

**A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF A WOMEN'S WORK-  
LIFE BALANCE OVER THE LIFE COURSE: A CASE STUDY  
OF FEMALE MANAGERS.**

**by**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science In  
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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Social Science (Industrial Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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## **Abstract**

This study was a qualitative exploration of women's work – life balance over the life course in retail management. Ten women who worked in the centre management of a mall in Durban were interviewed between June 2011 and August 2011. Through the use of thematic analysis, five themes were identified. These themes are: (a) the integration of work and life roles (b) the career as a learning process which is personally meaningful, (c) the retail industry and people dynamics (d) the value of time and (f) perceived autonomy among options for work and life development. The experiences of the participants were integrated with literature to arrive at an in depth understanding of the experiences of women's work- life balance within retail. The findings suggest that work-life balance within retail is perceived as a subjective, continuous experience which changes over time. Moreover, there is integration of work and life roles. The study contributes to the evolving body of knowledge on work-life balance of women within the retail sector; it also provides a unique context specific perspective to the understanding of work- life balance.

**Keywords:** women, work life balance, experience, retail, South Africa, qualitative research, thematic analysis.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE

1.1. INTRODUCTION .....	2
1.2. Work-life balance .....	2
1.3. Statement of the problem .....	3
1.4. Study Aim .....	5
1.5. Research Objectives .....	5
1.6. Research Questions .....	6
1.7. Demarcation of Chapters .....	7
1.7.1. Chapter one .....	7
1.7.2. Chapter two .....	7
1.7.3. Chapter three .....	8
1.7.4. Chapter four .....	8
1.7.5. Chapter five .....	8

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTRODUCTION .....	9
2.2. Work Life Balance .....	9
2.3. Definition of work-life balance .....	13
2.4. Factors impacting work life balance .....	15
2.4.1 The Changing Nature of Work .....	15

2.4.2. The Retail Industry .....	20
2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	22
2.5.1 Life Course Theory .....	22
2.5.2 CONCLUSION.....	27

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	28
3.2. Research Design.....	29
3.3. Sample and Sampling Method.....	29
3.3.1. Research Participants.....	30
3.3.2. Sample Description.....	30
3.4. Data Collection Techniques.....	32
3.4.1. Access.....	32
3.4.2. Instruments used .....	32
3.4.3. Procedure followed.....	33
3.5. Data Analysis .....	35
3.6. Validity and Reliability.....	36
3.7. Ethical Considerations.....	36
3.8. Limitations of Design .....	36
3.9. CONCLUSION .....	37

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....	38
4.1. Theme one: The integration of work and life roles .....	38
4.1.1. Theme one- sub theme: The impact of technology on work- life balance .....	42
4.2. Theme two: The career as a learning process which is personally meaningful .....	45
4.3. Theme Three: The retail industry and people dynamics .....	48
4.4. Theme Four: Transitions- The value of time .....	52
4.5. Theme Five: Home social capital and wellbeing .....	54
4.6. CONCLUSION .....	58

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	61
5.1. Summary .....	61
5.2. Conclusion .....	62
5.3. Recommendations of the study .....	63
5.4. References .....	64
5.5. Appendices .....	76
5.5.1. Appendix A: Informed Consent form .....	76
5.5.2. Appendix B: Interview Schedule .....	77

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

#### 1.2. Work-life balance

The expression of work and life, cast as work-life balance, has become a key feature of much international and South African current government, practitioner and academic debate. This has occurred against a backdrop of “globalization and rapid technological change” (Guest & Sturges, 2004, p. 56), an ageing workforce and concerns over labour market participation rates (Anderson & Kelliher, 2010; Harris & Foster, 2003). Within the European Union the reconciliation of work and family has become a core concern for policy and encouraged debate and policy intervention at international levels (Lyness & Judiesch, 2008).

The focal issue of this debate is the need for a “healthy work-life balance” (Maxwell, Gillian & McDougall, 2004). However, the debate and subsequent policy are often based on assumptions about work and life derived from superficial readings of empirical data or misconceptions about employee attitudes to work and life. What is required therefore is an analysis that explores the story of the work-life balance debate as well as the operation of work-life balance policies. Some of the issues overlooked in the work-life balance debate indicate that what is needed is a more nuanced appreciation and research agenda, of the complex relationship between work and life that goes beyond the current zero-sum assumptions of work-life balance (Manzoni & Barsouz, 2003; Hyman & Summers, 2007). The diverse nature of the workforce also has a significant bearing on work-life balance.

