity involves repeat interviews. A maximal approach to reciprocity would involve moving people from articulating what they do to theorising about what they know.

The goal of emancipatory feminist research is therefore to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the participants in at least as much as it is to generate theory. To do this, research designs require more than minimal reciprocity (Lather, 1986). Firstly, interviews should be conducted in an interactive, dialogical manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher as opposed to mainstream interviewing in which the researcher's own standpoint is deflected and ignored. Secondly, interviews should be repeated to facilitate collaboration and deeper probing of research issues. Thirdly, there should be a negotiation of meaning. Finally, the researcher should establish a dialectic between participant's self-understandings and researcher efforts to create a context which enables the participants to question both taken for granted beliefs and the authority that culture has over us (Bower, cited in Lather, 1986).

The goal of theoretically guided empirical work is to develop theory. It does this by increasing specificity at the contextual level in order to see how larger issues are embedded in the specifics of everyday life. This results in theory becoming an expression and elaboration of politically progressive feelings rather than an abstract framework imposed by intellectuals on the complexity of lived experience (Lather, 1986). Lather (1986) argues that building empirically grounded theory requires a reciprocal relationship between data and theory. "Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured" (Lather, 1986, p.267).

What this means is that we need to move beyond predisposition and seek a set of procedures that will illuminate the ways the researchers values enter into the research. However, Lather (1986) argues that guidelines for developing set procedures are rare. Acker, Barry & Essevold (1991) outline five suggestions for operationalising critical inquiry. Firstly, critical inquiry looks at oppressed people and stems from a response to

their experiences, desires and needs. Participants are actively involved in the negotiation, construction and validation of meaning. Secondly, critical inquiry is fundamentally dialogical and a mutually educative enterprise. Thirdly, critical theory focuses on contradictions which help the participants see how poorly their understanding affects their interests and experiences. Fourthly, the validity of critical inquiry is found in part, in the responses of the participants. Fifthly, critical inquiry stimulates critical analysis which results in enlightened action.

Lather (1986) argues that a purely interpretive, phenomenological paradigm is inadequate as it is based on the assumption of fully rational action. A central challenge to this paradigm is to recognise that reality is more than negotiated accounts but that we are both shaped and shapers of our world. In developing critical theory, a key issue revolves around how to maximise the mediation between participant's self-understandings and transformative social action without imposing theory. Lather (1986) notes that if research is going to spur action, theory must be grounded in the understandings of the oppressed even while it seeks to enable them to re-evaluate their situations. Therefore, the central paradox of critical research lies in the intersection between participants self-understandings and the researcher's efforts to provide a change-enhancing context (Lather, 1986).

If we seek illuminating theory grounded in trustworthy data, then we need to formulate techniques that check the credibility of the data and minimise the effects of personal bias. Lather (1986) notes that uncertainty in the social sciences is leading to a reconceptualisation of validity. Efforts to eliminate subjectivity out of research are seen as naive. Research is increasingly recognised as a process whereby subjective and objective knowledge are interwoven and mutually informing (Heron, cited in Lather, 1986). Lather (1986) argues that the best way to present valid research is to employ self-reflexivity. For critical researchers, this requires new techniques and concepts for obtaining and operationalising trustworthy data which avoid the pitfalls of traditional notions of validity.

Lather (1986) offers a reconceptualisation of validity appropriate to critical research. Firstly, triangulation should be employed where multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes are used. Secondly, construct validity must be dealt with in a manner

that recognises its roots in theory construction. Building emancipatory theory involves grounding theory in the participants lived experiences without theoretical imposition. What this means is that systematic reflexivity must be employed which reveals how priori theory has been changed by the logic of the data. Thirdly, face validity can be reconsidered by recycling descriptions, emerging analysis and conclusions back through at least a sample of the participants. Fourthly, Lather (1986) proposes catalytic validity which would represent the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to change it.

GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

The goals of the present research will be twofold. Firstly, to qualitatively explore how women in organisations understand and experience empowerment and how their understanding impacts on the ways in which they experience empowerment or disempowerment. Secondly, the research will seek to empower the women through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge to see through factors that serve to disempower them. As such, knowledge will be produced that is directly useful to the participants. Thus, the aim here is to engage in dialogue with the participants, providing a place as noted by Cunningham (1988), to both test and develop concepts, models and propositions produced from other contexts and to provide concepts, models and propositions to feed into other research contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the philosophical framework that underpins this study. The nature and value of qualitative feminist research methodology in the social sciences and the reason why it was applicable in the present study, will then be examined. Thereafter, the research design will be presented in detail as well as issues of reliability and validity and limitations of the study.

4.1 PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Methodology refers to the way in which problems are approached and answers sought, the way in which research is conducted. Lather (1991) argues that research paradigms inherently reflect our beliefs about the world we live in. Three major theoretical perspectives have dominated in the social sciences. Each perspective focuses on different kinds of problems, seeks different kinds of answers and thus makes use of different research approaches. In the scientific, positivist approach, emphasis is placed on the facts or causes of social phenomena and not on the subjective states of individuals. Based on a natural science research model, the positivist searches for facts and causes by means of quantitative methods, mostly questionnaires and experiments that yield data amenable to statistical analysis.

While positivism insists that only one truth exists, postpositivism cleared methodology of prescribed rules and boundaries. This resulted in a constructive turmoil which allowed for the exploration of multiple possibilities of making sense of what it means to be human, of ways of knowing which do justice to the complexity, tenuity and interdeterminacy of human experience (Mishler, cited in Lather, 1986). Postpositivism is therefore marked by approaches to inquiry which recognise that knowledge is historically embedded, valuationally based and socially constituted. In the postpositivistic tradition, theory serves as an agent and research attempts to illustrate rather than provide a truth test.

The second major theoretical perspective in the social sciences is constructivism and symbolic/interpretive research. Although constructivist methodologies are far less uniform in aims and strategies than the methodologies constituting the scientific perspective (Schwandt, 1990), this perspective is based on relativism and recognises that people have multiple realities. Knowledge is viewed as a dynamic, human construct which is intuitive and subjectively derived from experience. `Facts' are viewed as theory laden constructs. The intellectual interest of constructivism is practical in that it attempts to understand, not explain, human behaviour. The methods used to do this focus on generating constructions on which there is consensus and methods employed in this approach are traditionally hermeneutic or dialectic and the design is typically pre-ordinate or responsive. Research approaches in this perspective are phenomenological, contextual, interpretive and individualistic.

If constructivism can be characterised by its concern with capturing the lived experience of participants, then the third major research tradition, critical science methodologies can be characterised by their concern with critical consciousness (Schwandt, 1990). Critical science takes many forms (critical theory, critical social science, new paradigm research, praxis-oriented research, critical inquiry, emancipatory social theory, emancipatory research, feminist research) and seeks to recover critical reflection in the social sciences through inquiry (Schwandt, 1990). Knowledge in critical theories is viewed as dialectical and never value-free. Knowledge is generative/emergent and derived from inquiry. Inquiry is viewed as openly ideological and in contrast to the scientific view, the moral and political have priority over scientific and epistemological theory (Kvale, 1996). The intellectual interest of critical theories is emancipation. Critical theorists believe that inquiry should be used to improve the condition of the oppressed. Inquiry is viewed as a political act in which transformation, reconstruction and empowerment occur. Methods employed in this tradition are dialogical and participatory. Action research is viewed as praxis and meaning is negotiated between the researcher and the researched. Lather (1991, p.71) argues that the "overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position."

However, promoting methodology as an end in itself is not sufficient. Feminism has created an impasse by claiming that feminist research must reject a masculinist structure-orientation. In addition, feminism has claimed that there are two versions of truth: a patriarchal view from outside the experience of women and a feminist view from inside women's lived experiences of oppression. The tension between outsider versus insider or structural versus personal views, reflects epistemological debates concerning the usefulness of logico-deductive versus inductive research (Currie, 1988).

For the purposes of this study, it was felt that a combination of phenomenological and critical science methodologies would best aid the overall objective of uncovering the gendered nature of women's experiences of empowerment. On the one hand, a phenomenological paradigm allowed the researcher to uncover women's understandings of empowerment and how they experience empowerment in light of these understandings while on the other hand, the critical science paradigm allowed the researcher to acknowledge her own influence on the research process and through negotiation and participation with the subjects encourage a critical consciousness of the factors that serve to act as disempowering or empowering factors in their organisation. Although research that discloses the value-base of the researcher have typically been discounted such views do not recognise the fact that scientific neutrality is always problematic (Lather, 1991). Emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday understandings and in this way directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes.

However, a tension exists between a phenomenological commitment to realism and inductively reflecting participants' accounts in naturalistic contexts on the one hand and critical theory which actively encourages the researcher in the creative and interpretative process of generating new understandings and theories on the other hand. Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) argue that philosophically speaking, theory cannot simply emerge from data and that observation is always embedded in pre-existing concepts. To ignore this tension involves the risk of viewing interpretive, phenomenological research as a prescriptive method where standardised procedures are followed and 'truth' guaranteed. Rather, this study argues for a critical revision of phenomenological research. A revision of this kind allows for the acknowledgement

that the researcher's perspective includes substantive interests which guide the questions asked, priorities and values of the researcher (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994).

The primary objective of critical research is to involve the researched in a democratized process of inquiry characterised by negotiation, reciprocity and empowerment. Lather (1991) terms this process 'research as praxis' which is borrowed from Gramsci's notion of becoming increasingly conscious of one's own actions and situations in the world. Feminist research is an empowering approach to inquiry. If the goal of critical research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researcher at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge, then research designs must have more than minimal reciprocity (Lather, 1991). A critical research methodology would allow us to understand the maldistribution of power and resources in society as well as help change that maldistribution and create a more equal world. Furthermore, a critical research (research explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society) adds an important voice to that ferment (Lather, 1991).

4.2 THE NATURE AND VALUE OF QUALITATIVE FEMINIST RESEARCH

Lather (1991) argues that feminist research involves putting the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry. Given the nature of the subject under study, it was felt that a qualitative feminist methodology would best aid the overall objective of uncovering the gendered nature of women's experience of empowerment. As noted earlier, feminism is not a single theory of society or of gender relations. The same is true of feminist methodology. Walker (1991) points out that no single generally accepted feminist methodology exists. What makes some research feminist "lies rather in the types of questions one is asking, the concern with the political project (of women's emancipation), as well as careful attention to gender stratification and the sexual division of labour in one's analysis of social relations and hierarchies" (Walker, 1991, p.xxiii). Qualitative research methods facilitate this in that they incorporate some key assumptions and tools. The first important aspect of qualitative research is its focus on dialogue (Lather, 1991; Kvale, 1996). In this way, the research process focuses on the research participants, giving them voice. In addition, this focus allows for a great deal of flexibility during data collection. Furthermore, good qualitative research emphasises the importance of the research context.

In the past, it was recommended that social science research maintain a value neutral position. However, feminist and other social science researchers have argued against this facade of value neutrality and have sought to design research methodologies that are comfortable for both the participants and the researcher (Berg, 1998). Feminist researchers have attempted to humanise the research process by utilising strategies that listen more and talk less insisting that the researcher become involved with the participants. The objection to value neutrality has arisen because research is so seldom undertaken for neutral reasons. Various values, moral attitudes and beliefs orient researchers in particular ways. Feminist researchers have argued that if it is not possible to adopt a value neutral position, it is more forthright and honest to acknowledge one's own biases in the research process.

Addison (1989) notes that theory must not be built just from the bottom up but dialogically co-constituted in a manner that involves much self-reflection by the

researcher and negotiation with the participants. A collaborative inquiry enables the researcher to examine ways in which such a gendered culture is produced and reproduced in organisations. The exploration provides rich data for analysis of both the discourses operating within the organisation as well as the analysis of female subjectivity, the ways in which women are positioned by others and themselves within these discourses. Treleaven (1994) found that the dominance of masculine discourses produced female subjectivity as a site for the reproduction of gender within organisations.

Currie (1988) argues that feminist consciousness is a way of conducting feminist research which must reject a masculinist structure orientation. Debates about `feminine personal' versus `masculine scientific' methodologies can be better understood in the context of testing established theory through deductive research as opposed to grounded theory which has an inductive approach. Currie (1988) argues that debates of this nature concern practical rather than political choices. This polarity of thinking has resulted in two versions of truth. The first concerns patriarchal views outside the lives of women and the second focuses on feminism's inside view grounded in women's lived experiences. Feminism has rejected objective scientific facts and begins instead with the perceived world so that experience rather than scientific knowledge is authority.

Two fundamental insights from feminism provide us with a way of knowing and learning about the world which overcomes this false distinction (Currie, 1988). The first is that feminism accepts personal experience as valid and the second, is that the claim that the distinction between objective and subjective truth is false arising out of masculine experiences of the world. Women's experiences constitute a different view of reality and a different way of making sense of the world. Many feminist arguments are particularly important. Firstly, women need to discover the nature of their own oppression in order to fight it. Secondly, the nature and dimensions of these differ according to women's different lives. Thirdly, feminist theory agrees that it should not become expert theory and reject other women's experiences that do not correspond by calling them inadequate or false.

However, Currie (1988) disagrees with the feminist notion that structures and institutions are not oppressive forces and that they are constructed solely out of everyday life. Currie

(1988) argues that it is dangerous to conceptualise research choices as between masculine objective and feminine subjective, outsider versus insider, views. Vogel (cited in Currie, 1988) notes that although the oppression of women can be analysed by looking at theoretical frameworks, the origin of women's oppression is not deducible theoretically because most established theory has neglected or excluded issues of gender.

It is therefore necessary to reconstruct theory from the standpoint of women (Currie, 1988). Currie (1988) argues that in order to do this, we need to treat women's worlds as problematic. The starting point of feminist research should therefore be the experienced worlds of women. However, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that the task of research is more than merely fact-finding or description. Rather, it is the development of explanations from data.

Another feature of qualitative research is that it is multimethod in focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The use of multimethods reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Because objective reality can never be captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) the use of multiple methods is an alternative to validation. A multimethod focus therefore combines rigor, breadth and depth to a study.

In addition, qualitative research has the following important characteristics (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Firstly, it is inductive. Concepts, insights and understandings are developed from patterns in the data. Data is not collected to assess preconceived hypotheses, models or theories. A qualitative study is therefore embarked on with only a vaguely formulated research question and the research design is flexible. Secondly, people and contexts are viewed holistically and the researcher attempts to understand the participants from their own frame of reference. Qualitative methods are thus humanistic. Kvale (1996) argues that qualitative research is sensitive to the human situation, involving an empathic dialogue with the participants contributing to their emancipation and empowerment. Thirdly, researchers are sensitive to their own effects on the people they study. Furthermore they attempt to acknowledge their own fore-structure, or pre-understandings, and regard all perspectives as valuable and all settings and people worthy of study. All objects of study are at once similar and unique: similar because some general social processes may be found among any group of people and

unique in that some aspect of social life can best be studied through each participant because there it is best illuminated (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Feminist psychologists have come to favour empowering methods to inquiry and have described it as a means of challenging the requirements of positivist psychological research and individual oriented methods such as questionnaires which discriminate against women (Squire, 1989). The decision to use an empowering methodology highlights interesting differences between feminist research and strict positivist research within psychology. Interviews that are always carried out in a context and their contextualisation at normative and material levels challenge the "ahistoricism" of traditional psychology. What this has meant for feminist researchers is that women are defined as real, historical individuals with concrete specific desires and interests (Harding, 1987). Dialogical interviews therefore attempt to embrace rather than deny the context of phenomena and recognise differences in the cultures and histories of women. Within this study, the concern with contexts reflects a number of concerns namely Squire's (1989) charge that feminist psychology fails to examine power relations adequately; Bhaskar's (1989) claim of the transitivity of intellectual work, the intention of realist feminists to work for emancipation (Cain, 1993); and the realist understanding of the complexity of social ordering and hence social scientific research (Bhaskar, 1986).

In addition, the lack of a routinised data collection procedure in qualitative research allows for a certain degree of creativity and flexibility in the research process. This lack of rigidity has proved especially appealing to feminist researchers as it allows for dialogue and the creation of an arena for emotions, psychic ramblings and digressions (Bozzoli, 1991) which can be included as data.

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the understandings and experiences women in an organisation have of empowerment. It was felt that a survey questionnaire could hardly provide figurative space for the richness of people's inner experiences to be revealed. In the light of the above considerations, it was decided to conduct this study by means of a qualitative feminist research methodology.

4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The choice of a method of investigation depends largely on the problem to be investigated. It is essential that the method must fit the problem and the goals of the research (Addison, 1989). Phenomenology and critical feminist research provide suitable frameworks for the study of empowerment. Phenomenological research seeks to discover naturally arising meanings amongst participants (Berg, 1998). While a phenomenological method allows the researcher to explore the understandings and experiences women have of empowerment, critical feminist research allows the researcher to empower the women by extending the research process to include action. In contrast to a positivistic approach, critical feminist research can be empowering as participants engage directly in understanding and acting on issues of concern in their own lives (Lather, 1986).

The critical feminist approach also addresses the shortcomings of phenomenology, namely its failure to extend to include action by allowing the researcher and the participants to become "the changer and the changed" (Lather, 1991, p.56). What this means is that the research was consciously used to help participants understand and change their situations. For this reason, an important design factor was locating the inquiry within one organisation. The research context in this study refers to a single organisation, but extends to include how these women experience empowerment both at home and in their communities. By broadening the participants' knowledge of empowerment in their organisation, new possibilities for experiencing empowerment were opened up for these women. The research therefore took place in one division of a large organisation in Gauteng. Women represent approximately 60% of the staff in this division and they are represented at all occupational levels.

4.3.1 SAMPLING

Locating the inquiry within one organisation enabled the participants to research collaboratively the network of disempowering practices. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participants to take part in this study. What this means is that participants were deliberately selected for their heterogeneity and the actual number of participants was regarded as less important than the potential of each subject to aid in developing

insight into women's experiences of empowerment. Berg (1998) argues that purposive sampling is generally used when the researcher wishes to use his/her expertise to select subjects who represent a population. In this case, purposive samples were selected after field investigations to ensure that certain types of individuals displaying different attributes were included in the study. For example, women were selected from a variety of occupational levels, races, age groups and family composition, where no two women were the same in terms of these categories. Despite some limitations, for example the lack of wide generalisability (Berg, 1988), purposive sampling was appropriate in this study given the nature of the research questions. Seven women from different occupational levels in the division were selected to take part in this study. Some of the women shared certain demographic details such as education level, marital status, and occupational position in the organisation. These demographic details were however, also points of possible difference between the women participants. These were identified as age group, education level, employment status, marital status, and household composition.

4.3.1.1 Sample Realisation

Participant	Age	Education level	Employment status	Marital status	Household compositio n
1	24 years	Matric Secretarial course CIAB[2]	Administration	Married	No children
2	29 years	Matric CIAB	Senior administration	Married	With children
3	30 years	Matric CIAB B.Com	Senior administration	Married	No children
4	38 years	Matric LIB[3]	Administration	Married	With children
5	42 years	A levels	Middle management	Married	With children
6	54 years	A levels CIAB	Middle management	Married	With children
7	60 years	Matric	Secretary	Married	With children

[2] Certificate of the Institute of Associate Bankers
[3] Licentiate diploma of the Institute of Bankers

4.3.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The research took place in three stages. As data collection was collected over a period of time, analysis took place simultaneously. The first stage consisted of two phases and attempted to address the first of the research goals. In the first phase, data collection involved each of the participants completing a written protocol. Written protocols were chosen over the more common in-depth interview as a data collection tool for a number of reasons. Firstly, written protocols are free from interviewer bias. Secondly, they are generally easy, less time consuming and of low cost (Hodder, 1994). Thirdly, protocols give the participants pause for thought as they write down their views and the data obtained may differ from spoken form. Fourthly, written texts endure and can give historical insight (Hodder, 1994).

In order to inform the participants of the aims of the study and what was needed from them, the study, its aims and requirements as well as the rights and obligations of the participants was verbally negotiated with them. After commitment to the study had been volunteered, each participant was handed a written form of explanation to read through before writing the protocol (see Appendix 1). The aim of the written form was to remind participants of the information given during the initial approach and to aid in exploring women's understandings and experiences of empowerment. It had more or less the same function as an interview guide during an in-depth interview. That is, not to steer the responses in a specific direction, which is of importance to the researcher but to remind subjects of issues which may be of importance to them.

Care was taken in designing and presenting the written explanation in order to have as little influence as possible on the data produced. Participants were told to be as honest and open as possible, to give their own, unbiased opinions and experiences and not the responses that they may feel are expected of them. They were assured of anonymity throughout the study. The protocols were written in the absence of the researcher and were returned after a period of approximately three weeks.

The written protocols were then analysed thematically using the steps of analysis as adapted from Kvale (1996). Firstly, each participant described her understandings and experiences of empowerment. The protocols were largely phenomenological in that the

women described their situations. Like the more common qualitative research interview (Kvale, 1996), written protocols allow for the description and interpretation of themes in the subjects' lived world. Secondly, each participant was encouraged to reflect on the written protocol on the basis of her spontaneous descriptions, free from the interpretation of the researcher, and thirdly, the researcher condensed and interpreted the meaning of each written protocol by identifying themes. This was done by breaking the protocols up into meaning units and allocating each unit to a theme.