The work force is increasingly diverse and comprised of a significant number of women. The entrance of women into the labour force brings additional complexities to organizations as women occupy senior positions within organizations. The challenges experienced by women range from the traditional roles into which women are socialized, to exclusion from male-only clubs, discrimination and the glass ceiling which affects women and minorities, preventing them from advancing to senior positions (Nieto, 2003; McRobbie 2004; 2003; Odendaal& Roodt, 2003).

Work-Life Balance (WLB) is well researched internationally and has increasingly become an important area of study within South Africa. WLB has numerous accepted definitions, which view work as a set of prescribed tasks, which an individual performs while occupying a position within an organisation (Mostert & Van Aarde, 2010). Life is viewed as activities outside of paid work including household activities and those activities with family, friends and the community, including care activities and voluntary activity (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; Patel, Govender, Paruk& Ramgoon, 2006). A balance between these domains has been conceptualised as the subjective appraisal of harmony between these domains (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). The subject of WLB is significant to organisations and people because there are multiple positive outcomes associated with its attainment. The following are examples: good physical, mental and psychological health as a result of WLB. Furthermore, WLB has been found to increase productivity within the workplace, thus positively impacting organisational performance (Gornick & Meyers, 2005).

### 1.3. Statement of the problem

In the South African context, it is important to gain an in depth understanding of WLB within the

retail sector. This is an under researched sector, but is significant as it contributes almost one per cent to the South African economy (Statistics South Africa, 2011). A study which explores the experiences of women in managerial positions in retail is important because this sector has been under researched, and employs a large proportion of women. This research will therefore address this limitation by exploring the complexities of WLB for females who occupy managerial positions within the retail sector.

According to a study conducted by Duxbury and Higgins (2008), women are more likely than men to report high levels of role overload and caregiver strain. This is because women devote more hours to non-work activities such as childcare, elder care and are more likely to have primary responsibility for unpaid labour such as domestic work. Furthermore, research indicates that women also experience less spousal support for their careers than their male counterparts (De Klerk & Mostert, 2010). Although women report higher levels of work-family conflict than do men, the numbers of work-life conflict reported by men is increasing. WLB therefore is becoming a prominent issue in the lives of working women and men. Long work hours and highly stressful conditions are the features of many managerial jobs; however these features not only hamper employees' ability to harmonize work and life but also are associated with health risks, such as increased smoking and alcohol consumption, weight gain and depression (Hammig, Gutzwiller & Bauer, 2009). Work-life conflict evidently is associated with several physical and negative mental health outcomes.

A greater amount of in depth qualitative research involving female South African managers, who are engaged in full-time work, is necessary. This is an under researched sector within South

Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2011) and thus the participants of this research will be female retail managers.

Although studies on WLB in the South African context have increased in the past decade, research predominantly approaches work-life interaction from a quantitative perspective (Mostert, 2010; Mostert & Van Aarde, 2010). It also includes certain limitations such as a predominant focus on measuring negative as opposed to positive WLB outcomes (Huldi, 2002). Examples include burnout, negative health implications etc. This research explored both positive and negative interactions of work and life by allowing the female participants to share their perceptions of WLB. The research therefore drew on conceptual and empirical material and in so doing; the contributions challenged some of the assumptions and perceptions that currently feature in the work-life balance debate. This assisted in mapping out the terrain for further and better research about the relationship between work and life.

#### 1.4. Study Aim

The study aims to understand the experiences of female managers in the retail sector. Furthermore it aims to study the work life balance of female South African managers who are engaged in full time work from a qualitative perspective. The distinctive features of this research are that it will study the experiences of women in depth, as well as understand the roles they fulfill, within a unique industry, which is retail. The aim of this study is to understand women's subjective experience of WLB as well as their understanding of WLB within the retail sector.

Although studies on WLB in the South African context have increased in the past decade, research predominantly approaches work-life interaction from a quantitative perspective (Lee & Steele, 2009; Rost & Mostert, 2007; Mostert & Van Aarde, 2010). It also includes certain limitations such as a predominant focus on measuring negative as opposed to positive WLB outcomes (Mostert & Oldfield, 2009). Examples include burnout, negative health implications etc. This research will explore both positive and negative interactions of work and life by allowing the female participants to share their perceptions of WLB. In studying work –life balance, it is important to view employees within the context of both the culture of the organisation, as well as the realities of the sector, in this instance, the retail sector. A greater amount of in depth qualitative research involving female South African managers who are career-focused and engaged in full-time work, is necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding in the topic area. This makes this qualitative study on WLB significant and necessary.