The second phase involved an interview with each participant in which the interpreted meanings were fed back to each participant for the purpose of validation. This dialogue continued until there was only one possible interpretation or it was understood that the participant had multiple understandings. This interview was also extended to explore issues that had become apparent through the protocols. For example, the women's experience of having had to write the protocol; the influence of significant female role model's views on working women; and the educational background of the participants. These interviews were not tape recorded but written notes were taken with the permission of the participants. New themes were once again sought.

In the second stage of the data collection, the results of the first stage were workshopped with all seven women. The workshop took the form of a group interview with insight from the researcher being added. Although the intention had been to have one three hour workshop with all the women, once in the field it became apparent that participants could not find the time, either during or after office hours. It was therefore decided to let the women dictate what was convenient for them. We met for an hour and a half over an extended informal lunch and data obtained in the written protocols and interviews was used to inform the structure of the discussion. The reason for getting all the women in a group to discuss the results of the protocols was based on the belief that women's participation and the flow of ideas and information would be enhanced by being able to listen to each other's understandings and experiences of empowerment and to interact with each other. A group interview format facilitates women building on each other's ideas and augments the identification of patterns through their shared understandings and experiences (Callahan, cited in Berg, 1998).

Fontana and Frey (1994) note that the use of group interviews is not meant to replace individual interviews but is an option that provides different perspectives and another level of data gathering which is not available in individual interviews. In addition, group interviews can be used for triangulation purposes and phenomenological purposes are served where group interviews are conducted in an unstructured way in the field (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Because the women dictated when and what would be discussed in the workshop, an unstructured format was used. There are a number of advantages to using workshops: they are relatively inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating for the participants, cumulative, elaborative and aid in recall (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

The workshop served to explore the themes and meanings of the participants emerging from the written protocols and individual interviews as well as providing new perspectives on the phenomenon from relevant literature and the ideas of the researcher. In this way, the workshop aimed to address the second of the research goals by empowering the women through a dialogically co-constituted account of women's understandings and experiences of empowerment. The workshop also extended to include action in which the women determined and developed meanings and themes, identified barriers to empowerment and acted on their new knowledge. The workshop was then analysed by using qualitative data analysis techniques as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Firstly, all material was transcribed and the transcript read. Secondly, the data was creatively brainstormed and categories coded. Thirdly, important themes of the coded categories were identified and fourthly, the inter-relationship between coded categories was identified. This data was then hermeneutically compared and integrated with the relevant theory and contextualised in terms of the literature. Throughout the analysis, the focus was on how the participants created, negotiated, sustained and modified meanings. The findings of the workshop were documented and given to each participant for reference purposes.

The third stage of the research was evaluative and was conducted six weeks after the workshop. The purpose of the evaluation was to establish if the women had experienced any changes in their lives by having been involved in the research process. In this stage the women were telephonically interviewed. These interviews were in-depth and sought to probe any changes that the women had experienced as a result of the workshop and

the research (See Appendix 5 for an interview guide). These interviews were then analysed using the data analysis technique of Glaser and Strauss (1967) as detailed above.

4.4 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Whereas quantitative research emphasises reliability and replicability of methods, qualitative research is designed with a close fit between the data and what people actually say and do, in mind. This refers to validity. A point can be made that there has been an overemphasis on reliability in social research: "We concentrate on consistency without much concern about whether we are right or wrong. As a consequence we may have been learning a great deal about how to pursue an incorrect course with a maximum of precision!" (Deutscher, cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.7). This does not imply a lack of concern about accuracy in qualitative research. A qualitative study should not be an impressionistic analysis based on a superficial look. Rather, it is systematic research conducted with methods that are rigorous though not necessarily standardised.

Industrial/organisational psychology has traditionally relied heavily on scientific approaches to inquiry which has resulted in a rather one-sided view of the field. Acker (1978) saw the structure of male dominated thought as the determinant of a positivistic bias in the social sciences based on the idea that there are regularities in human behaviour and that science can discover their laws. She attributed the prestige of quantitative methodology to its concern with control, mastery and prediction. While it is undoubtedly efficient in answering some kinds of questions, the theories appropriate to quantitative techniques cannot grasp the nature and complexity of human existence.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) go one step further and argue that conventional positivist paradigm terms are not relevant to the systematic inquiry into human experiences. They argue that terms such as internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity can be replaced by four alternative constructs: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Qualitative research does not assume to be replicable. Rather, the researcher purposefully avoids controlling the research conditions and concentrates on recording the complexity of situational contexts and interrelations as they occur (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

In terms of the research design, issues of reliability and validity were carefully considered. Validity and reliability was ensured in the sampling by ensuring that

women with different perspectives and outlooks were selected. This was done by conducting field research prior to the research. Reliability and validity in the data collection was ensured by using multi-methods thus resulting in triangulation. Lastly, reliability and validity was ensured during the data analysis stage through the ongoing process of feeding meanings back to the participants ensuring the accuracy of the findings.

4.5 LIMITATIONS

Lather (1991) argues that research paradigms inherently reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and although research that discloses the value-base of the researcher have typically been discounted as too subjective, such views do not recognise the fact that scientific neutrality is always problematic. Emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday understandings, and in this way, directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes. Squire (1989) argues that some psychological research on black women, lesbian women and gay men has reinforced the passivity ascribed to these groups. Caution is needed when asserting the importance of information that emerges from emancipatory research as one needs to be aware of the political implications of one's research.

Another limitation of the research concerns the actual nature of qualitative research. The nature of qualitative research means that studies of this nature cannot be replicated because the real world changes. This limitation was overcome to a degree by keeping thorough notes and records about the research design and the rationale behind it. In this way the researcher allows others to inspect the procedures, protocols and decisions. A further response to the call for replicability is that data is well organised and documented which makes it easily available for anyone who wishes to challenge or reanalyse the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

There are also a number of limitations regarding the actual research design. Firstly, written protocols assume that all the participants are literate. In this study, this was not an issue as all of the women involved are working in clerical positions within an organisation and literacy is therefore a prerequisite for employment. What this does mean, however, is that written protocols may not be an appropriate data collection tool in other, more extensive, research on the empowerment of women. Secondly, group interviews present some unique problems (see Fontana & Frey, 1994). There is the problem of one person dominating the group and the difficulty of encouraging recalcitrant individuals to participate. In addition, the group culture may interfere with individual expression and the group format can make it difficult to research sensitive topics. Furthermore, the researcher must elicit responses from the entire group to

ensure full coverage of the problem and the interviewer needs to balance her role as moderator and interviewer. Fontana and Frey (1994, p.365) note that "the group interview must simultaneously worry about the script of questions and be sensitive to the evolving patterns of group interaction".

RESULTS

This chapter will focus specifically on the findings of the research as well as specific themes resulting from the analysis. However, before these are given, mention will be made of a few general trends that were evident from the data even after cursory readings of the protocols. Considerations of the context in which the data was collected as well as response effects (Dixon, 1989), will also be examined.

5.1   GENERAL TRENDS

A number of general trends became apparent when first making contact with the women in the organisation and after initial readings of the protocols. In the first instance, the women were all most obliging and interested in taking part in this study. Although they had no prior knowledge of empowerment, they all displayed a gratefulness for the opportunity to participate in the study. In fact, the women's willingness to participate was so positive that the researcher feared she had contacted an unnaturally dedicated sample of people and conscious efforts were made to vary the working backgrounds of respondents. This did not however, result in a change in general attitude regarding participation in the study.

The women all seemed to experience a certain joy in working and were all dedicated to their work. All of the participants said that work was very important to their sense of identity. They said things like: work is *"pivotal, it is essential for my mental well-being;"* work *"constitutes 50 –60% of centrality. At home I would go insane. I am crazy about my family, but I need to work"*; *"I enjoy working, problems and all. I am not forced to work, but I believe it is important to keep busy and stimulated"*; work *"means independence for me"*; work *"gives me financial independence and emotional pleasure"*; *"work is important for balance. I would be bored without my work"*; and *"I have always thought work is most important. At work, work is central, but in life, a sense of identity is not based entirely on work. Work doesn't always give you the satisfaction that family does"*.

In addition, it was expected that the women would have difficulty articulating how they understood and experienced empowerment. This expectation seemed to have been confirmed when the protocols were not returned on the due date. However, contrary to this expectation, four of the participants said that they found the experience of writing about empowerment easy. They said things like: *"it was no problem"*, *"I felt I could write on it forever"*, *"it just flowed"*, and *"at first I put it off because I didn't know what to say, but once it came to me it was easy"*. One of the participants said that although she found the task easy, she found the experience frustrating because *"empowerment seems so idealistic, there's so much to say"*. Another participant said that she didn't find the task *"too difficult. Finding the time to do it was a problem though"*. And only two participants found the experience difficult, *"because I hadn't thought about it before"* and *"I was feeling an irritation towards men at the time and was not sure whether or not I understood what empowerment is"*.

When asked how they felt about doing the actual task of writing the protocols, two participants said that they only did it because I asked them to. Another participant said that although she did it because I asked, she also did it because it was a learning experience. One participant did it because she *"felt it was interesting"* and two others said they did it because they thought it was very important: *"My mother was in market research and I realise how important work of this nature is for changing things"*. The last participant said that the task made her realise what a big subject empowerment is and it made her think about all the different aspects of gender.

The organisation in which the research was conducted forms part of a large banking institution in South Africa. The masculinist culture and politics of the organisation is itself a subject of inquiry and this produced complex challenges in establishing a suitable framework. Banking has been a traditionally very male dominated occupation where most senior management positions, even today, are still occupied by men. However, over the last two decades, more and more women have been appointed in the bank, but they still tend to occupy the majority of administrative and clerical positions in the organisation.

The division in which this research was conducted is the Trust Division in which the

clientele are mostly affluent people. The division itself is made up of approximately 60% women and yet there are no female senior managers. With a background of strongly held traditional attitudes towards women, and other minority groups, among management and staff in the organisation who have little experience of accepting women and minority groups as peers, there was a hostility to affirmative action which is a priority within this organisation. As noted earlier, the organisation is also in a state of transformation as they strive to become a flatter, less hierarchical organisation. In addition technological changes are also taking place which may mean that employees of this organisation are experiencing a certain amount of uncertainty regarding their positions in the organisation.

Furthermore, the organisation in which the participants work is undergoing much change in terms of becoming a less hierarchical organisation, technological changes are also playing a major role, and affirmative action is a priority within this organisation. These changes are creating feelings of uncertainty and apprehension that are sometimes evident in the findings of the study. The women seem to feel that they have to work harder in order to just keep up with the work. In addition, the work done in the organisation is directly linked to the stock exchange and because the value of the Rand has taken a significant fall, many targets in the organisation will not be met. This means that the people working in the division will not be rewarded at the end of the year.

In addition, the researcher's role as facilitator in the workshop seemed to be less important than the role of providing a space in which the women could explore their own disadvantage and talk about issues of concern to them.

Finally, although the results showed similar trends in some instances, significant differences were found in other areas. The women all positioned themselves as empowered and then went about explaining empowerment in terms of how they are. However, even though the women all positioned themselves as empowered, understandings of empowerment varied widely across the participants. Not only did the women all understand empowerment differently, there were also inherent contradictions within their unique understandings. For example, one of the women claimed that empowerment is something that is given to you and later on that

empowerment cannot be given to you but is something that you are born with. That is, you either have it or you don't. These contradictions seem to reflect just how broad and vaguely formulated the construct of empowerment actually is. In addition, empowerment would seem to be a construct that depends on the definer for definition. As one participant commented: "*I think that the definition would vary greatly depending on the person who is doing the defining*". That is, no one definition of empowerment is appropriate for all women. Nonetheless, a number of important themes emerged when exploring the understandings that women have of empowerment.

5.2 DISCOUNTING OF DATA

"Discounting data" is a term used to describe how data is interpreted in the context in which it is collected (Deutscher, 1973 and Mills, 1940, cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). What this means is that one has to look at how the data were collected in order to understand them because different contexts require different interpretations (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The following were taken into consideration when data from the study were interpreted.

5.2.1 SOLICITED DATA

Although it was explained to participants that the explanatory forms handed to them before they wrote their protocols, were aids in helping them explore their understandings and experiences of empowerment, and not a guideline to steer them in a specific direction, it is possible that their responses were influenced to a greater or lesser degree by these forms as well as the researcher's introduction and explanation as to what the study entailed. This was therefore kept in mind during the interpretation of the data.

5.2.2 INFLUENCE OF THE RESEARCHER

The fact that the researcher was a woman, prevented the negative influence on female respondents by male researchers which was postulated by Acker (1978). Although the researcher did not previously know any of the participants, this did not seem to prevent the women from freely expressing themselves. The women were all approached and the study explained to them. The voluntary nature of the study was emphasised and the women were given the opportunity to withdraw if they felt that they would not be able to ensure commitment to the study.

Although the possibility existed that participants could have been influenced by their friends and colleagues who were taking part in the study, the sincere tone of their responses in the protocols seems to indicate that they heeded the request to express their own feelings and not let themselves be influenced by others or the expectations of the researcher. In the workshop, ideas and views were however, influenced by

others in the group but this had been expected and encouraged as the women moved from their unique position on empowerment to a more global understanding of empowerment.

5.2.3   INTERPRETATION OF INDIRECT DATA

As the researcher did not know any of the participants prior to the study, it is possible that much indirect data may have remained unused because of the researchers absence during the writing of the protocols and lack of an intimate relationship to interpret indirect cues during the interviews and workshop. Although the researcher elicited the trust and support of the participants and attempted to approach them as "friends", it is still possible that, at least in part, non-verbal cues were missed. Although this may increase the validity of the research, the depth of the research may be lacking.

5.2.4   SOURCES

There are at least three dangers associated with sources when interpreting data. The first is that of focusing on a very select and narrow view of the field by obtaining data from people who are very similar in their perspectives on empowerment and life in general and who may thus not be of much help in providing as broad a perspective as possible (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In order to avoid this, women from a variety of occupational levels were selected. However, because all the women work in one division of a large organisation, this was only possible to a certain extent. The second danger is to unfairly generalise for the whole group of respondents from what one participant has said (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This was guarded against by keeping the reader in mind and stating who and how many said what. Lastly, the study may be open to what Miles and Huberman (1994) call "elite bias". Care had to be taken to include the voices of participants who were not as articulate and to make as much use in the final analysis of data collected from these respondents as well as the more expressive and articulate participants.

5.3 OVERVIEW OF THEMES

The protocols, interviews and workshop were transcribed and coded according to three broad typologies. These typologies are: empowerment as an external construct, empowerment as an internal construct and dialoguing empowerment. The first typology includes categories that relate to empowerment as being understood and experienced as a) something that is shaped by organisational factors, b) shaped by other individuals, or c) shaped by societal factors. The second typology includes categories that relate to the participant's personal, internal qualities and the relationship of empowerment to these. These include: a) the participants' understanding and experience of empowerment as qualities one has, or b) as skills one can develop. The third typology includes categories about how the women's understandings and experiences of empowerment evolved over the course of the research.

Because there seems to be an overlap between the participants' understandings and experiences of empowerment, the themes under each category look at how the women's experiences support their understandings. In addition, the themes attempt to look at how the participants' understandings evolved during the course of the research. In an attempt to create a dialogue, certain themes arose which demonstrated the progression the participants had made. The movement/progression of the participants' initial understandings in their protocols to their understandings after the workshop are therefore also considered.

5.3.1 EMPOWERMENT AS AN EXTERNAL CONSTRUCT

5.3.1.1 EMPOWERMENT AS BEING SHAPED BY ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

5.3.1.1.1	Empowerment as a hollow buzz word that alludes to affirmative action
5.3.1.1.2	Empowerment through rewards and recognition
5.3.1.1.3	The power of role models: seeing similar others reach the top
5.3.1.1.4	Empowerment as being allowed to use one's initiative
5.3.1.1.5	Empowerment as the opportunity to achieve goals

5.3.1 EMPOWERMENT AS AN EXTERNAL CONSTRUCT

5.3.1.1 EMPOWERMENT AS BEING SHAPED BY ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

5.3.1.1.1   *Empowerment as a hollow buzz word that alludes to affirmative action*

The theme of empowerment as a hollow buzz word that alludes to affirmative action became apparent in the initial stages of the study during the writing of the protocols. The participants clearly stated that empowerment was for other people and not themselves. Two of the women in the study directly stated in their protocols that they felt empowerment was the same as affirmative action and that empowerment is an attempt to move away from the negative connotations associated with affirmative action. Empowerment in this sense is understood as a buzz word. One of the participants commented: *"It is just a word. It is affirmative action in disguise. Empowerment is connected to past injustices. I don't think empowerment is anything"*. A further two of the participants indirectly alluded to empowerment being the same as affirmative action. One of these participants stated: *"Empowerment has received a lot of attention in the recent past and has mainly to do with the minorities having a say"*. Another participant said: *"It seems that there is always a "buzz" word that has everyone jumping and it seems that the latest "buzz" word is empowerment ... and no doubt into the next century it will be called something else"*.

The negative association of empowerment as being the same as affirmative action was also raised. One participant commented that: *"Empowerment in the workplace is giving previously disadvantaged people the opportunity to achieve or be placed in areas where previously they were not permitted .... Regrettably in many instances the previously disadvantaged are being placed in positions for which they are not adequately equipped merely as window dressing and to this end empowerment (reverse apartheid in many instances) could cause the downfall of a lot of businesses"*.

Empowerment is understood in this sense as the misuse of power by inappropriately putting unqualified people into positions of power. Empowerment is therefore viewed as something that is given to you and it is viewed negatively. *"In this country empowerment seems to be a way of rectifying the perceived injustices of the past and it seems that calling something empowerment is merely a way of installing people into positions for which they may or may not be qualified. Personally I believe the South African version of empowerment is simply a cover up for affirmative action and is not doing anything to enhance the skills or growth of the country and the economy"*.

5.3.1.1.2   *Empowerment through rewards and recognition*

This theme was observed in only one of the protocols but when questioned about the importance of rewards and recognition in the experience of empowerment, all of the other participants agreed that it did play a role. Recognition was however, seen as more important than rewards. In addition the women felt that rewards and recognition must be contingent on work well done and not just arbitrarily awarded. For example, one of the women said that she found it disempowering that because their business is dependent on the stock market for certain goals to be met and because of the crash in the stock market this year, they would not be rewarded. She felt that they had worked just as hard, if not harder this year and because of something beyond their control they would forfeit their rewards. Another participant said that she feels empowered *"when I am rewarded for work well done. When I gain recognition for work well done."*

This participant went on to say that she felt that it is not only women who give recognition where recognition is due but that some male managers do as well. *"X is one of them and I can honestly say that he is one of the few male managers I have worked under who truly practices empowerment – And not because he is dumping but because he is able to let go – not just the work, but the recognition that goes with a job well done. There are plenty of guys out there that are prepared to let go – but when the praise and recognition comes, they tend to take it to themselves with maybe a paternalistic/condescending pat on the back for the hardworking woman concerned"*. It therefore follows that women experience disempowerment when there is a lack of deserved rewards or recognition.

5.3.1.1.3   The power of role models: seeing similar others reach the top

Only one participant said directly that she feels empowered when she sees similar others reaching senior management positions. She stated that she feels empowered *"when I see more women being placed into senior management levels"*. Another participant said that she felt she would be empowered if the organisation had to make things truly equal, but that *"they are supposedly equal. I think it depends on how high up you go. Take for example, in the normal lines, things are very equal, It's when you get to more senior levels that it's a problem. Take (our organisation), for example, it doesn't have any senior female managers"*. It is therefore disempowering for the women that there are no senior female managers in their organisation as they can hold no hope for becoming senior managers themselves.

5.3.1.1.4   Empowerment as being allowed to use one's initiative

This theme was evident in only one of the protocols. The participant said that she felt empowered when she was able to use her initiative in difficult situations. Conversely, she felt disempowered when she did not have the opportunity to use her initiative to do something.

5.3.1.1.5   Empowerment as the opportunity to achieve goals

Empowerment was also understood as the opportunity to achieve goals. In this sense, empowerment is understood as opportunities given by the organisation. One of the participants noted that: *"for empowerment to work, the opportunities to succeed and achieve must be given to all but only if they have the correct qualifications and abilities"*. This view seems to imply that empowerment is something that is given to one and that women feel empowered if they are given opportunities to achieve goals.

5.3.1.1.6   Empowerment as the opportunity for personal growth

All the participants also agreed that a result of empowerment is personal growth and that personal growth leads to empowerment. One of the participants noted that empowerment *"allows for personal growth within both a woman's personal*

environment and in the workplace". Another participant said that "*circumstances that are not suitable for my growth and development are done away with and I create my own circumstances*". Another participant said that "*people should be given the chance to grow not to cause disaster*". This would imply that women experience empowerment when they are given opportunities that foster personal growth.

5.3.1.1.7   Work overload and management's lack of sensitivity

Work overload emerged as a theme directly related to feelings of disempowerment. One participant said that she feels disempowered "*when more and more work is placed at my door and even though management knows I am not coping nothing gets done to relieve it*" and also "*when it is necessary to take work home night after night, and I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel*".

5.3.1.1.8   Empowerment and change: opportunities for involvement

A theme that emerged quite strongly and yet quite obliquely, was that of organisational change playing a role in the empowerment of women. The organisation in which the women work is undergoing much technological and structural change at the moment and one of the participants said: "*This is rewarding – to be part of the change*". Another participant agreed when she said that she enjoys working, "*problems and all*". Change at the societal level was also found to be empowering. One participant commented: "*In women becoming empowered, I think it is great and exciting time and one where there are many opportunities for woman to take if they want to.* Empowerment was also experienced by one participant when she participated, or got involved, in issues in the organisation. She said that she thought it was in her "*own interest to participate*".

5.3.1.2 EMPOWERMENT AS BEING INFLUENCED BY OTHER INDIVIDUALS

5.3.1.2.1   Empowerment as feeling valued

Empowerment was also understood as feeling valued, feeling useful and needed by the organisation and by the family and community. All of the participants agreed in one form or another that in order to feel empowered, you have to feel appreciated and valued by others. As one participant commented: "*I think in a sentence empowerment to me is the feeling that I am useful whilst disempowerment is the feeling of uselessness*".

The participants also contrasted their sense of being valued as woman with that of being valued because one acts like a man. The women therefore found it disempowering if, in order to be valued, they have to act like men. This issue did however, emerge more as a criticism of other women rather than as a reflection of themselves. As one participant noted: "*for some women it has become a driving ambition to exceed/excel/equal the positions of important men in organisations of all kinds. This is all very well and serves to motivate women who feel that a good direction their lives should take is to maintain such managerial or corporate positions and spend all their time fighting to stay there and justify their appointments*". The women clearly found it empowering to be able to use their feminine power. One participant said that "*women are able to be professional and to accomplish the tasks set forth in a feminine manner and should feel comfortable fulfilling their duty in their manner. In conclusion I feel that women are able to offer a company a lot in their way and needn't be like men to do so*". Another participant agreed: "*I hope that women still retain their individuality and feminine side and do not trade that in for reaching the top*". Empowerment in this sense can be understood as being true to oneself. One participant said: "*unfortunately many women still feel that they can only add value if they either act like a man or do things that are acceptable to men*" and that this was disempowering for women.

5.3.1.2.2   Empowerment as enabling or empowering others

All the participants agreed, three strongly, that empowering others is a very empowering experience. The experience of training and developing others was found to be extremely rewarding. This was also extended to include motherhood in which one enables one's children to become adults. One participant wrote: "*I understand empowerment to be enabling or facilitating another, in order for them to operate independently within a certain environment*". Another participant agreed that "*if empowerment is used to enable people to have opportunities to succeed and not purely to give the statistics the government has laid down, everyone could benefit but as in many cases, power is incorrectly used and the wrong results obtained*".

Conversely, the experience of being unable to enable others was felt to be disempowering. One participant noted: "*Black empowerment is a subject I am loathe to touch on. I have had the opportunity of training equal opportunity appointees and I found it a nerve racking and pressuring experience. It is hard to empower people who do not have the necessary skills and general knowledge to do the job*".

Another participant said that she feels empowered when she is "*able to help others out in situations where they do not have sufficient training or experience*". Conversely, she feels disempowered when she is unable to empower others: "*despite spending hours of training – both classroom and on the job training – I found myself constantly demotivated as I did not appear to be making any headway*". Another participant said that she feels empowered when empowering others, because "*it is an achievement. It's a lovely feeling when you see someone you've trained succeeding because it has to come back to you in confidence really*".

5.3.1.2.3   Empowerment as the sharing of power

This theme became apparent from all seven interviews. The participants all agreed that there is a relationship between power and empowerment. As one participant noted: "*I think they have to be connected. To exercise the one, you have to have the other. It just depends on how judiciously you would exercise it. That is where the mental confidence comes in. In other words, if you're made a manager and*

immediately dump on everyone, because you're so important now, that would be abuse of power". A distinction was also made between power and empowerment. One participant noted that: *"empowerment does not mean "to have power" – many people have power, but they cannot use it. I'm a Muslim. To say the very least, I come from a religion where women have almost no power. However, that does not mean that women are disempowered"*.

The participants then progressed in the workshop to contrasting their own power with that of men which is not sharing power but withholding power. All of the participants agreed that men and women have different ideas about power and how it is used. As one participant said: *"women don't have a power thing. Power is not that important to women. If you take the men and women in the office, the women tend not to want the status that men do. Cars, men managers have a problem if their cars are not pristine, if they don't have the best car. As long as our cars are working, we don't worry. For the guys, it's a status symbol. No one else can drive it because it's their status symbol. Whereas women will lend out their cars. Women give the best to their husbands because they don't have a problem with doing it. Maybe it's a maternal instinct, always sacrificing for your kids. You want to give the best to your child and therefore learn that you always give the best to somebody else"*. The women therefore view power as something to be shared and feel that men prefer to withhold power because, for men, it is closely linked to status.

5.3.1.2.4   The role of support

The theme of support was observed in the transcripts of all seven participants and includes practical and emotional support. The women all stressed the important role of support in experiencing empowerment. Support from colleagues, bosses and husbands was viewed as important although the support from husbands in particular, was viewed as important for both empowerment at work and empowerment at home. One of the participants said that if a woman has *"the support of her husband and family she can do almost anything"*. The women also stressed the importance of emotional support from family. One participant said in the workshop: *"Harping on this support thing. If you've had a bad day, regardless of what it is about. If your husband takes you in his arms and says everything's going to be all right. You know its not going to*

be, but you feel better and you just have this thing that he will protect you. It's not that they are going to fight the big bad bear, it is just that it's a mindset".

The women all agreed that it is empowering to receive support from family and friends. Practical support from bosses at work was also considered important. One of the participants said *"there must be a line of referral where back-up support is available"* to feel empowered. And another said that in order to feel empowered one needs a *"boss with a "backbone""*. Another participant said that she feels disempowered when she needs assistance in certain areas *"but you get the feeling – don't make your problems ours"*. The women also emphasised that the genuineness of the support was important. One participant said that she feels disempowered when people say that they support you, *"but when it comes to the crunch – you can feel the indecisiveness"*. The women also said that they rely on colleagues to give them emotional support when things are going badly. One of the participants said: *"you rely on them to get you through it"*.

5.3.1.2.5   The role of trust and respect

Trust and respect were also highlighted by one of the participant as a necessary condition to experiencing empowerment. This participant said that empowerment *"means having the trust, respect and support of the people around you. If I feel I have the trust, respect and support of people around me then I feel empowered. If the support, etc, was not there, I would most definitely feel useless as I have no idea as to where I stand. It greatly restricts my freedom to work as I wish and it brings down my performance"*. However, this participant also said that respect can sometimes be disempowering. She cited the example: *"My mother-in-law is a widow and lives with us. I'm quite happy to let her do whatever she wants to – however, there have been occasions when she isn't always right in what she does or says but I feel powerless to say anything because of her age and the fact that she has been through a lot in her life including a battle with cancer which she won. But I think it's more her age that prevents me from saying anything. So I think that sometimes even respect for your elders (or even community leaders) can make a person feel disempowered"*.

5.3.1.2.6   Being listened to and having one's opinion sought

One participant clearly stated the need to be listened to and to have one's opinion sought as a condition necessary for fostering the feeling of empowerment. She said that she feels empowered when suggestions she makes are put into practice and when her opinion is requested. Conversely, she feels disempowered when she makes realistic suggestions and they are not considered.

5.3.1.2.7   Empowerment as being given the freedom to make decisions

This theme was observed amongst four of the participants. These participants feel that the freedom to make decisions is a necessary condition for feeling empowered and that empowerment is about being given this freedom. One participant said that at home she has "*never felt disempowered to have been born a Muslim and a woman at that. Our lives here are very different from those in totally Islamic states where woman walk around covered from heard to toe. We have freedom*". Another participant commented: "*Empowerment is the ideal – to give to another the freedom and trust to allow them to make their own decisions and allow confidence to be built up through this*". Empowerment was also said to be experienced when one has some autonomy at work. One participant said that she feels empowered when she has the authority to sign her own letters without having someone else check them. Conversely, one of the participants said that she feels disempowered when she is "'*spoon-fed' information instead of being given the freedom of finding things out by myself*". Similarly, another participant said that she feels disempowered when management "*spell things out to me every time as if I don't quite know what's happening*". Another participant stated that "*empowerment is the ideal – to give to another the freedom and trust to allow them to make their own decisions and allow confidence to be built up through this*".

5.3.1.3 EMPOWERMENT AS BEING DEPENDENT ON SOCIETAL FACTORS

5.3.1.3.1   Double standards

Double standards as a theme emerged very strongly in the workshop, where all the

participants noted that although men and women are supposedly equal at work, men still have more privileges than women. All of the participants feel that although the organisation in which they work supposedly offers equal opportunities for men and women, this is only superficial and at a deeper level things are still not equal for women. One of the participants said: *"The industry that I work in is still very much a male dominated industry and one where I think that woman are tolerated but still not 100% accepted. Although the company attempts to have all things equal between male and female as far as promotions and salaries are concerned there is still an uneasiness in the business if you are a female of child-bearing age and tendencies. One feels that you could work as hard as the male counterpart but the woman is penalised for taking time off for maternity leave. I understand from the business's point of view that up to 6 months maternity leave is a long time to be off but a woman can and does cope with the two roles"*.

When asked to elaborate on specific ways in which the organisation treats women differently from men, one of the participants said: *"Put it this way, a man can still take the afternoon off to go and play golf but a woman can't just take the afternoon off to go shopping. And I think that's a very discriminatory thing. That's the difference. Even when there's sport on TV, men can watch cricket at work but if it's a fashion show, you can't. They imply that you do business on the golf course, that you meet business contacts on the golf course. But you could do business while shopping"*. This subtle discrimination was found to be disempowering for women.

Double standards were also evident in the women's home and community lives. One participant said: *"I have a particularly nice hubby from Wales who is hardly chauvinistic at all. However he is a man and he also does these crazy irresponsible things that men feel they are entitled to do. And then stare in amazement when it is pointed out to them"*. Disempowerment was also experienced through society's expectation that men be dominant and women submissive. One participant said: *"in my life outside of work I work in a leadership position with other leaders and "hit my head" against the wall because most of the men feel intimidated by a female if they are confident, outspoken and generally competent. We need to work through them and often they will say "no" to something purely to show dominance and not out of any logical or suitable reason, and when a woman shows some form of strength then they*

tend to think that she is rather unfeeling and heartless and they do not appreciate that form of behaviour however it would be perfectly acceptable if a man acted accordingly".

5.3.1.3.2   Role expectations

Role expectations was a very broad theme to emerge in the workshop. Traditional male and female role stereotypes were found to be disempowering and yet the women also maintained their own role expectations of their husbands thus reinforcing the role expectation. Because this theme is so broad, it will be discussed under eight sub-headings: women belong at home and they are wives and mothers; women's work is not important; the "little" woman; dual roles; men are breadwinners, women work for supplementary income; men are managers, women do the work; women's position in society; and the advantages of being a woman: using one's feminine wiles.

5.3.1.3.2.1   Women belong at home and they are wives and mothers

A theme which emerged during the individual interviews was that of how the participants' mothers viewed women who work. Four of the participants said that their mothers did not work and that their mothers believed that a woman's primary role should be that of mother and wife. One participant said: *"My mother worked for supplementary income. She viewed motherhood as more important. My father is very dominant and women are viewed as subservient and men are viewed as the patriarchs".* Another participant said: *"My mother believes that a woman should be a mother and wife. Dad believed that women should be submissive and men in control".* Another participant commented that *"my mother never worked. She raised nine children. Work was not important in those days".* And the fourth participant said: *"my mother never worked. She believed a woman should be a mother and housewife. My father was very domineering".*

In addition, because society expects women to be wives and mothers, a tremendous amount of guilt is experienced by women who work. One participant articulated feeling guilty about being a working mother: *"Sometimes, the guilt I feel at the little amount of time I spend with (my child) makes me wish that I did not have to work full*

day. A nice little half day job seems so appealing now, when before I was driven by achievement and recognition at work, I now am driven by family and good sound values". One participant said that she finds it empowering when there are no role expectations. She said that her husband does not expect her to cook and clean even though he is not prepared to. The fact that he doesn't think it is her job and doesn't criticize her for not doing it, makes her feel empowered.

The women's role as mother and wife is also defined in terms of who is responsible for looking after the children. One participant told a story to explain how because it is her responsibility to look after their child, the husband doesn't know anything about this role. She said: *"Like the other day, I got home from work and my child was sick and I phoned my husband to ask him to stop and buy some Stopayne on his way home from work and he asked me all these questions like where do I buy it, what does it look like, is it syrup or tablets and the like and I just said oh well don't worry and hung up. I went around the corner and bought it myself.* The husband had turned a simple task into a massive exercise and because it is her responsibility to care for the sick child, he did not know what to do.

When asked whether men could and should take up more household responsibility, one of the participants said that she felt *"if the husband had to look after the children, he'd probably watch videos all day. And you'd still have to get home and do all the work. I can't actually imagine my husband going to the first day of school with all the other mothers".* Another participant disagreed and said that she thought the husband could help out more in *"later life, when the children are older. My brother ran his house for many years. Okay he's gone back to work now. But for about three years while she worked he did the washing and ironing and everything. And it hasn't harmed their marriage".*

5.3.1.3.2.2   Women's work is not important

Although the women in the study all said that work was important to them, it became apparent in the workshop that most of the participants' husbands do not view their work as important as their own. One participant told a story to explain in what ways her husband doesn't consider her work important: *"If the washing machine goes on*

the blink, who is the one that has to be there to let the repairman in? The woman, because the man works. I mean my husband will say `can you be here at ten today?' and I'll say `well why can't you?' and he'll say `because I work'. I mean it's still a very male/female thing that the woman's job is less important but if something has to happen, if I asked my husband just to do one thing, he can't do it because he works but I'm supposed to do everything. They always expect you to have time". This was clearly found to be disempowering.

Also under this theme of role expectations and how women's work is not considered important, a participant said: *"I get told repeatedly, if you're not happy at work, get out. My husband wouldn't sympathise at all if I've had a bad day."* Men therefore view women's work as arbitrary, something that can just be given up at any moment. Another participant agreed. *"Men think of solutions. If you tell a woman a problem, she will sympathise. My husband will always give a solution. My husband always says why are you working in that Mickey Mouse organisation and from day one he's said (this organisation) is a Mickey Mouse place. They don't sympathise.* Another participant agreed: *"Well that's what my husband says too but that's not the answer. I tell my husband he must pay me and then I'll leave".*

5.3.1.3.2.3 The "little" woman

The ways in which women reinforce role expectations became apparent in the theme of the "little" woman. One participant, when referring to her husband, said: *"For a lot of things I expect him... how can I say, you know you get a little dog that yaps at the front gate and a Rottweiler in the back garden. And the little dog can carry on, but you always know that the Rottweiler is in the back. In many cases, the woman is the one who fights with the teacher, fights with this, does that. But you know somewhere in the back, when push comes to shove, the husband is in the back".* This woman therefore clearly expects her husband to be her protector and guardian.

Another participant told a story of how her dog had been on heat and one night, while her husband was away another dog had got into their home to mate with their dog. She expressed feeling very helpless and not sure what to do. She said that she was sure that this would not have happened if her husband had of been there. She felt

certain that he would have known what to do or how to deal with the situation. Another participant said: "*I think the husband must be a man and the strength. He must be a man. And until that changes in us, I can't see change. You can make the structure flat, but it doesn't mean that things are going to change. Unless you see yourself as competent and others can see you in that way. You have to prove that you're competent in order to change perceptions*".

5.3.1.3.2.4   Dual Roles

Dual roles emerged as a theme which relates to role expectations in that working women are required to have dual roles within the work and home environment. One participant said: "*I've got a theory that a man is behind this whole feminist issue. Isn't it wonderful, you're sitting there as a man and then you decide why not let the woman help you earn money. So you start pushing feminist issues as a man and you've got a wife bringing in money with you and she's going to do the housework and she's going to cook for you. It seems that the more progressive women become, the more work women are just taking on*".

The women also expressed how their dual roles overlap each other and that there is a spillover effect between home and work. "*If you've had a bad day at work, you certainly don't feel good at home. If I've had a bad day at work, they certainly know it when I get home. We feel like if we've had a bad day, our husbands deserve to have a bad day with us*". Another participant then said: "*but I don't think that works the other way around. If I've had a bad time at home, I come to work to get away from it. I feel better when I'm at work*". All the participants agreed with this. The women also said that being working mothers meant that "*you tend to buy more, to take presents home, to look out for special things for (the children) and to plan trips over weekends and things like that*". This overcompensation may once again be due to the guilt women experience about having dual doles.

5.3.1.3.2.5   Men are breadwinners, women work for supplementary income

Ingrained societal beliefs hold that women work for reasons such as supplementary income, stimulation and to keep themselves occupied, while men work for more

meaningful reasons. Three participants in the individual interviews said that their mothers supported women who work but that this work was largely for supplementary income only. One participant said: "*my mother is all for women working and being independent*". Another participant said: "*My mother doesn't have a problem with working women. She believes that women are happier if they are kept busy and stimulated by work.*" And the last participant said that she "*grew up in Britain, where women have more balanced roles and there is equivalence between the genders. South Africa is frustrating in this regard. My mother had her own business and there was shared responsibility between my mother and father*".

On the other hand, men are seen to work for status and prestige. One participant told a story: "*I was speaking to a guy the other day who has recently got a divorce. I think he was married for twenty years or so and he was saying how he's always done everything for his wife. Drinking with the boys, socialising, etc. That was all for his wife and now she's up and left him. He's doing everything he's doing, working until 9 'O clock every night, so he never sees his wife and they drift apart. In his mind, he's doing everything for his wife. In the meantime, the wife is doing everything by herself so she starts her own life and he's upset because everything he did he did for her and she's up and left him. And although all that drinking with the boys and socialising might have helped his career, it actually wasn't for the wife*". This story demonstrates how role expectations demand that men put more into their work than into their families and how this creates tensions at home because women find the situation disempowering. Another participant said: "*It's quite interesting in a divorce situation how the man often rushes off to find a new wife and the ex wife gets on with her life*".

5.3.1.3.2.6 *Men are managers, women do the work*

When asked why women were not reaching senior management positions, the women chorused in unison: "*men!*" When probed, one of the participants said that it was "*because the old fashioned ideas are still there. That generation still believes that women shouldn't be managers. Of course in 20 years time, it will be different. It's different now than it was fifteen years ago. Fifteen years ago there wasn't one female manager. So it is slowly changing*". The participants clearly find these old fashioned ideas disempowering but they find it empowering that things are slowly changing.

Another participant felt that: "*men have developed the art of "dumping" the bulk of the work on women*". This participant felt that "*men like to put women in lower and middle management levels – as this is where the work gets done and churned out – senior management appears to be the boys club*". Another participant said that "*women and men do not understand each other and do not have the same responsibilities*".

Another participant agreed with this view when she said: "*And a woman is more responsible for the children and that in itself puts you on an unequal level with a chap who is transferable, that can go to Cape Town at the drop of a hat*". One of the participants who felt that women are not disadvantaged in society responded to this view by saying: "*But that's changed quite a lot now anyway because the wife is earning more money, men don't just drop things and transfer. A lot of people, now, men, can't afford to just transfer*".

The participants also expressed a concern that men sometimes abuse their power at work. One participant said: "*Take men for example, take the guy in the office who is the biggest pain, boss, bully, whatever. Invariably, you meet him with his wife and she's the boss and he is the underdog. When he comes to work he's a totally different person because he goes home and he's picked on. He's got to be a bully at work, because at home he's bullied. And he has the authority at work.*" When asked if women do the same thing, another participant responded: "*not necessarily, but I do believe you can be two different people at work and at home*".

5.3.1.3.2.7   The advantages of being a woman: using one's feminine wiles

The advantages of being a woman emerged during the group interview when one of the participants noted that: "*Sometimes, being a female gets you out of trouble. Sometimes being a female is against you and sometimes it works for you. Today I saw a client and the markets are down and today I had to tell him with a grin on my face what his account is actually worth now after the market crash. I mean its bad news. And he said to me: "I'm only taking this because you're young and you're a woman. If you were a man I would have been upset". Being a female worked for me today*".

The other participants agreed that women have certain qualities that are advantageous: *"There are certain qualities where woman are better than men and this is a very big generalisation, and these are orderliness, tidiness, methodical, sympathetic and perhaps give more attention to detail and hence woman are able to perform better at certain jobs for example administration etc.".* Role expectations mean that these qualities are good for administrative positions, but not for management positions and this is disempowering for women. If a man possessed these qualities he would be considered a good management candidate. Another participant said that women *"use their god given creativity and sensitivity to move forward. Men are not blessed with the same skills of observation and perceptiveness which comes so easily to women. Possibly due to the fact that they are able to bear children. Women are able to manipulate and display emotions very easily. They cry with colleagues, flirt with their clients, and still say focussed on their ultimate goal: "to be at the top"."*

5.3.1.3.2.8 Women's position in society

Five of the participants expressed that women are no longer disadvantaged in society although they did express some ambivalence in this regard. For example, one of the participants said: *"women are not as disadvantaged as they used to be"* and another participant said: *"I don't really think women are disadvantaged. Not today".* Contrary to this view, two other participants felt quite strongly that women are disadvantaged in society. One of the participants said: *"I think a lot of it might be superficial as well, for example sometimes its made out that you can but until you attempt it or do something then you can't. They say it is truly equal but when push comes to shove, it is not".* When asked how women could go about changing their status in society, one of the participants said: *"Don't waste your time. Men start with their mothers who tell them they are wonderful, then they go on from there. You'll never change a man. You have to accept him as he is. Men don't adapt as women adapt".*

5.3.1.3.3 Empowerment as making the most of a bad situation

Another theme to emerge under empowerment being dependent on societal factors, was the way in which women have developed an ambivalence towards their own

disadvantage and how they view empowerment as making the most of a bad situation. The participants all seemed to accept their lot in life and said things like: *"even if you're born with nothing, you make your own opportunities,"* and *"I can't see things changing ever – the very fact that women bear children, are not as transferable, still don't earn equal salaries, makes them vulnerable to, and dependent, on men. Maybe women with families and children are not meant to reach senior management levels"*.