#### 1.5. Research objective

This research explored how women in management positions perceived work-life balance in both their private and professional roles in management positions within retail.

#### 1.6. Research questions

- 1) How do participants talk about and experience their private lives?
- 2) How do participants talk about and experience their professional roles as a manager?

3) How do female managers manage their private and professional roles?

## 1.7. Demarcation of Chapters

The structure of the Dissertation is as follows:

### *1.7.1. Chapter One: Introduction*

This chapter will give an overview of the research problem and its background as well as the context in which the research took place. The aims and outcomes of the study as well as the rationale for conducting the study are explained.

### *1.7.2. Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework*

This chapter will discuss the current and past literature on women in the workplace, including aspects such as the barriers to success, balancing their dual roles, and previous studies on women. The strengths and limitations of past research will be highlighted. In addition, this review of literature will explain why research in this particular topic was necessary. The theoretical framework within which the above-mentioned factors are embedded will be discussed, as well as how the theory was applicable to the current research problem.

### *1.7.3. Chapter Three: Research Methodology*

This chapter will describe in detail the operations performed by the researcher. It will discuss the qualitative methodology used in this research project. In addition, it will cover the research design, participants, equipment and measures, as well as the procedures followed. Furthermore

this chapter will discuss the limitations of this research project. Finally, the ethical considerations that were taken into account will be discussed.

#### *1.7.4. Chapter Four: Results and Discussion*

This chapter discusses themes and sub themes that emerged in the study using thematic analysis. The results of the research will be presented. The discussion encompasses participant's responses and it is also interwoven with theory. The discussion intends to answer the research questions stated in the previous chapter.

#### *1.7.5. Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations*

The final chapter summarizes the research in terms of the aims, desired outcomes of the study, and the findings. Furthermore, a conclusion will be drawn from the results. Finally, the researcher will give recommendations for future research on the subject area.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### 2.1. Introduction

The subject of work-life balance (WLB) has been widely researched internationally and has gained momentum in South Africa in recent years. Many studies have been conducted which explain the interrelatedness between the domains of work and life (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; Hamilton & Deniss, 2005; Odendaal & Roodt, 2003). Whilst there is a significant body of knowledge on work-life balance, an overview of the literature indicates that there is not yet a coherent body of knowledge of WLB within the retail sector. The term WLB developed from an early interest in reconciling the tension between work and life (Wallis & Price, 2003). This was primarily driven by the deterioration of the ‘male breadwinner perception’ as a result of women’s increased participation in the labour market (Wallis & Price, 2003). This chapter will provide an in-depth understanding of the WLB of women in terms of their professional and private roles. In addition, it will discuss women in retail management positions, their career advancement, and the tensions of balancing these roles.

#### 2.2. Work-Life Balance

The term WLB is a contested term with multiple divergent views and titles. Potgieter & Barnard (2010) define WLB as the perceived sufficiency of time available for work and social life. It can also be understood as “negotiating the intersection between paid work and other areas of life”

(Burke & Lewis, 2007, p.113). These views of WLB perceive work and life as interdependent and mutually influential. Some scholars challenge the concept and existence of a balance between work and life. They posit that the term 'balance' suggests that work is not integral to life and implies a simple trade-off between the two spheres (Hernandez & Simmons, 2006).

A concept which is significant to understanding WLB is work life conflict (WLC). "The perspective of WLC, suggests that the expectations of (a) the employing organisation and (b) family/personal life are mutually incompatible for employees' time and energy, resulting in internal conflict"(Kirby, Wieland and Chad McBride, 2006, p. 328). The assertion that organisational needs and personal life needs are "mutually incompatible" doesn't easily accommodate the subjective perceptions accompanying individual WLB. For some the preference may be to spend long hours at work, because of career stage or because of a limited life outside work. For others, the opposite may apply and balance is perceived to exist where some work takes place but it is less important than the demands of home.

To illustrate this, a study conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 1999) of over 800 people working more than 48 hours a week, reported that about a third of the sample reported higher levels of work satisfaction and satisfaction with other aspects of their life. It appears that those who work long hours may fall into various types and these need to be taken into account. The research therefore begins with the awareness that conflict between work and life may exist, however the term WLC implies that managing life and work is an issue for people. The research centred on the perceptions of the participants and aimed to allow a subjective appraisal of work life balance.