The women have also seemed to just accept the inequity between men and women at work. One participant said that she felt the *"empowerment of women in organisations has developed over the last years into an accepted norm, whereas before it was more or less understood that this could not happen. In the past women were seen only as typist, receptionists, input operators etc. and even where they were given more responsibility they were not paid the same as their male counterparts, nor did they have equal benefits as men have always been considered to be the breadwinners and therefore needed to be financially superior"*.

The participants clearly go along with the double standards and role expectations that society places on them and have learned that the only way in which to deal with these is to make the most of your situation. One participant said that she felt *"with empowerment both women and the previously disadvantage should now be given equal opportunities to prove their worth and to achieve in competition with their fellow workers"*.

5.3.2 EMPOWERMENT AS AN INTERNAL CONSTRUCT

5.3.2.1 EMPOWERMENT AS QUALITIES ONE HAS

5.3.2.1.1 Empowerment as something you're born with

Contrary to what the participants had written in their protocols, in the workshop they all agreed that empowerment is something that one is born with. Irrespective of societal influences, women who are born with empowerment will make the opportunities to feel empowered. One of the participants noted of another participant: "*she has a six year old daughter who flat refuses to wear something. It's in you already, if you see what I mean. I think you're born with it and the influences in your life affect it as well. People who are empowered but not given opportunities will make or take opportunities. There are people who come from nothing and become something. I think most people find what they good at and what they enjoy and they take that line. There's no way on earth you could empower me to be a nurse. You have to have the natural ability to start with. I just joked with Y now and said were you going to climb Everest. I just think about that young girl last year that climbed Mt Everest. Her mother probably nearly had a heart attack but she was probably going to do it anyway. It's in you*".

5.3.2.1.2 Empowerment as a mindset

Empowerment as a mindset refers to an individual's mental attitude and approach to their work. Mental attitude includes self-confidence and self-determination, the necessary qualifications necessary to successfully complete tasks and self-beliefs about one's ability to successfully complete tasks. All of the participants agreed and felt that empowerment was directly linked to one's mental attitude. As one participant stated: "*The intrinsic meaning of empowerment should be your own mental attitude and the exercise thereof in practice. Self-confidence and the development of your particular abilities into a valued member of staff without the administrative hassles is an achievement of its own*". Another participant felt that "*everything is possible if one's mind is set that way. The very difference is in one's determination*".

5.3.2.1.3   *Empowerment as having a choice*

Empowerment as a choice emerged very strongly in the workshop where the participants expressed that in order to feel empowered in anything they do, they have to have made that choice. For example, for women to be empowered at work, they have to have made the choice to work. Women choose how they want their lives to be and then plan accordingly. As one participant said: "*I have organised my life according to my personal design for living*".

Empowerment was therefore experienced through following up on choices that one makes in one's life. One of the participants said: "*I don't subscribe in any way to the belief that women belong in the home or kitchen – not at all. However I feel that it is the men who must be the providers of their families and supply a sound financial basis for their children, homes, pensions at the end of the day. Women who have enjoyed the housewife bit and have found satisfaction in raising their children could afterwards maintain a good job and reap the benefits of the mental stimulation and extra money generated therefrom, but I strongly disapprove of the current expectation of the young married that on day one they should have the sort of home and assets enjoyed by their parents after many years of effort to accumulate these. In the present day workplace the mode is for young women to marry, buy a home beyond the mutual means of husband and wife, car, etc., then fall pregnant and stay off work for 6 months' maternity leave. On their return the financial struggle continues indefinitely, combined with baby care, baby sickness and somewhere along the line the nurturing that little children are entitled to, is neglected, must be neglected no matter how strong the protests, if the mother works from 9 to 5. I married and had two children, and stayed home with them until they were at school. I then worked mornings only for the mental stimulation and office family environment that is enjoyed here, for 9 years until my second child was almost finished school. Only then did I change to full time work again*".

Also under this theme is the women's conscious choice not to reach senior management levels. One participant noted that "*maybe women don't want to reach those levels. They don't want the responsibility. Because women have other responsibilities, maybe we don't want to spend 18 hours a day at work, social*

functions and meetings and those sort of things you have to attend if you're in those positions. Maybe they don't have the time to allocate to work". Another participant agreed with her and said: *"I have never wanted a managerial position which would entail taking one's work home at night, actually or mentally. At the end of the day I say to myself – I will never regret not doing that extra work or getting to the top of the career ladder but I will regret not spending enough time with my kid and not making enough time for my husband and myself. Perhaps both men and women, settle rather for wonderful blazing careers, as it consumes a lot of time so that they do not notice that they do not have first prize – true contentment, happiness and peace within themselves".*

The women therefore felt empowered through the choices they had made. One participant said: *"I'm happy, but I don't think I'd like to be a senior manager. Even some men don't want to attain senior management".* When asked whether home commitments meant that women could not have fulfilling careers, the participants all said *"no"*. *"The women just need to balance those roles more equitably".* The women all agreed that sometimes they resent being so busy at work and at home: *"I think you resent it when you think you're not being appreciated. But the bottom line is you choose it. But you can still resent something even if you've chosen it. You may resent the circumstances that you find yourself in".*

Another issue which emerged under this theme is the women's choice as to how they prioritise their home and work lives. This emerged strongly amongst the five women who are married with children and was acknowledged by the other two participants. *"Before having a child, I was totally career orientated and was the typical feminist go-getter. But now, with a child, who I love very dearly, my career has dropped on my list of priorities. Which I never thought would happen. Also, as I said to you, before I had kids I was much more career oriented and driven and I used to get into issues. Whatever issues I could get involved in, I got involved in. And since my child's come along its like that what's important is a nice happy home with all good things and nice smells in the house. That is what its come down to for me."*

Another participant agreed with this view when she said: *"Having children makes a big difference to the way you think about things. I waited a long time to have my child*

and it definitely is a totally different way of life. Your whole focus changes. My focus is on my child and what is best for her. I still enjoy my job and all the rest of it. I'm not going to give up my job, but my priorities have changed. Your priorities are very different when you have children. I mean I'm not interested in working until 8 or 9 at night. I have a child to go home to and she comes first in everything. I won't work weekends. I won't go away and attend training courses because she is my priority". When asked why she should have to work overtime, she responded: *"I won't".* Another participant said it was *"because the workload is so great and there's no one else to do it".* The first participant responded and said: *"don't get me wrong, if we have a crisis, for example, budget time, whatever, then I will work overtime but it's certainly wouldn't be a main factor. I would do it for a short time. But if I had to work every night and every Saturday I would have to do something about it. My priorities are not work first".* Another participant said that if she had to choose *"between work and marriage, I'd choose my marriage".* Another participant said she wondered what a man would choose. And another participant responded: *"I have a theory. In a crisis, the man will look for his wife. His wife will always look for the children. I think that's the difference the culture is that a man's first instinct is his wife and a wife's first instinct are the children".* Women therefore feel empowered if they are happy with the choices they have made in their lives and these choices mean putting family first.

5.3.2.1.4   Empowerment as a sense of well being: quality of life

Empowerment can also be understood as a sense of well being. One of the participants said: *"I think Y's hit the nail on the head by saying she wants to be happy. If you're not happy, what are you doing? You have to be happy with yourself and what you're doing. And if you get to be a senior manager one day and you're miserable, what's the point? Then you're old and your career is over and you've lost out on all that time. You've got a heck of a lot of money but what does that matter at the end of the day when you've got no one to share it with".* And another participant commented: *"If you're happy, you're confident".* Yet another participant wrote: *"If you don't take time to smell the flowers – the most meaningful proverb ever written in my opinion – then what is the point of it all. There are books to read and hobbies to pursue and children*

to chat to now that they are grown up and a home to enjoy and movies to see – work is not the be and end all in life".

5.3.2.1.5   Empowerment as motivation

Empowerment can also be understood as motivation whereby women create opportunities for themselves because they are motivated to do so. One participant said: *"In my opinion women in organisations understand empowerment as an opportunity to deliver what they are focussed on. Woman should feel entitled – they should take what opportunities they create for themselves".*

5.3.2.1.6   Empowerment as control

This theme includes a sense of mastery over one's environment and control over one's destiny. All of the participants agreed that having a sense of being in control of a situation is empowering. For example, all the participants clearly demonstrated concerns about the hierarchical structure of their organisation as well as the amount of "red tape" involved in their business. One of the participants said that because of the nature of their business, there are a lot of procedures and processes that they are instructed to follow. She felt that a lot of these procedures were unnecessary and hampered feelings of empowerment. Another participant said that she believes *"empowerment allows for red tape to be cut through in the work environment"* and this gives a person a greater feeling of control. Another participant said she feels disempowered when *"management holds onto functions that I could easily not need to refer to but I feel they do not trust me enough to make my own decisions".* The same participant said that she feels empowered when she has greater control over her job, when *"red tape is lessened"* and when *"the need to refer is diminished".*

5.3.2.1.7   Empowerment as shared responsibility

This theme centers around women taking, having and sharing responsibility. This theme was evident in only one protocol and only with regard to empowerment at home. This woman said that she feels empowered when her husband comes home and cooks, plays with their child and gives her the night off. *"We make joint decisions –*

his word does not rule, in fact he tends to go along with my needs". Another participant said in the workshop that she felt: *"women, by their very nature, tend to take on much more than any man will be prepared to take on – both at home and at work. Maybe motherhood automatically makes a women more responsible – so while the guys are out there playing their political games, the women take the pressure and the bulk of the work and get the job done".* Another participant said that she didn't think *"men are equipped, the way we are, to run the house. Maybe we just don't trust them enough to do a good job."*

As one participant said: *"generally life is so busy, I am tending to get the job done at work and then rushing home to cook and play with my little boy etc.".* This women said that she feels disempowered *"when my husband can come home at whatever time he likes but the responsibility of the kid and food and general management of the home falls to me".*

5.3.2.2 EMPOWERMENT AS SKILLS AN INDIVIDUAL CAN DEVELOP

5.3.2.2.1   Empowerment as competence and confidence

All the participants displayed remarkable competence and confidence in their abilities to do their jobs. They all believed that in order to be empowered, you have to have the competence and confidence to do your job. One of the participants said that she felt empowered because she is a confident, efficient person perfectly secure with herself and her abilities.

Confidence is derived from the support of the organisation and family. Another participant said: *"I know that they will stand by me and that allows me to be confident in my approach to any problems encountered or any decisions to be made".* Another participant said that she believes *"that if someone needs to be empowered they possibly do not have the confidence, qualifications or whatever it takes to perform a function. This could be anything from a job, to a mother as a housewife".* She went on to say that most people she knows *"do not need to be empowered because they are capable and able to do whatever it is in a confident manner".*

5.3.2.2.2   Empowerment as a personal experience

All of the participants felt that empowerment was a personal thing and that no one definition of empowerment was appropriate for everyone. One participant said: *"I think it (empowerment) is a very individual thing. Some people might grasp it. Others might not be interested in it at all because they don't want the responsibility that goes with it. Each person is different, some respond and some don't. And how can you know which buttons to press for each individual? Even at home you can either bemoan your fate or take it and run with it and make the most of the situation. And some people have everything going well and the still moan and other people don't. It depends on each individual person. I've done training at this branch and each person is different. It takes different things to excite different people."*

Empowerment is therefore seen as derived from personal experience. One participant agreed and said: *"Empowerment, to me, is a personal thing and if you cannot attain it yourself, you cannot be given it because even if you give someone empowerment they may or may not be able to use it correctly and then its worth nothing"*. Another participant said: *"I have always created my own personal empowerment in what I do. I think empowerment is already in each person in this room and I don't think it can be put there. You develop your career and aspirations according to where you are"*.

5.3.2.2.3   Empowerment as professional experience

Empowerment was also understood as professional experience. Here the participants seemed to agree that the more work experience you have, the more empowerment you experience. One participant commented that she, personally, has *"never felt a need to be given the opportunity to be empowered. Empowerment has come through personal, professional experience"*. Another participant said that *"If you have been with a company for a while you will have established where you wish to be"*.

5.3.2.2.4   Empowerment as knowledge

Directly linked to the theme above, empowerment at work is viewed as knowledge and that this knowledge allowed one to act independently. One participant stated: *"in*

my working life once I have gained the knowledge to act independently I have gained empowerment and in my personal life it has come with the ups and downs of everyday life".

5.3.2.2.5 Empowerment as the development of abilities

All of the participants claimed that empowerment cannot be experienced if you do not have the necessary abilities to experience empowerment. Here empowerment is understood as learning process in which women develop abilities such as self-confidence, qualifications and the like.

5.3.2.2.6 Empowerment as self-development and education

Another theme that emerged quite strongly amongst five of the participants was that empowerment is experienced as one's education increases and as one self-develops. One participant said: *"I notice that the people who are not prepared to study and self-develop are generally the one's who do all the complaining when they are not recognised for their effort. When in effect there is no effort from their side"*. Another participant said that: *"self-development is of the utmost"*. Another participant said that she experienced empowerment when she educated herself.

One of the participants stated quite strongly that in order to change the status of women, men and women need to be educated. *"Woman are a minority and hence receive rights on paper but there is still a long way to go to educate both men and women on the value that a woman can add to a company. The entire South African population needs to be re-educated in this matter and a culture of subservience needs to be deleted"*. Another participant agreed when she said: *"We need to change the perceptions of our male colleagues. Even if, everything is equal and in place, we would still need to change the perceptions of male colleagues, management and the like"*. This education needs to extend to include the family unit. One participant said that empowerment involves *"teaching your children that women are as worthy as men. Not only do men need to think and treat woman differently, but woman need to think the same and not accept second best, like dishing up the best potato for the husband and taking the worst one for herself, (although this a an admirable quality)*

she needs to teach her children that a woman is entitled to the best and so companies will be able to benefit from the values and qualities that woman are able to offer".

5.3.2.2.7   Empowerment as a problem solving ability

One of the participants emphasised the need for problem solving abilities in order to experience empowerment. *"I feel empowered when together with my colleagues we think of solutions to ever increasing problems in our office.I feel disempowered around negative people. People who are willing to sit back and complain without using their god given logic to work through a problem. People who are prepared to sit and wait to be pushed on ahead without doing anything or taking the first step. I would rather work through a problem or help a colleague, than walk away and decide to change professions".*

5.3.2.2.8   Empowerment as listening and learning

Two participants felt that they experienced empowerment when they learned new things at work. One participant said that she felt empowered when learning something new which can assist her in her job and another participant, said that she felt empowered when she was *"listening and learning at every opportunity".*

5.3.2.2.9   Compartmentalizing one's life as a strategy for empowerment

Five of the participants said that they cope with their busy lifestyles by compartmentalizing their roles. One participant said: *"I prefer to apportion my life into equal parts of work and relaxation".* Another participant said: *"I think we work separately. I live my whole life in little boxes. I move from one box to the next".* A third participant agreed and said that it *"is something that women can do (keeping home and work separate). At home, you're checking the dinner, watching the children, watching the TV and doing the knitting. Men don't do that. They tend to only have to concentrate on one thing. And that's why women can do things at home and do things at work and the two don't meet. It is your dividing line, your box. Men tend to only have to focus on one thing at a time while even all of us sitting here now are thinking about homework tonight. You concentrate on what's going on but you*

still have a compartment that home has to be dealt with." Another participant said that this is the reason why *"women are for more competent generally. Because they have two lives to lead".*

5.3.3 DIALOGUING EMPOWERMENT

This typology concerns how the participant's meanings changed during the course of the study. The women's understandings of empowerment evolved during the course of the research. Initially, their understandings of empowerment were largely of empowerment as an external construct with empowerment being viewed as shaped by organisational factors and others. In the workshop, their understandings evolved to looking at empowerment as being influenced by societal factors which included a critique of the way in which society is structured.

5.3.3.1 Initial externalisation of empowerment

This theme emerged in the evaluation interview in which the participants expressed that by having been through the research process, they now viewed empowerment as internal as opposed to external. As one participant noted: *"It's more internal now than external. Previously I viewed empowerment as a procedure or policy, but now I see it more as internal. It's an individual thing. The company could have a process of doing something but it won't change how the individual feels. You will not change the situation, the situation will only change if you change"*. Another participant said that her understandings of empowerment changed from being focused on empowerment as an external factor to seeing empowerment as something that is within a person

5.3.3.2 The entrenchment of societal values

All of the participants expressed a reluctance to engage in the research at a feminist level which seems to imply that societal values are so deeply entrenched in society that it was difficult for the women to engage at this level. One participant said in the evaluation interview that she has thought about our discussions on numerous occasions but that she still feels the same way about empowerment and that women can make of life what they want.

5.3.3.3 Challenging societal values

Although the women all seemed to adopt an attitude of 'this is how things are and all I can do is make the most of a bad situation', at the very least they were beginning to look at society critically. It was at this point that the researcher realised that her role as facilitator was less important than providing the opportunity for the women to research collaboratively the network of disempowering factors in their organisation and society. As one participant said at the end of the workshop: "we really should do this more often".

She said that she realised that the change has to do with one's own attitude. If you change your attitude then others will change theirs.

5.3.3.4 Empowerment as increased awareness

All seven of the participants expressed that the study had served to increase their awareness of not only empowerment but also their positions, as women, in society. One of the participants said that our discussions definitely changed the way she viewed empowerment but that these differences manifested themselves in a subtle manner and the greatest difference was an increased awareness. Another participant expressed experiencing a change by going through the research process in that she now has a greater awareness of the way in which men and women handle situations.

Another of the participants said that she felt she had become far more aware of factors which serve to disempower her and that this had resulted in her behaving more assertively. In addition all of the participants agreed that the changes they have experienced have been subtle, but that the biggest change has been a greater awareness: *"I think about it more often than I ever did"*. As one participant noted: *"I am glad I took part in the research, because it gave me something to think about and has heightened my awareness of empowerment"*. Another participant noted: *"In the bigger scheme of things, it has made no difference to my initial understanding, but in the smaller scheme of things it has made a difference. It has made a difference in that the way I perceive empowerment and the way others see empowerment are two*

different things. It has therefore broadened my understanding of empowerment and made me more aware of the plight of women because of the other's perspectives ".

5.3.3.5 Expanding women's views

Another participant said that she felt having gone through the experience was enlightening because she had not thought about all the different aspects of empowerment. She said that she felt that because they could discuss these issues out in the open, she had become more patient because she now has more views. She went on to say that she now considers things more carefully before acting rather than just reacting. In addition, she said that her increased awareness had resulted in her thinking about how to change the situation but that she has not yet come up with any answers.

5.3.3.6 Empowerment as knowing we're all in the same boat

The women also all expressed that they found it empowering to know that they are not alone in their plight. The women expressed drawing comfort from being able to hear other peoples' stories. One participant said that she felt her participation in the research had made no difference whatsoever to the way she viewed empowerment or society, but that it had been interesting to hear what others had to say. She said that her understanding of empowerment is exactly the same as it would have been 10 years ago. When asked why it had been interesting to hear what the other participants had to say, she said that it was just interesting to hear their views. She said one person had been more outspoken than she'd expected and she felt another had been very sanctimonious. In this participant's case, it would seem that the dialogical manner in which the research was just too foreign for any meaningful change to have occurred.

Other participants expressed gaining genuine support from hearing the other participants views. One participants said: *"I still feel the same way that I do, that empowerment is trust, respect and support. Except now I have everyone else's opinion. I can now think about things from various angles. Basically, what we discussed at the workshop, and the way other people saw empowerment, means that I now try to take that into context when deciding if I'm right or wrong about something.*

Whether you're feeling angry about something, or whether you should do something about it." She said that just knowing that other women are in the same position as herself plays a very important part in how she now see things: *"It doesn't mean its only my view now and I don't feel so wrong about feeling that way about something either. You know its not just you and that your feelings are wrong. Its nice to know that others also feel like that. Knowing that there are other people going through the same thing, gives you the strength to stand up to the situation".*

Another participant said that she was really glad that she had participated in the research process, because although she used to think about empowerment a lot, she had just buried those thoughts, and that it was a nice experience to talk about women's disadvantage out in the open. She said that she found it useful being able to talk with the others because it made her think about empowerment more widely. She said that what she thought about empowerment initially, she still holds true, but now she believes her understanding is broader and it has made her realise empowerment is made up of various aspects. In addition she also expressed being glad to have had the opportunity to hear what the others had to say because this was confirming.

5.3.3.7 The validation of women's views

Another theme emerging from the research is that by having the opportunity to explore collaboratively disempowering factors in their organisation and lives, the participants' views were validated. One participant said that the workshop has made her feel that she does not want to have to take on male characteristics in order to achieve anything.

Another change that this women has experienced as a result of our discussions is that she feels more enlightened to the fact that there are principles that everyone who was involved in the workshop believes in. She said that essentially all of the participants have some common principles that they've thought about differently. She said that listening to the other participants was very helpful, because some of the views are the same as her own, they are just articulated differently. Listening to the other participants made her feel that she was 'right'. It confirmed what she believed.

5.3.3.8 Shifting behavioural and emotional changes

In addition to an increased awareness of empowerment and their status as women in society, the women also expressed experiencing some behavioural and emotional changes as a result of their participation in the study. One of the participants said that she feels more positive about her work as a result of her participation in the study. "*It made a difference in a subtle way. It is going to take a long time for society to change but I think society will only perceive women differently when we ourselves perceive ourselves differently.*"

5.3.3.9 The impetus for change

It would appear that the workshop also served as an impetus to change. One participant said that she does not think about empowerment differently having been through the research process, but that she now thinks about her work differently. In the past she felt that women merely thought about making changes, but now she feels she can go out and make those changes. "*In the past women have always done it from the back. We've always sat submissively in our offices and put our little feelers out and made suggestions, but now we seem to be doing it more boldly*".

Another participant said that she does not really feel any differently about her work because of the research, because any limitations at work have been set by herself. That is, she has chosen to value her family above her work. However, she said that she feels that the research process has made her feel differently about her situation at home. On the one hand, she expressed feeling more resentment, and on the other hand she now experiences more acceptance. She said she has realised it does not help to get annoyed in certain situations. Her experiences at home have changed in that she now experiences "*half acceptance and half rebelliousness*". She said that knowing she has made the choice to be a working mother makes the situation more acceptable.

5.3.3.10 Spreading the word

In addition to a greater awareness, some behavioural and emotional changes, and knowing that they are all in this together, the participants also said that our

discussions have extended to others in the office. Although this has been informal, it is encouraging to note that the women are speaking out, not only to each other, but also to others in the organisation. One participant said that by speaking to the other participants about empowerment, when others in the office were present, has extended our discussion to others. Another participant said: *"I have thought about and discussed empowerment since our discussions. These discussions have included not only the group members, but also others in the organisation".*

DISCUSSION

This chapter will firstly look at reflexivity about the research process. The role of power will then be briefly examined in perspectives on the research. By using the perspectives on research as a template, women's understandings of power and empowerment will then be discussed from external, internal and feminist perspectives. Finally, a synthesis of understanding from a critical feminist perspective will be presented.

6.1 REFLEXIVITY ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The goals of this research were twofold. Firstly, to qualitatively explore how women in an organisation understand and experience empowerment and secondly, to empower the women through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge to see through factors that serve to disempower them. The study took the form of a collaborative inquiry which centred around women's understandings and experiences of empowerment. The study began with the assumption that perhaps women had different ways of knowing (Belenkey et al., 1986). In the course of the research, certain fundamental understandings of empowerment were unsettled and the women were encouraged to reflect on their status, as women in society, as a whole.

Initially, the researcher was reluctant to impose from outside the group, others' theory or even her own interpretations when the research project was basically conceptualised as a phenomenological approach where theory is constructed principally from the data. However, as these issues were explored with the participants, with the researcher's supervisor and in the literature, it became apparent that there is no blank slate (or tabula rasa) to which data are gathered anyway. Rather, validity in feminist research rests on participants engaging in collaborative enquiry, constructing new understandings that inform their subsequent and thus different actions which they themselves examined in the research process through later accounts. The researcher's tension of holding back as a participating researcher began to disperse, only to resurface when she found that she was the only person bringing theory to the study. Again, a self-reflexive approach of

bringing this to the participants was adopted and they saw the research as testing out whether such theory was useful for them.

The research focused on the ways in which a group of women in one organisation went about exploring how they understand and experience empowerment so that they could make something happen. The research problem demanded that the study tried to understand reality from the perspective of the women experiencing it. Since the research directly asked them about their experience, the research did not have the problem of developing indicators of concepts. Rather, the research wanted to maximise direct communication in their terms. This was done by assuming that the women involved would have a better chance of telling the researcher about their worlds if they actively participated in defining the dialogue. The researcher feels confident that in the protocols, interviews and workshop the participants felt comfortable about stating their own case.

Acker, Barry and Essevold (1991) argue that in qualitative research, the accuracy of listening and hearing is as important as the openness of telling. As a woman who has worked in a large organisation, the researcher did not have to go through the process of getting to know the special perspectives and nuances of meaning of the participants. The researcher felt that this increased the validity of the data. As a feminist researcher, the researcher was increasingly sensitive and aware in the interview process. This may have served as a limitation because the researcher may have been oversensitive and experienced a certain amount of guilt at taking up so much time in the participants' busy lives. However, this sensitivity in the research process also increased validity because as Acker et al. (1991, p. 146) note: "a faithful account is best pursued ... where changing consciousness is the central question, through the close and sympathetic involvement with the informant rather than through distancing and objectifying".

While it is acknowledged that this involvement may result in a blinding of the researcher, this was overcome through the ongoing process of analysis and by discussing with others what was emerging in the data, thus forcing the researcher to distance herself from the participants and look at the results more objectively. In addition, the accuracy of the findings were confirmed by the women themselves.

6.2   THE ROLE OF POWER: PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESEARCH

This study attempted to explore the personal and work worlds of a broad spectrum of women in an organisation with regard to age, work status and individual talents. Because the range of women studied were so different, it was not surprising that their experiences of empowerment were varied. However, a number of common themes emerged, weaving their experiences together. In certain respects, this study can be compared and contrasted with other research on empowerment. The differences found can be attributed to the fact that this research was conducted with women in a South African context. Women's disempowerment in South Africa is a contextual theme which looks at South African society in general and South African organisations in particular. The research therefore, sought to examine issues about these particular contexts that women are unhappy with. In this way, the network of disempowering practices were explored. While some of the findings can be explained in terms of other literature on empowerment, new findings also emerged which seem to be uniquely South African.

Women are players in the workplace and organisations need to understand how they can foster their development and empowerment. Organisations can only do this if they consider women's unique understandings of power and empowerment. Traditional masculine views of power associate power with authority, control and domination. Kanter (1977) distinguishes power from hierarchical domination and views it rather as the ability to get things done, to mobilise resources and to get whatever it is that a woman needs for the goals she is attempting to meet. Kanter (1977) argues that because of the hierarchical form of large organisations where the majority of women are subject to commands from above it is naturally assumed that power refers to hierarchical domination.

One of the central findings of the research is that power plays an integral role in the empowerment of women in organisations. Although there is still a lack of consensus as to how empowerment should be defined and operationalised all the theories and frameworks seem to share an emphasis on the construct of power. It is how power is understood and instilled in people that is debated. Conger and Kanunga (1988) argue that empowerment is derived from power. The results of the research highlight that

issues related to the uses of power at work need to be reconsidered.

The findings of the research demonstrate that women in organisations understand and experience power differently from men. Women see power as different from how men see power but live in a society in which masculine views dominate. The women contrasted their own feminine power with that of men which is withholding rather than sharing power. In addition the women noted that men's power is largely a status issue which does not apply to women. Women perceive masculine views of power as closely linked to status which women cannot identify with and view as selfish. As one participant noted: *"women tend not to want the status that men do. For guys* (their cars are) *a status symbol. No one else can drive it because it's their status symbol. Whereas women will lend out their cars. Women give the best to their husbands because they don't have a problem doing it."*

In addition, the findings of the study demonstrate that women are ambivalent about, or fear, their own power. Women reject the masculine paradigm of power but demonstrate an unwillingness to consider their own power. For example, one participant said that she found the task of writing about empowerment difficult because she *"hadn't thought about it before"*. Another participant said: *"women don't have a power thing"*. This reflects a reluctance to deal with issues of power. Another issue relating to power is that the women understand powerlessness as being an issue of victims and are not comfortable acknowledging either their own power or powerlessness.

The women in this study were reluctant to admit that they do not have any power when they were interviewed individually. Crosby and Clayton (1992, p.94) argue that "when a woman perceives support for remedial action, she may be more likely to identify discrimination – both to others and to herself – than if she expects no support". The implications of this for any research on women are that when looking at the ways in which masculine society hampers women, researchers must consider bringing women together to explore these issues.

Finally, the issues of external versus internal power as well as feminist perspectives on power need to be reconsidered. By examining power as derived from external and

internal sources, and by incorporating a feminist perspective on power a holistic strategy for the empowerment of women can be created. External understandings of power look at "power over", while internal understandings of power look at "power within" but neglect to acknowledge the role of societal structures. A feminist understanding of power considers "power for" and "power within" as an alternative to "power over". Feminist understandings of power not only look at power as responsibility but also include negating divisive structures in society. Power is therefore viewed as enabling or "power together" and adopts a critical view of society.

6.3 EXTERNAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

Initially, the women understood empowerment as something that is external to the individual. When empowerment is viewed as external it implies a dependency on others. Viewing empowerment as internal on the other hand implies self-sufficiency. Empowerment as external can be likened to empowerment as a relational construct. As noted in chapter two, when empowerment is viewed as a relational construct, power is seen primarily as a relational concept used to describe the perceived power that an individual has in relation to others (Conger & Kanunga, 1988). Power in this sense is understood as "power over" where power is perceived as the power one has in relation to others.

Empowerment is therefore viewed as being dependent on external factors or others. In addition, empowerment is viewed as arising when an individual's outcomes are contingent on what others do and how they respond and not simply on their own behaviour. For example, one participant, when referring to her husband, said: *"for a lot of things I expect him ... how can I say, you know you get a little dog that yaps at the front gate and a Rottweiler in the back garden. And the little dog can carry on, but you always know that the Rottweiler is in the back. In many cases, the woman is the one who fights with the teacher, fights with this, does that. But you know somewhere in the back, when push comes to shove, the husband is the back."* This story demonstrates that women see their power as ineffectual. That is, even though women have power, it is less effective than the power held by men.

The findings of the research demonstrate that, at least initially, the women understood empowerment in terms of their relationship to other individuals and other factors. The findings of the research indicate that, as an external/relational construct, empowerment can be understood in terms of two levels: empowerment as being shaped by organisational factors and empowerment as being influenced by others.

Empowerment as being shaped by external organisational factors was clear in the themes of empowerment as being allowed to use one's initiative or being given the

freedom to make decisions about one's job related activities; work overload; and as a hollow buzz word that alludes to affirmative action. For example, one of the participants said that she feels empowered when the organisation allows her to use her own initiative and judgement in performing her job. Hartline and Ferrell (1996) would agree with this when they operationalise empowerment as the extent to which managers give employees the discretion to make day to day decisions about their job related activities.

In addition, empowerment was viewed as not only external but as something that was for other people and not for the women themselves. This was very apparent in the theme of women understanding empowerment as a hollow 'buzz' word that alludes to affirmative action. Empowerment in this sense is understood as the misuse of power by inappropriately putting unqualified people into positions of power. This understanding also highlights the participants' denial of their own disadvantage because they do not view themselves as potential affirmative action beneficiaries. Given the organisational climate and attitudes to affirmative action in the participants' organisation, empowerment can also be understood as not seeing oneself as a victim.

The women initially understood empowerment as external because of how affirmative action is portrayed in the media and because of the organisational climate in which they work. Empowerment is therefore viewed as something that is given to you because you are a victim and this is viewed negatively. This view of empowerment can be understood in terms of the popular media in South Africa where black empowerment has become a 'buzz' word. Black empowerment in the popular media is a term used to describe how organisations are placing power in black hands by handing over control of organisations.

This view is congruent with Conger and Kanunga's (1988) notion of empowerment as a relational construct which is the process whereby a leader or manager shares his or her power with subordinates. The emphasis is on the notion of authority sharing. Burke (1986, p.51) agrees with this when he writes: "to empower, implies the granting of power – delegation of authority". When empowerment is viewed as relational, organisations have focused on the development of strategies of power sharing and the reallocation of resources in an attempt to increase the power of individuals with very

little and decrease the power of more powerful individuals. As a result, organisations have invested large amounts of money on participative management techniques such as quality circles, management by objectives and goal setting by objectives (Conger & Kanunga, 1988).

Still (1993) notes that unfortunately many affirmative action programmes rest on an assumption that women have a skill deficit. Thus it is believed that by training women in skills traditionally exercised by men will help address the imbalances between the sexes. This has only served to continue to perpetuate the masculine as a norm against which women are negatively judged and has tended to individualise and often psychologise women's absences and silences in management.

The failure of many affirmative action programmes to produce significant changes by increasing the presence of women in management (Still, 1993) means that affirmative action programmes have been directed towards developing the competencies of the individual woman and have often assumed she needs to overcome psychological traits which are undesirable in positions of responsibility and decision-making. Furthermore, the women's prior knowledge of affirmative action as influenced by the organisational climate also aids in understanding these negative reactions. It is therefore not surprising that the participants in this study felt such strong negative emotions about affirmative action.

Furthermore, dominant masculine views of power are individualistic. Affirmative action is about power at a collective level. The women in this study therefore, do not feel that they have the ability to challenge social injustice individually, which might explain why they only explored social barriers to empowerment when they were in a group. Affirmative action therefore undermines individual action.

In addition, the findings of the research demonstrate that traditional male characteristics have been given privilege over those attributed to the feminine. These gendered polarisations have produced a web of systemic practices and normative values which permeate organisations (Burton, 1991 and Blackmore, 1992, cited in Treleaven, 1994). Treleaven (1994) argues that the systemic effects of gendered practices show up individually in the women's alienation from the organisational culture ("the boys club")

and organisationally in the absence of women in leadership positions ("there are no female senior managers in Company X"). One of the participants in this study noted: *"One feels that you could work as hard as the male counterpart but the woman is penalised for taking time off for maternity leave."* Thus even though gendered practices are subtle in this organisation the women still experience them as disempowering because women feel they place them at a disadvantage.

Empowerment as being dependent upon others is demonstrated in the themes of empowerment as being given the opportunity to achieve goals; and empowerment as enabling or empowering others. These themes both suggest that empowerment is contingent upon others which suggests that empowerment involves a certain confirmation of one's sense of self through others. For example, the women expressed feeling empowered when they were empowering others and when they were given the opportunity to achieve goals. The former theme relates both to empowerment at work and empowerment at home.

The findings of the research indicate that women experience empowerment and are more comfortable with their own power when they were empowering others through training or through motherhood in which one enables one's children to become adults. This is congruent with Schaef's (1981) view of how women experience empowerment. Schaef (1981) argues that, for women, power is viewed as regenerative and expanding when shared. Women do not feel a need to hoard power, because it only increases when it is given away.

The latter theme refers to the amount of "red tape" that exists in organisations and the participants feel that these structures and procedures are preventing them from just getting on with their jobs. This would suggest that women would prefer flatter, non-hierarchical organisations. Conger and Kanunga (1988) would agree with this when they identify organisational factors as contributing to women's disempowerment. These organisational factors include organisational change and transition, competitive pressures, start up ventures, an impersonal bureaucratic climate, poor communication systems and highly centralised organisational resources. Organisations therefore need to focus on eliminating factors that lead to feelings of disempowerment amongst women.

The women in this study clearly preferred non-hierarchical structures in the workplace, because structures are seen to promote inequality in relationships. In addition, hierarchical structures were seen to hamper women in that endless 'red tape' meant that they could not just get on with their jobs. Thus, it was evident in this study, from the women in positions of authority, that they are more comfortable using their power to break down social barriers, to facilitate productive relationships by working with individuals rather than emphasising their authority over them. The results of the study indicate that when women collaborate collectively, they are more likely to explore social barriers than if they are alone. In addition the women showed a clear preference for male and female managers who use their power in nonauthoritarian ways. As one participant noted:

> *X is one of them and I can honestly say that he is one of the few male managers I have worked under who truly practices empowerment – and not because he is dumping but because he is able to let go – not just the work, but the recognition that goes with a job well done. There are plenty of guys out there that are prepared to let go – but when the praise and recognition comes, they tend to take it to themselves with maybe a paternalistic/condescending pat on the back for the hardworking woman concerned.*

Two of the participants did however also point out the dangers of working for women who try so hard to fit into the male dominated organisation they become overly authoritarian. Conversely, Grossman and Stewart (1990) found that another issue with women bosses is that they try so hard to be nonauthoritarian that they fail to communicate their directions and needs effectively.

6.4 INTERNAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

Once the women's understandings of empowerment evolved from understanding empowerment as external to understanding it as internal, they rejected empowerment as an external construct. By doing this the women seem to be taking the responsibility for empowerment upon themselves. The findings of the research seem to indicate that women are more comfortable with their own power if they take the responsibility for it upon themselves. Miller (1986) found that women tend to blame themselves, because it is more comfortable for them to feel inadequate than it is to feel powerful.

The findings of the research clearly indicate that a large part of empowerment has to do with one's personal perception of situations. Power as derived from internal sources can be likened to empowerment as a motivational construct where power is viewed as "power within". Personal and interpersonal influences on empowerment can be understood through the notion of empowerment as a motivational construct. Empowerment as a motivational construct refers to power and control being viewed as motivators that are internal to the individual. In the workshop, the women started internalising their power and realising that empowerment essentially comes from within. Empowerment in this sense is viewed as an attitude or mindset. The findings of the study show that empowerment as a mindset refers to an individual's mental attitude and approach to their work. Mental attitude includes self-confidence and self-determination, the necessary qualifications necessary to successfully complete tasks and self-beliefs about one's ability to successfully complete tasks.

Empowerment as a motivational construct therefore asserts that women's power needs are met when they perceive that they have power over a certain situation and believe that they have the capabilities to adequately cope with the situation.

Empowerment can also be understood as motivation whereby women create opportunities for themselves because they are motivated to do so. One participant said: "*In my opinion women in organisations understand empowerment as an*

opportunity to deliver what they are focussed on. Woman should feel entitled – they should take what opportunities they create for themselves". This was evident largely in the categories of empowerment as qualities one has and as skills one can develop. These themes relate to women's personal, internal qualities and the relationship of empowerment to these. These findings will be discussed in terms of the four psychological theories reviewed in chapter two: self-efficacy theory; stress and coping; social support; and learned helplessness theory. In addition, these theories will focus specifically on women in organisations with particular attention being paid to whether or not these theories are applicable to the empowerment of women in organisations.

6.4.1 Self-efficacy and the empowerment of women in organisations

The findings of the research validate self-efficacy as leading to empowerment for women. The women in this study spoke of empowerment as self-confidence and ability which can be equated with Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy. One participant said: *"the intrinsic meaning of empowerment should be your own mental attitude and the exercise thereof in practice."* The participants equated mental attitude with self-confidence and empowerment, the necessary skills or abilities to successfully complete tasks and self-beliefs about one's ability to do so. Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy explains how an individual's construction of individual action and interpersonal interactions influence feelings of empowerment.

The self-efficacy construct has served as a primary determinant of task motivated behaviour and performance (Harrison et al., 1997). Self-efficacy contends that behaviour is strongly stimulated by self-influence. Self-efficacy is also related to goal setting and self-regulation. The self-efficacy construct thus has a high degree of relevance as a basic element of individual behaviour and attitudes in the work environment.

Conger and Kanunga (1988, p.474) argue that empowerment as a motivational construct refers to "a process whereby an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced". One participant said that she feels empowered because she is a confident, efficient person perfectly secure with herself and her abilities. It thus follows that empowerment involves the strengthening of beliefs of self-efficacy and

the weakening of beliefs of powerlessness and power is viewed as being "power within". All the women in this study claimed to be empowered and can therefore be seen as having high self-efficacy. Bandura (1997, p.477) is quite scathing of the term empowerment and argues that empowerment and self efficacy are one and the same:

> There is much talk of "empowerment" as the vehicle for bettering personal lives. This is a badly misused construct that has become heavily infused with promotional hype, naïve grandiosity, and virtually every brand of political rhetoric. "Empowerment" is not something bestowed through edict. It is gained through the development of personal efficacy that enables people to take advantage of opportunities and to remove environmental constraints guarded by those whose interests are served by them.

As noted earlier, perceived self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs in his/her capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) suggests that four factors influence self-efficacy: enactive attainment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal.

Enactive attainment refers to women's genuine mastery of a task related to her job. When women are given challenging tasks to perform, they are given the opportunity to test their efficacy. Initial success experiences instil in the woman a sense of ability and she therefore feels more empowered. Enactive attainment is therefore, the experience of mastery of a task that creates a feeling of confidence in the employee. For example, the findings of the research show that women experience empowerment when they feel confident and competent.

Vicarious experience is the observation or visualisation of another's mastery of a task that can persuade one to attempt to master the task. Women can experience a sense of empowerment through vicarious experience. This was also apparent in the findings of the research where one participant said that she feels empowered when she sees other women succeeding in the organisation. Conger and Kanunga (1988) note that if an employee observes a supervisor successfully completing a task, they may believe that

they can behave in a similar manner or that they can achieve some improvement in their own performance. This is problematic for the women in this study because there are no female senior managers within their organisation. In addition, the women have negative reactions to affirmative action. The findings imply that if women had to view a female senior manager as an affirmative action beneficiary, they would lose all respect for the woman concerned. The implications of this for women are that they cannot win in organisations and the implications of this for the organisation are that staff need to be adequately informed about affirmative action.

The third source of efficacy information as outlined by Bandura (1986) is that of verbal persuasion. Women are more likely to experience a sense of empowerment if they are persuaded verbally that they have the capabilities to effectively master a task. The findings of the study also indicate that women feel empowered if they are rewarded and recognised for work well done. Verbal persuasion can also perhaps be understood in terms of women feeling empowered when they have support from their bosses at work and from colleagues. For example the women expressed feeling better about themselves and their work if their husbands reassured them and told them that everything would be okay.

Finally, Bandura (1986) asserts that one's personal competence expectations are affected by one's emotional arousal state. States that arise out of fear, stress, anxiety and the like can lower feelings of self-efficacy and thus, empowerment. Emotional arousal can serve as inspiration or the stirring up of positive emotions and the alleviation of debilitating emotions such as stress in challenging situations. This was evident in the theme of empowerment as a sense of well-being. When the women in the study feel happy, they feel empowered. Confidence and a sense of well-being are derived, in part, from the support of the organisation and family because knowing one is supported allows for women to tackle challenging tasks more confidently.