Furthermore, Pocock (2008) argues that work and life are not distinct spheres that can be balanced by the individual, but rather consist of boundaries between work and non-work responsibilities. Instead of the term ‘balance’ Pocock (2008) suggests the use of the term ‘interaction’ to reflect a permeable state between work and life. Other terms that suggest the mutual reinforcement of the two spheres such as work-personal life integration, work-life articulation, or work-personal life harmonization, are therefore preferred (Callister, 2002; Cooper, Dewe & O’Driscoll, 2001; Rapoport & Lewis, 2008). However, the terminology ‘integration’ also remains contentious. While creating the image of a more positive organizational change, the term nevertheless implies the two spheres of work and life must be merged, leading to fears of a contamination or the domination of personal life by the demands of paid employment (Callister, 2002). ‘Work-life harmonization’ and ‘work-life articulation’ while promising, have not been widely used in the literature to date. For this reason, this research retained the original, long-standing, and comprehensive term, ‘work-life balance’.

The Work Foundation of England (2008) recognises the permeability between work and life and defines WLB as “people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work”. It is achieved when an individual’s right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society (Cooper Dewe, & Driscoll, 2001). From this definition WLB encompasses multiple aspects. There is flexibility in the number of hours worked, flexibility in the place of work, and breaks from work (Maxwell, Gillian & MacDougall, 2004). Maxwell, Gillian and McDougall (2004) further argue that in addition to the permeability of work and life and the multiple aspects of work, there are

also key levels of influence on WLB. These are the macro or socio-economic level, the level of the organization and that of the individual. Kater (2005) further argues that it is a “myth” to view work life and family life as constituting two separate and non-overlapping worlds.

In continuing to argue against a simplistic conception of WLB, scholars have also noted that the concept of WLB can be regarded as unhelpful as it implies that at "the centre of such balance is an individual who manages to keep things in balance" (Nieto, 2003, p.225). This view asserts that WLB rhetoric places too much emphasis on individuals' responsibility to attain balance within their lives. This is also important as this perspective denies that gender, class, and ethnic differences shape WLB outcomes for individuals. Numerous studies have shown different experiences between males and females with regard to WLB (Mayton, 2002; Manzoni & Barsouz, 2003; Magwaza, 2003). This therefore reflects that a view of WLB based solely on individual effort is reductionist. Whilst taking account of gender differences in WLB, these issues do not pertain only to women with children as is commonly implied, but also to other forms of employees within an organisation. These employees can be males or females as well as single or married individuals (Nieto, 2003).

WLB has also been critiqued as encouraging a quick fix solution that does not address fundamental inequalities which could emanate from macro factors such as the unequal balance of power that corporations possess and use to regulate work and workers (Beder, 2000). Thus scholars argue for a critical evaluation of WLB, where macro factors and fundamental inequalities are taken account of in the work-life interrelationship. The crux of this argument is that the multi-faceted nature and forces which shape WLB must be taken into account when

conducting research and cannot be overlooked if a full and complete understanding of WLB is to develop.

An effective definition of WLB then must encompass the interface which exists between the work and life domain as indicated by a significant amount of literature (Odendaal & Roodt, 2002; Burke & Lewis, 2007). In contemporary society WLB is accepted as an important aspect of wellbeing. Individuals, society and corporations are aware of the necessity of initiatives which support WLB. A few important considerations in understanding WLB are that individual priorities differ; men and women should be able to experience parts of their lives as not in conflict, or separate and in need of balance, but integrated (Rapoport & Lewis, 2008). Essentially WLB can be understood as being made up of the separate domains of work and life, whilst taking account of the interdependence which exists between these domains. The interaction between the domains of work and life then can lead to a subjective experience of balance or imbalance impacting on the quality of life and quality of working life for many female employees.

### 2.3. A definition of work-life balance

Having discussed WLB, it is important to dispel common assumptions regarding WLB. This will be done through the Life Course (LC) Perspective used in this research.

According to the LC perspective, life and work are fluid and dynamic (Hutchinson, 2007). Work-Life Balance does not mean an equal balance with regard to time (Newman and Newman, 2007).

It is not therefore centered on scheduling an equal number of hours for various work and personal activities because this is usually unrewarding and unrealistic. The theory further argues that the roles and time requirements of roles fulfilled by adults varies over the life course. Multiple factors influence this variation. These are; being married or single, employees with children and those without, people who are at the beginning of their careers as opposed to those who are nearing retirement. Therefore, in conceptualizing WLB, there is no 'one size fits all' rule. The LC perspective posits that the "best work-life balance is different for each of us because we all have different priorities and different lives" (Hutchinson, 2007, p. 18).