These four factors can be experienced alone or in interaction with other individuals which suggests that self-efficacy (and therefore empowerment) can be personal or interpersonal. In addition, self-efficacy beliefs impact on the quality of women's functioning in a number of diverse ways. Firstly, self-efficacy has an impact on choice behaviour. Choice behaviour refers to whether or not women choose to engage in a

task or avoid it. The women clearly demonstrated that they experienced empowerment when they had chosen to engage in certain tasks. For example, for women to be empowered at work, they had to have chosen to work.

Secondly, self-efficacy has an impact on effort expenditure and persistence. A highly efficacious individual is more likely to expend maximum effort and persistence in the face of a challenging task (Bandura, 1986). Effort expenditure and persistence were evident in the themes of problem solving ability and self-development and education. The participants indicated that problem solving ability and self-development and education were both a result of empowerment and a cause of empowerment. One of the participants expressed feeling empowered when she and her colleagues worked out solutions to ever increasing problems in their office. It was also noted that empowered women are prepared to study and self-develop.

Thirdly, self-efficacy impacts on women's thought patterns and emotional reactions (Bandura, 1986). An inefficacious woman is more likely to respond with stress and react emotionally to failure. This seems to be linked to women's feeling in control of their situations. This includes both a mastery of their environment and control over their destiny. For example, one of the participants said that if one has been with a company for a long time, she will know where she wants to be and will go about achieving her goals.

Finally, efficacious women are producers of their own behaviour. Women who perceive themselves as efficacious set themselves challenges that "enlist their interest and involvement in activities; they intensify their efforts when their performances fall short of their goals, make causal ascriptions for failures that support a success orientation, approach potentially threatening tasks nonanxiously, and experience little in the way of stress reactions in taxing situations" (Bandura, 1986, p.395). Research has shown that people with high efficacy, act, think and feel differently from those with perceived inefficacy. This was evident in the themes of empowerment as involvement and empowerment as a mindset. Empowerment as a mindset refers to an individual's mental attitude and approach to their work. Mental attitude includes self-confidence and self-determination, the necessary qualifications necessary to successfully complete tasks and self-beliefs about one's ability to successfully

complete tasks. All of the participants agreed and felt that empowerment was directly linked to one's mental attitude. As one participant noted: *"everything is possible if one's mind is set that way. The very difference is in one's determination"*.

The results of the study seem to implicate that solutions to restricted aspirations and occupational pursuits for women require both individual and social remedies. At the individual level, self-efficacy can be promoted by eliminating self-limiting barriers that have become ingrained over time through organisational practices and by creating the means for women to exercise control over their occupational lives. Another way of building self-efficacy amongst women employees is by exposure to models from similar backgrounds performing their jobs in a successful manner. This was evident in the theme of the power of role models. Organisations need to therefore, increase the presence of women in senior management positions.

In addition, social support in the form of encouragement and positive feedback raises the perceived efficacy of women. The women clearly stated that recognition was important for feeling empowered. The participants felt that rewards and recognition must be contingent on work well done and not just arbitrarily awarded. For example, one of the women said that she found it disempowering that because their business is dependent on the stock market for certain goals to be met and because of the crash in the stock market this year, they would not be rewarded. She felt that they had worked just as hard if not harder this year but because of something beyond their control they would forfeit their rewards. The implications of this are that if organisations cannot give tangible rewards, they should at the very least offer recognition and encouragement for work well done.

Finally, self-efficacy can be enhanced by eliminating self-belittling biases in the self-appraisal of capabilities and in the interpretation of personal attainment (Bandura, 1997). For example, seeing oneself as a complete failure for not succeeding on one task. In order to achieve this, success and failure experiences can be altered through cognitive restructuring of belief systems and thought processes involving standards of self-evaluation and appraisal of personal efficacy.

Organisational barriers to women's career development requires social remedies. These may take many forms. Gender biases operate to diminish the personal efficacy and

aspirations of women. Remedies at the social level must address the expectations, belief systems and social practices in the home, the media and the workplace.

The results of this study are consistent with studies conducted in the past to support Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. However, this study goes beyond previous research to assess the relationship between perceptions of self-efficacy and performance with regard to the empowerment of women in organisations. In this respect, this study lends support to the application of Bandura's theory to the work environment.

Recommendations for further research on empowerment and self-efficacy may progress in several directions. The antecedents of self-efficacy perceptions need to be validated. Bandura (1986) outlined four informational cues that may influence self-efficacy and subsequently, empowerment. They include enactive attainment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. Although Bandura (1997) and others have validated these relationships in a number of settings, further research on the relationship of the antecedents of self-efficacy needs to be conducted in organisational settings. In sum, the self-efficacy construct is central to research in organisations with regard to empowerment. Thus research is needed to fully develop the nomological network of self-efficacy and empowerment.

6.4.2 Stress and coping and the empowerment of women in organisations

Theories of stress and coping offer a means of understanding empowerment as an interaction between individuals and the environment. Gutierrez (1994) notes that the literature on empowerment and coping describe the involvement with similar others as an important process and that good social support can significantly mediate stress. The development of specific skills also improves coping and facilitates empowerment. Through skill development, individuals can strengthen their social power through problem solving, community and organisational change, life skills development and interpersonal skills (Gutierrez, 1994).

The results of this study show that the development of abilities is important in order to experience empowerment. In addition, self-development, education and problem solving abilities were found to be important. The women in this study understood empowerment

as a learning process in which they develop abilities such as self-confidence. This is similar to Bandura's (1986) idea of enactive attainment in that as the women become more successful at completing tasks so their confidence increases. This results in the development of more effective coping strategies in the face of stressful events and therefore, empowerment.

Stress and coping theory places emphasis on two factors: situational and personal factors. Personal factors are all those which the individual brings to the situation and includes such things as history and experience. This was evident in the themes of empowerment as professional experience, empowerment as personal experience and empowerment as personal growth. Personal factors include such views as empowerment as something one is born with. With more women entering the job market, women are confronted with stressors that are shared with men, as well as stressors that are unique to their gender (Dunahoo, Geller & Hobfall, 1996).

Dunahoo et al. (1996) note that although men and women share particular work related stressors, they may perceive and react to these stressors differently according to their social support structures and coping mechanisms. Dunahoo et al. (1996) argue that organisational factors that affect both men and women's experiences of stress at work include issues such as role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload and lack of autonomy. These factors could be seen in the theme of work overload. Job related stressors that are unique to women include the fact that women are faced with the glass ceiling phenomenon where there are limited promotion opportunities for women and discrimination in the workplace. The women in non management positions seemed to believe that they have chosen not to reach management levels, because they do not want the responsibility that goes with such a position. This is however, uniquely feminine because the women all felt that they had chosen to prioritise their families above their work.

In addition, role expectations come into play here because all the women in this study believe that a woman's primary responsibility is her children and family. Be this as it may, the women did say that there are no senior female managers within their organisation which would suggest that the women are faced with the glass ceiling phenomenon which is a uniquely female stressor.

Social skills can facilitate coping as they enable individuals to utilise social support more effectively and allow greater control in interactions with others. The women expressed that their work environment is supportive in that there are a lot of women in the organisation to share their problems with. Furthermore, joint problem solving is facilitated and can assist coping by providing a framework with which to deal with stress. The development of problem solving skills was found to be empowering because the women could actually take action and make something happen. Cognitive skills can provide a means of regulating internal events and assist in effective situation appraisals.

Empowerment research suggests that the outcome of stressful events can be less debilitating when individuals are encouraged to identify with similar others, to develop specific skills, to perceive the societal or organisational components of their problems and to engage in change on a collective level. Knowledge about empowerment can create a more holistic understanding of how women react to situations of injustice, powerlessness, and stress. Increasing feelings of control, having contact with similar others and developing skills can contribute both to empowerment and effective coping. The major area of difference between empowerment and stress and coping, centres on the role of the group and critical consciousness.

Coping literature describes individual phenomena and has largely overlooked how group efforts and an understanding of social structures can contribute to more effective efforts to increase individual, group or community power. The empowerment literature which identifies group interaction and collective action as crucial elements of the change process can begin to explain why some victims of stressful events have been moved to take political action. The findings of the research indicate that by bringing the women to explore issues of disempowerment in their lives served to increase awareness of social barriers that are hampering them but only encouraged minimal action. This encourages us to look at women as potential participants in social transformation and recognises the crucial role which appraisal, skills and social interaction can play in determining how individuals react to stress.

Guitterez (1994) argues that individuals, groups and communities on the margins of society are likely to experience severe stress due to societal injustice and inadequate

access to social resources. Research that looks at social systems primarily from a stress and coping perspective will not adequately consider how the social environment can be modified. Neither can they understand how participation in social action can have a positive effect on women's mental health. There is therefore a tension involved in looking at empowerment solely from an internal perspective. An orientation which extends information on the stress and coping process to include empowerment can aid in understandings how individuals, communities and groups can move from frustration, inaction and fear to efficacy, action and participation in social change.

Recommendations for research in this area include placing primary focus on women who are experiencing stressful events. The overall goal of this research would be to develop knowledge which could provide insights into how organisations can create policies and programmes which would enhance the empowerment of women in organisations.

6.4.3 Social support and the empowerment of women in organisations

The impact of social support on women in organisations emerged very strongly throughout the research process. Argyle (1989) broadly defines social support as the existence of relationships with colleagues, friends or others who can be relied upon to help when needed. Women working in organisations can find themselves more and more isolated in a male dominated environment. They feel increasingly lonely and secluded from colleagues and the outside world (Winnubst & Schabracq, 1996). Although the women in this study expressed that they worked in a very supportive work environment, they did stress the importance of social support in fostering feelings of empowerment. The findings of the research indicate that women require both practical and emotional support, formal and informal support. The former being more necessary from bosses and colleagues, and the latter referring to support from husbands and families.

The link between social support and empowerment can be seen as important because it has been shown to increase self-efficacy through enactive attainment, reduce stress and counteract learned helplessness. Research suggests that social support influences empowerment in women in that women who have strong social support systems in

place are more likely to experience less stress at work and are more likely to take on challenging tasks. Empowerment as social support was evident in the themes of empowerment as feeling valued; empowerment as the sharing of power; empowerment as trust, respect and support; and empowerment as being listened to having one's opinion sought.

In addition, it became apparent in the evaluation interviews that by providing a space for the women in which they could collaboratively explore their situations, the participants discovered that their problems were not unique. This made them feel supported. Argyle (1989) argues that the most available source of social support is the working group where women are brought together to work together but also for increased job satisfaction and social support. However, for working groups to be successful, certain conditions are required. The group should be homogenous, have close physical proximity and incentives. Social support from the family is also important. Previous research has shown that social support from the family buffers the effects of stress and thus results in women feeling more empowered.

6.4.4   Learned helplessness and the empowerment of women in organisations

Although the participants all claimed to be empowered, an element of learned helplessness became apparent in the findings of the study. This was evident in the theme of making the most of a bad situation. Because of the way in which society is structured (that is, male dominated), the women in this study realised that they are hampered societally and that individually they are powerless to change these structures. However, they did view empowerment as making the most of the situation by taking power where one can. The cornerstone of the learned helplessness hypothesis is that learning that outcomes are uncontrollable results in motivational, cognitive and emotional deficits (Abramson et al., 1978). The cognitive deficit refers to the idea that the mere existence of uncontrollability is not sufficient to render an individual helpless. Rather, the individual must have an expectation that the outcome will be uncontrollable in order to experience helplessness. The motivational deficit consists of the aborted initiation of voluntary responses as a consequence of the expectation that the outcome will be uncontrollable. Finally, the learned helplessness

hypothesis claims that blunted emotional reactions are a consequence of learning that outcomes are uncontrollable.

Thus, learned helplessness has important implications for women in organisations who learn that outcomes are unrelated or noncontingent on their actions which in turn results in faulty cognitive, motivational and emotional functioning. When the participants were asked how they could change societal structures, one woman replied: *"don't waste your time. Men start with their mothers' who tell them they are wonderful and it just goes on from there."*

The critical factor in determining an individual's response is not the actual situation but rather how the person labels or evaluates the situation. If negative emotions are roused because women unthinkingly evaluate a situation illogically or irrationally, then teaching women to think more rationally might create positive emotional states that, in turn, shape behaviour change in healthful directions. Unless negative beliefs are restructured, change will be unsuccessful. Restructuring beliefs can be aided by helping women accept the fact that self-statements mediate emotional arousal. Women can be assisted in recognising the irrationality of certain beliefs. In addition women can be aided in understanding that the inability to initiate or sustain desirable behaviours frequently results from irrational self-statements. Finally women can be helped in modifying their irrational self-statements, that is, practice changing negative or irrational statements into positive, rational ones.

In sum, learned helplessness occurs most frequently in situations where women believe that they have no control. The women in this study genuinely believe that the way society is structured will never be advantageous for women. The responsibilities of home life weigh heavily on working women. Society requires that they work all day and then still come home and wash and clean.

In addition, for the women in this study, the responsibility of the children falls to them. The implications of this are that it is not sufficient to make organisational changes more conducive to women. In addition we need a complete re-education of society. Men (and women) need to be educated as to the value of women and role expectations need to be revised in order to make women's dual roles less taxing.

Furthermore, learned helplessness can be overcome by the identification and reconstruction of thoughts and self-statements. Learned helplessness therefore encompasses some of the concerns of self-efficacy and stress and coping theories. Self-efficacy emphasises behaviours while stress and coping emphasises thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Similarly learned helplessness encompasses behaviours as well as thoughts and feelings.

The four psychosocial theories discussed here, self-efficacy, stress and coping, learned helplessness and social support, have significant implications for the empowerment of women in organisations and help us to understand how women understand and experience empowerment. The implications derived from these theories are relevant to healthful change at the individual, organisational and community levels. These three levels are interrelated in that change at one level may effect change at the others. All four theories share to a certain degree an emphasis on self-control. With the feminist perspective included the implications also take cognisance of other variables such as socio-economic and environmental factors.

In addition to the theories and the implications derived from these theories, organisational changes also need to be considered in order to improve the situation for women in organisations. Firstly, job improvement could lead to women experiencing a sense of empowerment. This can be achieved through job enlargement; reducing repetition, physical overload or time pressures; and the like. Secondly, the organisation itself can change to accommodate women. For example, flattening organisations, decentralisation, reducing role conflict and ambiguity and better designed techno-structural systems such as job descriptions, career planning, grievance procedures and the like. Thirdly, organisations can offer increased social support by creating small work teams, encouraging trainers and managers to be gender sensitive and more supportive, and by establish coaching/mentoring programmes. Fourthly, women need to be involved in decision making. This can be achieved through surveys, suggestion schemes, and industrial democracy structures.

Empowerment is therefore a process that involves the individual, the environment and an interaction between the two. In order for women to feel empowered, we need to consider

the psychological, motivational processes that facilitate our understanding but at the same time we need to consider and remove external factors in organisations that may negatively affect the empowerment process. In order to genuinely empower women in organisations, we need to examine ways in which empowerment is fostered through improved cognitive functioning using the theories of self-efficacy, stress and coping, learned helplessness and social support. There are however shortcomings with just adopting an internal motivational approach to empowerment in that the responsibility for empowerment is placed on women alone. In addition, motivational theories of empowerment neglect to critique societal structures that disempower women. For this reason, feminist understandings of power and empowerment need to be considered.

6.5   FEMINIST UNDERSTANDINGS OF POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

As noted earlier, women's understandings of empowerment evolved during the course of the research. Initially the women understood empowerment as something that is not only external to the individual but something that is for other people. The women then understood empowerment as internal to the individual and rejected external understandings of empowerment thus placing the responsibility for empowerment upon themselves. By understanding empowerment as internal, the women were able to start to understand empowerment as something that is not only internal (about one's own psychological make-up) but that it is also something that is facilitated or hampered by external factors, for example societal structures. This last view is related to feminist understandings of power and empowerment.

The theme of women's understandings of power and empowerment became apparent from all seven interviews. The participants all agreed that there is a relationship between power and empowerment. As one participant noted: "*I think they have to be connected. To exercise the one, you have to have the other. It just depends on how judiciously you would exercise it. That is where the mental confidence comes in. In other words, if you're made a manager and immediately dump on everyone, because you're so important now, that would be abuse of power*". Another participant noted however, that: "*empowerment does not mean "to have power" – many people have power, but they cannot use it. I'm a Muslim. To say the very least, I come from a religion where women have almost no power. However, that does not mean that women are disempowered*".

The participants' understandings of power evolved in the workshop where all the participants agreed that men and women have different ideas about power and how it is used. As one participant said: "*women don't have a power thing. Power is not that important to women. If you take the men and women in the office, the women tend not to want the status that men do. Cars, men managers have a problem if their cars are not pristine, if they don't have the best car. As long as our cars are working, we don't worry. For the guys, it's a status symbol. No one else can drive it, because it's their status symbol. Whereas women will lend out their cars. Women give the best to their*

husbands, because they don't have a problem with doing it. Maybe it's a maternal instinct, always sacrificing for your kids. You want to give the best to your child and therefore learn that you always give the best to somebody else". The idea of power as not being an issue for women is evident in the feminist literature on power. Miller (1986) argues that it is not that power is not an issue for women, but rather that women fear their own power.

Miller (1986) suggests that women fear power because it results in negative reactions from men. Women have internalised these criticisms and started believing that they are wrong. By bringing the women together in the research process, they were able to challenge these criticisms. One of the participants said that by listening to what the other participants had to say confirmed what she believed and made her feel that she was 'right'.

In addition, Miller (1986) suggests that women fear power because a woman who uses power for herself frequently feels that she is disrupting the surrounding context. For example one of the participants in the study said: *"in my life outside of work I work in a leadership position with other leaders and "hit my head" against the wall because most of the men feel intimidated by a female if they are confident, outspoken and generally competent. When a woman shows some form of strength then they tend to think that she is rather unfeeling and heartless and they do not appreciate that form of behaviour however it would be perfectly acceptable if a man acted accordingly."* Furthermore, Miller (1986) argues that for women power is associated with abandonment. Because society encourages women to remain in a position where others define the situation, to change the situation threatens a woman with no place to go and no support. As one woman commented when asked how society could be challenged: *"don't even waste your time"*. Power is also linked to inadequacy for women which in turn translates into anger (Miller, 1986). Women blame themselves because it is more comfortable to feel inadequate than it is to feel powerful. Lastly, Miller (1986) suggests that power is associated with women's sense of identity and women fear destroying the core sense of their identity if they behave powerfully.

Women need to understand that masculine norms create powerlessness amongst women. Women need to address their own feelings of inadequacy and face their power fears. In addition, women have to start forming their own networks. And yet, the women in this study displayed a reluctance to mobilise themselves which may be indicative of just how busy women are.

How women understand power and empowerment therefore impacts on how they experience empowerment and how they experience empowerment impacts on how they understand power and empowerment. All the participants positioned themselves as empowered and then attempted to document how they experience empowerment in terms of how they are. For example, if a participant felt she was empowered and that she had a lot of trust, respect and support, then she would say that she felt most empowered when trust, respect and support were present. It is therefore necessary that all the various aspects of empowerment are considered and organisations need to examine in which areas there are weaknesses. In addition, organisations need to consider giving women more opportunities to experience empowerment. Organisations can also supply women employees with more information about empowerment.

Through the process of the research and by providing a space in which the women could explore disempowering factors, the women's understandings of empowerment evolved. In some form or another, all the participants were effected by the research process. For many it merely increased their awareness of their own disadvantage but it also made them aware that others share their problems and that they are not alone in their disadvantage. Although the ways in which women understand empowerment did not change radically, six of the seven participants expressed a greater awareness of women's issues having been through the process.

The degree to which women's work experience is affected by discrimination and sexism was an important finding to emerge. Women experience discrimination at a number of levels and although this discrimination is frequently subtle it occurs at the societal, institutional, and personal levels. Subtle discrimination may be experienced through labelling, lowered expectations, lack of support or overt harassment.

The findings of the research indicate that women in South African organisations are still treated differently from men and that this is disempowering. Although the discrimination is subtle in that men are afforded more privileges than women the participants do experience these subtle factors and are hampered by them. Whatever its form, its recognition and eradication should be a central priority for organisations concerned with enhancing the effectiveness and rights of all members in the organisation.

The results of the study therefore implicate that sensitisation and resocialisation of employers, managers and supervisors are necessary to prevent the subtle types of discrimination that take place as women move into top positions or what were exclusively male occupational territories.

In addition all the participants felt that the workshop was a good opportunity to hear what other people had to say and that this was confirming and made them feel less guilty about the views that they held. Sometimes women who become aware of their disadvantage are unable to cope with it. Recognising disadvantage and using it as an impetus to action requires the support of friends and of some validating system.

The use of the workshop allowed for a greater identification of social barriers, something that the women were unable or not prepared to do on their own. This may be due to the fact that at the individual level the women spoke about empowerment as a personal phenomenon. When they collectively explored the construct of empowerment, they spoke about it on a more global level. This would imply that group structures assist women in thinking globally while individual structures encourage personal discussion. Alternatively, women may be less likely to raise concerns about their societal position or speak freely when alone for fear of sounding like they are complaining. Group structures therefore provide the opportunity for exploring societal issues, because the women feel more supported and hence confident in groups.

In addition, research suggests that individuals who develop a sense of critical consciousness and who interact with similar others may more likely to identify external causes for their stress and therefore, be more motivated to engage in efforts to

change the social structure of their stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) note that for women, being aware of similar others with similar problems and knowing that one can rely on them to be of assistance in times of stress can greatly increase risk taking behaviour as well as confidence levels.

Callahan (cited in Berg, 1988) suggests that the group interview format facilitates women building on each other's ideas and augments the identification of patterns through their shared understandings and experiences. Whatever the reason for women's reluctance to speak of social barriers in the individual interviews, Fontana and Frey (1994) suggest that the purpose of a group format is not meant to replace the individual interview, but rather to add to the research process.

The implication of this for organisations is that if organisations want women to be critically aware of disempowering practices in society then they need to provide a space in which women can collaboratively explore issues in their lives. Small work groups could be a solution in this situation.

In addition, the results of the research indicate that women also experience disempowerment as a result of societal factors. Societally, empowerment is dependent on a number of factors that were seen in the themes of double standards and role expectations. On the one hand, women are hampered by societal expectations that women should be wives and mothers and men the breadwinners. For example, one of the participants said that the generation of men that are managing organisations at the present time do not believe that women should be managers. These role expectations hamper women by making them feel guilty for being working mothers. One participant said: "sometimes, the guilt I feel at the little amount of time I spend with (my child) makes me wish that I did not have to work full day. A nice little half day job seems so appealing now". On the other hand, women are hampered in terms of double standards. Men are awarded more privileges than women and although these differences are subtle, women experience them as disempowering nonetheless. For example, the idea that men can still leave the office to go and play golf, while women can't go shopping. Things need to be truly equal in organisations for women to experience empowerment and there needs to be a greater awareness societally of women's unique practical and psychological needs in organisations.

The role of work in the development of women's sense of self and personal identity was also an important societal finding to emerge. All the participants said that work was important to them and that work contributed to their sense of self. However, it was found that men do not always consider women's work as important as their own and that this can be disempowering. Although the study emphasised the tremendous significance of work in promoting and maintaining women's sense of empowerment, thus confirming that the core of feminine identity is not only the self as wife and mother, feminist researchers should not be misled into following the masculine example of degendering women.

The findings of the research suggest that women experience a tremendous amount of role conflict and role overload. Role overload, as a disempowering practice, emerged early in the study, with the women displaying an inability to find the time to complete the protocols. As one participant said: *"generally life is so busy, I am tending to get the job done at work and then rushing home to cook and play with my little boy etc."* The participants expressed feeling disempowered when *"more and more work is placed at my door and even though management knows I am not coping nothing gets done to relieve it"*. Another participant felt that *"men have developed the art of "dumping" the bulk of work on women. Men like to put women in lower and middle management levels – as they know this where the work gets done and churned out – senior management appears to be the boys club"*.

This role overload leads to feelings of inadequacy and stress. Guitterez (1994) argues that one of the primary causes of stress in working women is the balancing of their work and life roles. The women in this study expressed that they find themselves trying to successfully balance the roles of homemaker, mother, working woman and wife. The fact working women are so very busy, can be explained in part, by the women's natures themselves. As one participant commented: *"women, by their very nature, tend to take on much more work than any man will be prepared to take on – both at home and at work."* Women themselves therefore need to consider drawing boundaries in terms of what they are capable of doing and organisations need to be sensitive to women's dual responsibilities.

Women also experience role conflict. They do not want the responsibility of senior management positions because the commitment and dedication required for such a position conflicts with their commitment and dedication to their families. Role conflict is also experienced in that societal expectations require that women be business-like at work and nurturing at home. These two different roles force women to compartmentalise their lives.

In addition the findings of the research indicate that there is a need to expand traditional definitions of what constitutes empowerment. For example, as the women spoke about their understandings and experiences of empowerment, it became clear that their own definitions are much more encompassing of their activities than are traditional academic definitions of empowerment. Academic discussions of empowerment have emphasised the multidimensionality of power. However, according to most definitions, interpersonal or social power is the ability of an individual to affect the behaviour of another (Grossman & Stewart, 1990).

The women in this study identified empowerment as something that is "individual" and "personal". Women do not want to be compared with men when it comes to empowerment. Nor do they want to be compared with other women. The implications of this for organisations are that any empowerment initiatives will fail unless the women themselves can identify with the programme and define the context. It is only when we look at this broader context, as defined by the women themselves that we begin to understand what empowerment means for these women.

Another implication of the research thus seems to be a call on society to accept women's needs to fulfil themselves as workers, wives, mothers and contributors. Our society needs restructuring to enable women (and men) to divide their time more equally between their home and work lives. Equal prestige should be given to those aspects of humanity which should furthermore not be so delineated from each other.

6.6   TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS OF UNDERSTANDING: A CRITICAL FEMINIST APPROACH

Walker (1991) claims that feminist scholarship is always focused on reality. By its very nature, feminism is critical and has specific goals of challenging and changing the status of women in society. The relationship of academic feminism is central to this as it produces knowledge by providing insights into the workings of society and the mechanisms that oppress women. In this way, feminism provides strategies for changing society and eradicating the oppression of women.

The evaluation interviews show that the participants did discuss and think about the issues involved in the study after the interviews and workshop. This is positive because it implies that an important aim of feminist research namely, dialogue had been achieved. The findings of the research indicate that the women involved in the study became more empowered by looking at the network of factors that serve to disempower them as well as through the opportunity to do so.

While feminism does not deny that traditional male views of empowerment are valuable, we need a more encompassing understanding of empowerment. A synthesis of understanding would argue that we need to consider all the various aspects of empowerment: relational and motivational and feminist. The diversity of findings revealed demonstrate that to look at only one at the exclusion of the others is to make a grave mistake. Unless women dialogue there is the danger that they will see empowerment as primarily relational. However, there is a danger inherent in this. If women see empowerment as internal the responsibility for empowerment is being placed on women themselves. This will result in women setting themselves up for failure because they take the responsibility for empowerment solely upon themselves. It is therefore essential that empowerment is understood and experienced from relational, motivational and feminist perspectives.

Chiles and Zorn (1995) suggest that clear conceptual explications and empirical investigations are needed on what empowerment is and how it arises. This study has

attempted to critically explore the kinds of personal, interpersonal and organisational phenomena that women perceive as influencing them to feel empowered in their jobs. The main findings of the research indicate that: a) women understand and experience empowerment in a variety of ways; b) no one understanding of empowerment is appropriate for all women; and c) the women all experienced a certain amount of empowerment by being able to talk about their experiences. Chile and Zorn (1995) note that researchers have approached the study of empowerment in organisations in varied ways. For the purposes of this research empowerment was explored from three perspectives: relational, motivational and feminist. These three views can be seen as internal and external, individual and organisational, meaning and cause, a perception and a process. "Empowerment as a perception is the symbolic construction of one's personal state as characterized by competence, or the skill and ability to act effectively, and control, or the opportunity and authority to act" (Chiles & Zorn, 1995). Furthermore, empowerment is the process whereby this state is achieved.

Empowerment therefore can be viewed as a process whereby individuals interact with their environment to create empowered outcomes. In order to feel empowered in an organisation, women must feel capable of successfully completing the tasks of their jobs and believe that they have the authority or freedom to make the necessary decisions for performing the job (Chiles & Zorn, 1995). That is, women must feel that they have mastery over their environment and the environment must be conducive to empowerment. In addition, feminist perspectives on empowerment show that women have unique problems with power and that these problems need to be addressed by not only addressing these fears but also critiquing the dominant ideology and society that has placed women in this position in the first instance.

Chiles and Zorn (1995) note that a second important issue regarding the understanding of empowerment focuses on the roles of causality and meaning. Empowerment is not a one way process, from organisation to employee. Empowerment is not something that managers do to employees. Rather, empowerment needs to be conceptualised as a symbolically manipulated experience. Chiles and Zorn (1995) contend that the symbol using and abusing capacity of people requires that individual's interpretations be emphasised. "Organizational and individual actions may facilitate empowerment and may in fact be major influences on employees' empowerment-related beliefs and

feelings, but employees' interpretations always mediate these actions" (Albrecht cited in Chiles & Zorn, 1995, p.2).
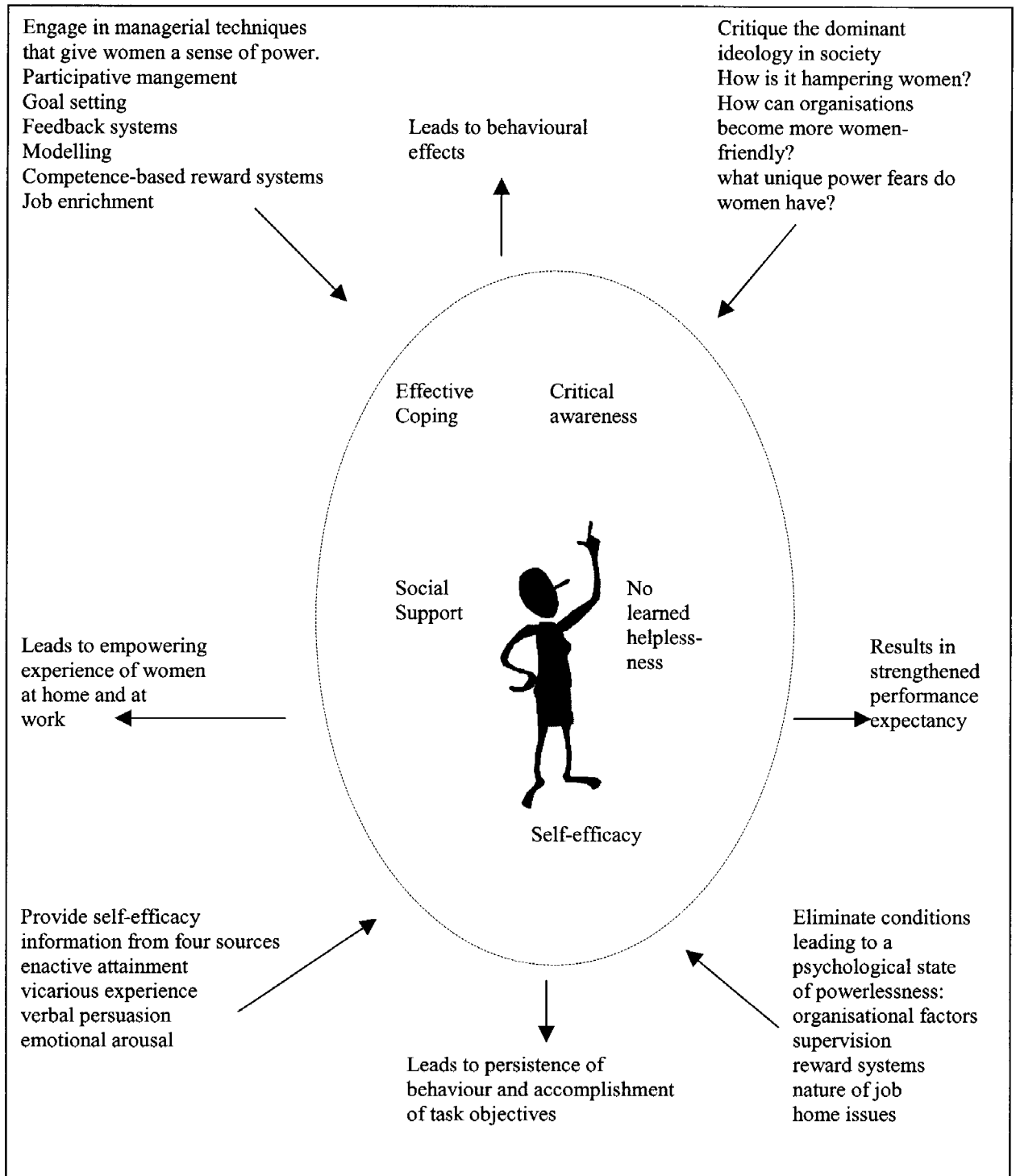
A third distinction needs to be made between emphasis on competence and emphasis on control in conceptualising empowerment. In self-efficacy theory, the emphasis would be on one's perceived competence (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) while others (Burke, 1986, Mbatha, 1992) view empowerment as shared power, control and decision making authority. Chiles and Zorn (1995) contend that both a focus on control and competence is necessary in order to achieve an adequate conceptualisation of empowerment. Empowerment is therefore an internal, individual experience which is facilitated by an empowering organisation (external).

Up until now, empowerment has been viewed as a process (as represented in diagram 2, p.57). However, the findings of the research indicate that empowerment is far more complex than this and that no one strategy is appropriate for all women. The findings of the research suggest that empowerment is understood as a very personal, individual experience which cannot be captured in one definition for all women. The women themselves said that empowerment is made up of many aspects and no one combination of the aspects is appropriate for all women.

In order for women in organisations to be empowered, they themselves need to define what it means to them to be empowered. The organisation can foster this by being aware of their unique social and psychological needs. In addition, the results of this study seem to implicate that social science needs to move away from studies that compare men and women. Women, by nature of their gender and their circumstances, have very different frames for producing meanings.

We therefore need to consider empowerment more as a lived experience rather than in a stage fashion in which certain sequential stages can be followed and empowerment guaranteed. Although these processes are important, the findings of the research demonstrate that women's understandings and experiences of empowerment at work are far more encompassing of their entire lives (See figure 3).

Figure 3: **Empowerment as a process that encompasses women's lives in their entirety**

Engage in managerial techniques
that give women a sense of power.
Participative mangement
Goal setting
Feedback systems
Modelling
Competence-based reward systems
Job enrichment

Leads to behavioural
effects

Critique the dominant
ideology in society
How is it hampering women?
How can organisations
become more women-
friendly?
what unique power fears do
women have?

Effective   Critical
Coping   awareness

Social   No
Support   learned
                                 helpless-
                                 ness

Leads to empowering
experience of women
at home and at
work

Results in
strengthened
performance
expectancy

Self-efficacy

Provide self-efficacy
information from four sources
enactive attainment
vicarious experience
verbal persuasion
emotional arousal

Leads to persistence of
behaviour and accomplishment
of task objectives

Eliminate conditions
leading to a
psychological state
of powerlessness:
organisational factors
supervision
reward systems
nature of job
home issues

While this study essentially looked at how women understand and experience empowerment in an organisation, the findings of the research indicate that the boundaries between personal life and work life are far more fluid for women. The women spoke not only about empowerment at work but empowerment at home as

well. This would implicate that when considering the empowerment of women we need to not only consider their work situation but their personal lives as well. The relational aspects of women's work therefore needs to be considered. In this study, connections between work and the family or between themselves and others within the workplace were found to be important.

As individuals, all the women in this study were different and yet they all placed emphasis on the relational context of their work. This helps to explain some of the stresses to which women are particularly vulnerable as well as the special abilities and sensitivities women bring to their work. The women all claimed to work in a particularly supportive environment. This may be due largely to the fact that the division in which the research was conducted was made up of approximately 60% women.

Because women frequently have more than one 'occupation', they are often required to integrate and balance conflicting demands in ways that result in an overflow from one boundary to the other. All of the participants indicated that although they are continually trying to compartmentalise their lives, that this is not always possible.

Because women frequently have more than one 'occupation', they are often required to integrate and balance conflicting demands in ways that result in an overflow from one boundary to the other. All of the participants indicated that although they are continually trying to compartmentalise their lives, that this is not always possible. Grossman & Chester (1990) note that in various discussions of this topic, few women have actually questioned whether focusing exclusively on a career to the exclusion of other aspects of their lives, actually does produce the ideal worker.

Women have been described as being less able than men to separate their homes and work lives (Grossman & Chester, 1990). This observation has frequently been made in a negative manner suggesting that women are deficient in this skill. On the other hand, the ability to compartmentalise one's work and family life has an implicit value of efficiency, seriousness, and single-mindedness. This study found that the issues of balancing, integrating and separating work and personal life is of central concern for women. The women in this study felt that they had to compartmentalise their lives in

order to cope effectively with the stresses of leading dual lives. As one participant commented: "I have little boxes".

If we accept that empowerment can be conceived as both self-initiated (internal) and initiated and controlled by others (external) then we must recognise that although empowerment may be influenced by others, it ultimately resides within the individual. Since individuals do not live in a vacuum but symbolically interact with their environment, empowerment is simultaneously influenced by self-initiated actions, interpersonal interactions and generalised perceptions of patterns of behaviours and symbols associated with the organisation.

As noted earlier, research that demonstrates the most useful theories, the interrelationships among theories and how best to apply theory to the practice of empowering women in organisations has been neglected. There is a paucity of theoretically derived, empirically tested practice implications. Gonzalez et al. (1990) assert that this lack of research has resulted in efforts to empower women based on whatever feels right. Therefore, theoretically uninformed, pragmatic decision-making continues to dominate much of empowerment processes. In order to understand the empowerment of women in organisations, it is essential that all four theories and the implications derived from these theories are examined and explored.

In addition, the diversity, richness and depth of the meanings the women revealed in this study, calls for the negation of the myths that women are second-class, non-dedicated workers. Societal expectations of women place tremendous stress on women. Society should recognise women's many urgent practical and psychological needs to perform paid work and should value this work as being equal to men's. At the same time, women's home and family work should be re-evaluated and properly esteemed by all, including women themselves.

One of the most important messages of this study is that empowerment is more than simply an intrapersonal construct, and requires assessment of behavioural and interactional factors to thoroughly understand this open-ended construct. A universal and global understanding of empowerment may not be desirable because it is theoretically inconsistent with the construct given the specific demands and

characteristics of different settings and life situations. A universal and global understanding of empowerment may also confuse experiences of empowerment because it may be inappropriately conceptualised as a static personality trait instead of a more dynamic, contextually driven construct. The measurement of empowerment in a specific setting for a particular sample of women is possible, but it must be connected to experience of the participants as they state it, and contextually grounded in their life experiences.

CONCLUSION

This research revealed that women understand and experience empowerment in a number of ways. How women understand and experience empowerment is affected by a number of factors: organisational factors; personal characteristics and abilities; their relationship with others at work and at home; and societal factors such as double standards for men and women and role expectations. The participants in the study had a number of responses to these factors. Some of the women have tried to study further or work harder while others have resigned themselves to their situation and stopped trying to succeed in organisations, choosing rather to value their families above their work.

The findings of this research show that although relational, motivational and feminist perspectives contribute to our understandings of the empowerment of women in organisations, no one perspective is sufficient for capturing the construct of empowerment in its entirety. Rather, we need to move towards a more holistic understanding and approach to empowerment. The empowerment of women in organisations is made up of a number of factors and any attempt to empower women should include relational, motivational and feminist elements.

In addition, the research demonstrated that by providing a space in which the women could explore disempowering practices in their lives, their understandings and experiences of empowerment shifted towards a more holistic understanding. The research seems to have aided women in developing a greater awareness of the factors that affect their lives and this awareness resulted in greater feelings of control over their situations.

It was ascertained from the participants that women's lives in their entirety are influential in their behaviours, feelings and choices at work. This study found that other life dimensions are also influential in the way a woman experiences empowerment. Studies therefore need to examine the context in which women's lives are embedded in order to gain greater understandings and experiences of empowerment and help identify strategies for improvement and change.

Although the research begins by experiencing the experiences of women, a process whereby the consciousness of the researched might be raised in order to change their experiences of empowerment, the subjective component of feminist research is a dialectical process that includes much more than simply adopting an experientially based perspective and leads us necessarily to questions about social process, or structure. Against feminist approaches which portray the separation of the personal and the structural as a false distinction, this research suggests that what we need is not a research choice between structure or people but rather ways of conceptualising relationships between the two. As demonstrated here, this is not the accomplishment of choosing between subjective and objective analyses.

Returning to the insider versus outsider view, the dilemma posed for feminist research is not the correctness of choosing either as the proper vantage point. Rather, feminism is a challenge to the necessity of this type of choice. Beginning from the standpoint of women, the goals of this study included the expansion of knowledge through the development of feminist theory. If feminist knowledge is to remain as processual and open-ended as Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocate, it will be necessary to test theories through a logico-deductive approach in order to expand, revise or reject knowledge as this knowledge is used to transform its very basis. For this reason, feminist research requires flexibility in how we think about what we want to achieve. Surely this requires that an adherence to a static way of feminist research reflected in debates about the correct choice of method is considered.

In approaching the inquiry, the researcher brought with her commitments to feminist praxis, knowledge produced about the world for action to change it equitably and a concern with how we find out what we know, the domain of methodology and epistemology. The researcher did not expect to find some universal truths that could be uncovered by objectivity but rather accepted that knowledge itself is a social construction. The researcher valued lived experience as a source of constructed knowledge and drew, in part, on the significant contribution to the women's movement of feminist consciousness raising (Fonow & Cook, 1991). As the women told their stories and were heard, they developed understandings of the political issues embedded in personal experience and ways to change.

The use of a workshop as a data collection technique allowed the researcher to moderate and observe interactions among the participants on their perspectives on empowerment which is something that could not have been planned for in the first days in the field. Neither could the researcher have realised at the beginning of the study the value of incorporating these techniques. These techniques allowed the researcher to capture a richer interpretation of the participants' understandings and experiences of empowerment.

By establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of the study, the researcher was better able to capture the nuance and meaning of each person's life from their point of view. This also ensured that the participants were more willing to share everything with the researcher, warts and all. Maintaining trust and rapport continued throughout the length of the study. Through the process of collaboration, research can develop new understandings that inform women's actions towards changing some of their situations as women in organisations. In addition, a collaborative action research design provided a suitable framework for this study of empowerment. In contrast to an instructional or skills oriented course, participation in action research informed by critical theory (Lather, 1986) can be empowering as participants engage directly in understanding and acting on issues of concern in their own lives.

Treleaven (1994) found that the most intriguing outcomes of collaborative research are the ways in which women act together to challenge the basic assumptions of the dominant masculine values in the organisation. This study validated this finding and while these actions frequently arise out of women's grievances and disadvantage, women also find forums in which to take their own initiatives and influence practices which have reproduced the established norms of leadership. What is suggested here is that collaborative inquiry as a form of empowerment has the potential for being both individually and organisationally productive of change towards a more equitable and diverse culture in the workplace by unsettling acceptance of the dominant modes of decision-making, leadership and women's participation.

The inquiry developed out of feminist values of sharing power, responsibility and knowledge among participants with attention being given to the research process. The research explored women-centred ways of working. An assumption was made that

women had a different voice (Gilligan, 1982) and different ways of knowing (Belenky et a, 1986). The researcher recognised that there were ways of working which were characterised as feminine and that these ways of working were devalued and excluded in organisational cultures based on the dominance of values ascribed to the masculine. Treleaven (1994) notes that some of the approaches attributed to the feminine are not accessible to us in contexts beyond the workplace and that women's persistent and systemic exclusion from the diversity of expression within the workplace produced alienation many women felt. By spiralling back into the literature stage, the researcher was able to seek ways in which others had conceptualised and examined empowerment and was able to borrow some of these as well as create others with the help of the participants.

In conclusion, this study does more than add to our understanding of empowerment by giving visibility to women's experiences. It challenges established theory by recognising how the normal practice of social science research obscures the structural roots of women's oppression through the development of paradigms which portray empowerment as either a relational or motivational construct. As we have seen, feminist approaches which begin from the experiences of women as a rejection of established theory often perpetuate this process by emphasising women's accounts as self-evident explanations. Contrary to some feminist claims (Stanley & Wise, 1983) this study illustrates the necessity to go beyond the purely personal worlds of women. For women in this study, the personalisation of empowerment is the process which rendered it empowering. Returning to the issues raised at the beginning of this study, the research began with wanting to explore the experienced worlds of women. The research sought to discover phenomenologically how women understand and experience empowerment so that the study could begin from the consciousness or personal worlds of women. In order to truly empower women, "the marchers in the "procession of life" need to alter their step, discard their biases and make space for the diversity and complexity of human needs and aspirations" (Janse van Rensburg, 1989, p. 46).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

WRITTEN INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS

<div align="right">

Warden's Flat
Phelps House
Private Bag 1032
GRAHAMSTOWN
6140
8 July 1998

</div>

Dear Participant

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this study. As I would have explained to you, I am interested in looking at how women in organisations understand empowerment and how they experience empowerment in light of these understandings.

It is important from the outset for me to point out that there are no right or wrong answers and not even a single definition of empowerment that is more important than any other. What is important is that I hear **your** understandings of empowerment. For this reason I ask you to **write one or two pages (longer if you wish) on how you understand empowerment (that is, how do you define it and what does it mean to you to be disempowered or empowered). In addition to this, I would like you to give me some examples of when you experience empowerment and when you feel disempowered.**

I thank you again for your time and ask that you return your written notes to me by **15 August 1998.** For this reason, I enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. I encourage you to make a copy of the document for your own reference and in the event of a failure in the postal service. In September I will visit again to ensure that I have understood you correctly and that I have got the facts straight.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be contacted at the above address, or on the telephone: (046) 603 8048 or on email: adsj@giraffe.ru.ac.za.

Yours sincerely

SALLY JAMIESON

APPENDIX 2

Retyped from protocols, exactly as handed in by participants, except for autobiographical details at the beginning or end of the protocols, which was deleted to ensure anonymity. For the same reason, any names used were deleted and changed.

PROTOCOLS

Empowerment of women in organisations has developed over the last years into an accepted norm, whereas before it was more or less understood that this could not happen.

For some women it has become a driving ambition to exceed/excel/equal the positions of important men in organisations of all kinds. This is all very well and serves to motivate women who feel that a good direction their lives should take is to maintain such managerial or corporate positions and spend all their time fighting to stay there and justify their appointments.

I don't subscribe in any way to the belief that women belong in the home or kitchen – not at all. However I feel that it is the men who must be the providers of their families and supply a sound financial basis for their children, homes, pensions at the end of the day. Women who have enjoyed the housewife bit and have found satisfaction in raising their children, could afterwards maintain a good job and reap the benefits of the mental stimulationn and extra money generated therefrom, but I strongly disapprove of the current expectation of young married that on day one they should have the sort of home and assets enjoyed by their parents after many years of effort to accumulate these. In the present day workplace the mode is for young women to marry, buy a home beyond the mutual means of husband and wife, car, etc., then fall pregnant and stay off work for 6 months' maternity leave. On their return the financial struggle continues indefinitely, combined with baby care, baby sickness, and somewhere along the line the nurturing that little children are entitled to, is neglected, must be neglected no matter how strong the protests, if the mother works from 9 to 5.

I have organised my life according to my personal design for living.

I married and had two children, and stayed home with them until they were at school. I then worked mornings only for the mental stimulation and office family environment that is enjoyed here, for 9 years until my second child was almost finished school. Only then did I change to fulltime work again.

I have always created my own personal empowerment in what I do, in that I am a confident efficient person perfectly secure with myself and my abilities, and this rubs off on the people for whom I work. I have never wanted a managerial position which would entail taking ones work home at night, actually or mentally, as I prefer to apportion my life into equal parts of work and relaxation. If you don't take time to smell the flowers – the most meaningful proverb ever written in my opinion – then what is the point of it all. There are books to read and hobbies to pursue and children to chat to now that they are grown up, and a home to enjoy and movies to see – work is not the be and end all in life.

The intrinsic meaning of empowerment should be your own mental attitude and the exercise thereof in practice – self-confidence and the development of your particular abilities into a valued member of staff without the administrative hassles is an achievement of its own.

This is probably not what a really ambitious woman would want to hear – but should!!

I understand empowerment to be enabling or facilitating another, in order for them to operate independently within a certain environment, however there must be a line of referral where back-up support is available. I believe empowerment allows for red tape to be cut through in the work environment and it allows for personal growth within both a woman's personal environment and in the workplace. Empowerment is the ideal – to give to another the freedom and trust to allow them to make their own decisions and allow confidence to be built up through this. However, I believe that it has become just another buzz word for the late 1990's.

Women, by their very nature, tend to take on much more than any man will be prepared to take on – both at home and at work. And men have developed the art of "dumping" the bulk of the work on women. Maybe motherhood automatically makes a women more responsible – so while the guys are out there playing their political games, the women take the pressure and the bulk of the work and get the job done.

Don't get me wrong – I am not an extreme feminist, and in fact try not to get boring on the subject of the general laziness of our masculine counterparts. And indeed there are definitely some exceptions. X is one of them and I can honestly say that he is one of the few male managers I have worked under who truly practices empowerment – And not because he is dumping but because he is able to let go – not just the work, but the recognition that goes with a job well done. There are plenty of guys out there that are prepared to let go – but when the praise and recognition comes, they tend to take it to themselves with maybe a paternalistic/condescending pat on the back for the hardworking woman concerned.

Sally, this is probably not exactly what you wanted, but I'm sitting here just writing throughts as they come into my head. I feel very strongly about this subject, when I actually take the time to think about it. Generally life is so busy, I am tending to get the job done at work and then rushing home to cook and play with my little boy etc. I can't see things changing ever – the very fact that women bear children, are not as transferable, still don't earn equal salaries, makes them vulnerable to and dependent on men.

Black empowerment is a subject I am loathe to touch on. I have had the opportunity of training equal opportunity appointees and I found it a nerve racking and pressuring experience. It is hard to empower people who do not have the necessary skills and general knowledge to the job. Despite spending hours of training – both classroom and on the job training – I found myself constantly demotivated as I did not appear to be making any headway. Customers do not care who does the job – they just want it done – and if they know that the black person who is assisting them cannot help them they immediately call for the person they report to, and insist that they do it. Many clients refuse to deal with black employees at all – and state so categorically. Not because of racist issues but simply because they want service and they want it now.

When do I feel disempowered?

-At work?

1. When more and more work is placed at my door and even though management knows I am not coping nothing gets done to relieve it.
2. When it is necessary to take work home night after night, and I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel.
3. When I make realistic suggestions to cut red-tape and they are not considered.
4. When management holds onto functions that I could easily not need to refer to, but I feel they do not trust me enough to make my own decisions.
5. When I need assistance in certain areas but you get the feeling – don't make your problems ours.

At home?

1. When my husband can come home at whatever time he likes but the responsibility of the kid and food and general management of the home falls to me.

When do I feel empowered?

-At work?

1. When I gain recognition for work well done
2. When I am rewarded for work well done
3. When suggestions I make are put into practice
4. When red tape is lessened
5. When the need to refer is diminished
6. When I see more women being placed into senior management levels.
7. When my opinion is requested.

(PS Men like to put women in lower and middle management levels – as this is where the work gets done and churned out – senior management appears to be the boys club.)

At home?

1. My hubby does not expect me to cook, clean etc. Even if he is not prepared to do it – he doesn't think it is my job and never criticizes me.
2. He will often come home and cook, play with Matthew (my kid) and give me the night off.
3. We make joint decisions – his word does not rule, in fact he tends to go along with my needs.

Sally what you have chosen to study and survey is probably one of the most difficult topics around. Women and men do not understand each other and do not have the same responsibilities. I have a particularly nice hubby from Wales, who is hardly chauvinistic at all. However he is a man, and he also does these crazy irresponsible things that men feel they are entitled to do. And then stare in amazement when it is pointed out to them.

Maybe women with families and children are not meant to reach senior management levels. Before having a child, I was totally career orientated and was the typical feminist go-getter. But now, with a child, who I love very dearly, my career has dropped on my list of priorities. Which I never thought would happen. Sometimes, the guilt I feel at the little amount of time I spend with Matthew makes me wish that I did not have to work full day. A nice little half day job seems so appealing now, when before I was driven by achievement and recognition at work, I now am driven by family and good sound values.

At the end of the day I say to myself – I will never regret not doing that extra work or getting to the top of the career ladder, but I will regret not spending enough time with my kid and not making enough time for my husband and myself. Perhaps both men and women, settle rather for wonderful blazing careers, as it consumes a lot of time so that they do not notice that they do not have first prize – true contentment, happiness and peace within themselves.

To me empowerment does not mean "to have power" – many people have power, but they cannot use it. To me it means having the trust, respect and support of the people around you.

Therefore, if I feel I have the trust, respect and support of people around me then I feel empowered. I know that they will stand by me and that allows me to be confident in my approach to any problems encountered or any decisions to be made.

If the support, etc., was not there, I most definitely feel useless as I have no idea as to where I stand. It greatly restricts my freedom to work as I wish and it brings down my performance.

Situations at Work (examples of empowerment/disempowerment)

Empowerment
1. Being able to help others out in situations where they do not have sufficient training or experience.
2. Being taught something new which can assist me in my job.
3. Having the authority to sign my own letters (without having someone else checking it).
4. Being able to use my initiative in difficult situations
5. Having a boss with a "backbone"

Disempowered
1. Being "spoon-fed" information instead of being given the freedom of finding things out by myself.
2. Having things spelt out to me every time as if I don't quite know what's happening.
3. Not having the opportunity to use my initiative to do something.
4. When people say I have their support but when it comes to the crunch – you can feel the indecisiveness.

Situations in my community (empowerment/disempowerment)

I'm a muslim. To say the very least, I come from a religion where women have almost no power. However, that does not mean that women are disempowered. If she has the support of her husband and family, she can do almost anything.

I have never felt disempowered to have been born a muslim, and a woman at that. Our lives here are very different from those in totally Islamic states where woman walk around covered from heard to toe. We have freedom.

My mother-in-law is a widow and lives with us. I'm quite happy to let her do whatever she wants to – however, there have been occasions when she isn't always right in what she does or says, but I feel powerless to say anything because of her age and the fact that she has been through a lot in her life, including a battle with cancer which she won. But I think it's more her age that prevents me from saying anything. So I think that sometimes even respect for your elders (or even community leaders) can make a person feel disempowered.

I think in a sentence empowerment to me is the feeling that I am useful whilst disempowerment is the feeling of uselessness.

In my opinion women in organisations understand empowerment as an opportunity to deliver what they are focussed on. If you have been with a company for a while you will have established where you wish to be. They use their god given creativity and sensitivity to move forward. Men are not blessed with the same skills of observation and perceptiveness which comes so easily to women. Possibly due to the fact that they are able to bear children. Women are able to manipulate and display emotions very easily. Women do not have to take on male characteristics to be successful, but they can and will achieve their goals by just being feminine which allows them to use their power in different ways. They cry with colleagues, flirt with their clients, and still stay focussed on their ultimate goal: "to be at the top". At some stage they realised that they were managers from a very young age, when they managed their families, homes, finances and their bosses. At this point they realised that they could do all of the above and still remain in focus and become the boss. They can meet deadlines even if it means not leaving the office but with sheer determination and the word failure they would increase their production tenfold. Women do not take easily to failure.

A company that ignores the abilities of women is decreasing its chances of success. Men are afraid of displaying emotions and women thrive on emotions. We live in a society that has programmed us to believe that our place is in the kitchen. By being successful we have deprogrammed ourselves. Our focus remains with meeting challenges, growing and developing ourselves. They do not have to burn the bra to be noticed, but are more passionate and quietly contained these days. Women have the capacity to love and share. They think solutions-wise and would be prepared to take the good qualities of the male and unite to make a situation in the workplace manageable.

If they unite with the male this union becomes such a powerful force. But they are no longer prepared to put money in the male's pocket, but to do it for themselves.

The future lies in the hand of the woman.

I feel empowered when together with my colleagues we think of solutions to ever increasing problems in our office. It is in my own interest to participate, listen and learn at every opportunity. To educate myself, and self development is of the utmost. Circumstances that are not suitable for my growth and development are done away with, and I create my own circumstances. This is rewarding – to be part of the change.

I feel disempowered around negative people. People who are willing to sit back and complain without using their god given logic to work through a problem. People who are prepared to sit and wait to be pushed on ahead without doing anything or taking the first step. I would rather work through a problem, help a colleague than work away and decide to change professions. To me that would be failing. I notice that the people who are not prepared to study and delf-develop are generally the one's who do all the complaining when they are not recognised for their effort. When in effect there is no effort from their side.

Everything is possible if one's mind is set that way. The very difference is in one's determination.

Woman should feel entitled – They should take what opportunities they create for themselves.

It seems that there is always a "buzz" word that has everyone jumping and it seems that the latest "buzz" word is empowerment.

I think that the definition would vary greatly depending on the person who is doing the defining. In this country empowerment seems to be a way of rectifying the perceived injustices of the past and it seems that calling something empowerment is merely a way of installing people into positions for which they may or may not be qualified

I believe that if someone needs to be empowered they possibly do not have the confidence, qualifications or whatever it takes to perform a function. This could be anything from a job, to a mother as a housewife. Most people I know do not need to be empowered because they are capable and able to do whatever it is in a confident manner. I personally have never felt a need to be given the opportunity to be empowered. Empowerment has come through personal experience professional. In my working life once I have gained the knowledge to act independently I have gained empowerment and in my personal life it has come with the ups and downs of everyday life.

Personally I believe the South African version of empowerment is simply a cover up of affirmative action and is not doing anything to enhance the skills or growth of the country and the economy.

Once again I feel that this has become the buzz word of the 90's and no doubt into the next century it will be called something else.

Empowerment, to me, is a personal thing and if you cannot attain it yourself, you cannot be given it, because even if you give someone empowerment they may or may not be able to use it correctly and then its worth nothing.

Empowerment in the workplace is giving previously disadvantaged people the opportunity to achieve or be placed in areas where previously they were not permitted.

In the past women were seen only as typist, receptionists, input operators etc. and even where they were given more responsibility they were not paid the same as their male counterparts, nor did they have equal benefits as men have always been considered to be the breadwinners and therefore needed to be financially superior.

With empowerment both women and the previously disadvantage should now be given equal opportunities to prove their worth and to achieve in competition with their fellow workers.

Regrettably in many instances the previously disadvantaged are being placed in positions for which they are not adequately equipped merely as window dressing and to this end empowerment (reverse apartheid in many instances) could cause the downfall of a lot of businesses.

If empowerment is used to enable people to have opportunities to succeed and not purely to give the statistics the government has laid down, everyone could benefit but as in many cases power is incorrectly used and the wrong results obtained. For empowerment to work, the opportunities to succeed and achieve must be given to all but only if they have the correct qualifications and abilities. People should be given the chance to grow not to cause disaster.

The industry that I work in is still very much a male dominated industry and one where I think that woman are tolerated by still not 100% accepted.

Although the company attempts to have the all things equal between male and female as far as promotions and salaries are concerned there is stiill an uneasiness in the business if you are a female of child-bearing age and tendencies. One feels that you could work as hard as the male counterpart but the woman is penalised for taking time off for maternity leave. I understand from the business's point of view that up a 6 month maternity leave is a long time to be off but a woman can and does cope with the two roles.

Empowerment has received a lot of attention in the recent past and has mainly to do with the minorities having a say. Woman are a minority and hence receive rights on paper but there is still a long way to go to educate both men and women on the value that a woman can add to a company. Unfortunately many woman still feel that they can only add value if they either act like a man or do things that are acceptable to men. Women are able to be professional and to accomplish the tasks set forth in a feminine manner and should feel comfortable fulfilling their duty in their manner.

There are certain qualities where woman are better than men, and this is a very big generalisation, and these are orderliness, tidiness, methodical, sympathetic and perhaps give more attention to detail and hence woman are able to perform better at certain jobs for example administration etc. As far as being able to achieve results and work that involves logic and general brain power women are able to manage just as well as a man. The result would be on the merit of the individual and not on whether they are male or female.

In my life outside of work I work in a leadership position with other leaders and "hit my head" against the wall because most of the men feel intimidated by a female if they are confident, outspoken and generally competent. We need to work through them and often they will say no to something purely to show dominance and not out of any logical or suitable reason, and when a woman shows some form of strength then they tend to think that she is rather unfeeling and heartless and they do not appreciate that form of behaviour however it would be perfectly acceptable if a man acted accordingly.

The entire South African population needs to be re-educated in this matter and a culture of subservience needs to be deleted. Not only do men need to think and treat woman differently, but woman need to think the same and not accept second best, like dishing up the best potato for the husband and taking the worst one for herself, (although this a an admirable quality) she needs to teach her children that a woman is entitled to the best and so companies will be able to benefit from the values and qualities that woman are able to offer.

In conclusion I feel that women are able to offer a company a lot in their way and needn't be like man to do so. In women becoming empowered, I think it is great and exciting time and one where there are many opportunities for woman to take if they want to, but I hope that women still retain their individuality and feminine side and do not trade that in for reaching the top.

APPENDIX 3

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS: QUESTION GUIDE

1. How did you find the experience of writing down your thoughts on empowerment? Was it easy or difficult?

2. How did you feel about doing the task? Did you feel it was important, trivial, something you could do without, or did you just do it because I asked you to?

3. What is your educational background?

4. How central is work to your sense of identity?

5. What is/was your mother/significant female role model's view of women in organisations?

6. Have I understood you correctly? Is this what you meant when you wrote your protocol?

APPENDIX 4

WORKSHOP/GROUP INTERVIEW: QUESTION GUIDE

1. How do you understand empowerment

    -   explore link to affirmative action – like any construct, many definitions, way it is implemented rather than way it is defined

    -   relational – external empowerment – power seen as something that is given to you by others because you have status or a particular position, skill in the organisation or society.

    -   Motivational – internal empowerment – power seen as something within. Includes motivational theories: self-efficacy, stress and coping, social support and learned helplessness. Seen as personal empowerment.

    -   Feminist – holistic – includes aspects of both as well as a critique of the dominant ideology. Women-friendly. Leading on from this what are women afraid of about feminism? Does it turn you into a vicious lesbian/abortion rights activist?

2. What is the relationship between power and empowerment?

    -   How do you see power?

3. What is the relationship between empowerment at work and empowerment at home?

    -   Is there a spillover effect?

    -   Is there a compensation effect?

4. When do you feel empowered?

5. Do you view society as male dominated?

    -   Is this a problem?

6. Are women disadvantaged?

    -   In what ways are women disadvantaged?

7.   How does this view of society impact on your organisation?

      -     Is this a problem?

8.   If we change things in the organisation, for example, eliminate these factors, will you be empowered?

9.   If we change things in society, will you be empowered?

10.   What else may we need to be empowered?

      -     self-efficacy

      -     stress and coping

      -     social support

      -     learned helplessness

Need to relate these theories to relevant literature and discuss the relationship between these theories and empowerment.

APPENDIX 5

EVALUATION IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW: QUESTION GUIDE

1. It has been six weeks since I last saw you, have you found yourself thinking about the research or the workshop?

2. What are your thoughts about the research?

3. What has this research meant to you?

4. Has this research made you think about empowerment differently?

5. Has this research made you think about your work differently?

6. Has this research made you think about your home situation differently?

7. Has anything happened in terms of the way you perceive things as a result of the workshop?

8. What has happened?

9. What has been different?

10. Based on our discussions, do you think your understandings and experiences of empowerment changed in any way?
   - Why/Why not?
   - In what ways did they change?