The framework used by LC perspective to understand WLB is captured in the definition provided by Felstead (2009). This definition of WLB was used within the research. Felstead (2009) defines work-life balance as "the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labour markets" (p. 47). The LC perspective primarily recognizes that perceptions regarding work and non-work roles and spaces are associated with the societal and cultural times, which are constantly changing. Within this research, this is particularly important as this will allow for a dynamic and holistic conceptualization of the perceptions of the women, who participated in the study regarding, their own flexibility and autonomy in negotiating their attention and presence in the workplace.

An interest in WLB historically, has emanated from a host of historical, social, economic and political factors. These will be discussed later.

## 2.4 Factors impacting work- life balance

### 2.4.1 *The Changing Nature of Work*

Within Western societies, the 1970's was a period during which various changes occurred in the nature of work as well as the workforce. The nature of work evolved from a manual form of production to a knowledge based economy. The demographic composition of those entering formal employment changed from being predominantly male to female (Whitehead, 2001). Globalization was another factor which brought about increasingly sophisticated technology and increased competition between organisations. Pocock (2008) argues that constant change became a feature of most organizations as a result of the interplay between the aforementioned factors.

During the same period, there was also growth also in what was once considered atypical forms of work – subcontracting, outsourcing, and part-time, casual, and non-permanent work – in most advanced industrialized societies (Gornick & Meyers, 2005). In a study conducted in Australia, this form of employment was found to be commonly taken up by recent mothers, who wanted to raise children as well as bring in an income (Odendaal & Roodt, 2003). In recent years, there has been a steady growth in atypical forms of employment in South Africa as many organisations restructure and retain a core staff as a means of cutting costs and the need to remain competitive.

In South Africa, the introduction of a democratic government in 1994 led to the implementation of legislation which sought to redress the inequities created by the apartheid regime. The *Employment Equity Act* and the *Labour Relations Act* have sought to provide equal access to opportunities for previously marginalised groups in South Africa (Department of Labour, 2011). The result has been an increase in the number of women participating in the labour force between the period of 1995 and 2005 (Statistics South Africa, 2011). This has also led to an increasingly diverse workforce, with more and more women occupying managerial positions

within organisations. While South Africa has instituted legislation to further equity in the workplace, the country has not significantly made inroads in introducing and implementing legislation which furthers WLB in organizations.

The gender composition of the workforce has also significantly changed. There has been an increase in the participation of women in the Labour force (International Labour Organisation, 2011). Despite this development, Mostert (2010) argues that the general outlook on gender role expectations relating to men and women in society has not changed significantly. The societal expectations of women as primarily responsible for domestic duties and males being involved more significantly within formal employment still persist. Magwaza (2003) argues that gender is integral to any discussion about the relationship between paid work and family life. Drawing from the LC perspective, this research posits that gender perceptions are based on a set of socially constructed relationships rather than fixed (Emslie & Hunt, 2000). This is important to because of the socially constructed nature of work and life roles and that these are continually constructed over the life course (Magwaza, 2003).

Even though gender equity issues have formed part of legislative and social discourse in South Africa for at least the past 15 years and even longer internationally it is clear that society is yet to reach parity in terms of adequate female representation in organizational management structures. The former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, while commending the work of the commission on gender equality stated that “society still lags far behind in terms of actual implementation, particularly in mainstreaming gender issues” (Freeman & Edwards, 2003, p. 23).

In understanding the WLB of women, the impact of gender cannot be overlooked within organizations (Fredericks, 2008). Rapoport and Lewis (2008) justifiably assert that the modern industrialized work place was created by and for a certain subset of men. This is because many practices and values which are highly valued within organizations reflect “masculine” attributes. Rapoport and Lewis (2008) further argue that examining these assumptions using a gender lens is a powerful opportunity for learning and change.

The challenge of WLB remains a part of woman's experience in their career development. This is particularly true given that gender and patriarchy are part of the social fabric. Aside from the societal factors impacting WLB, personality factors also have an influence on the interaction between work and life. Mostert and Van Aarde (2010) propose that demographic characteristics, personality attributes, job, and home characteristics all have a bearing on WLB.

In light of this evidence, long working hours cannot be regarded as the main obstacle to WLB. Rather, other factors seem to cause workers to experience an imbalance between their work and life roles. A related factor might be the rising consumptive aspirations; with aspirations rising more than average incomes. As a consequence, people need to work more and longer to be able to pay for the material goods they want or at least make the monthly payments on credit card bills. This unsustainable addiction to consumption has been termed ‘affluenza’. Hamilton and Denniss (2005), who explicitly link excessive consumption, indebtedness and overwork. Moreover, it seems that this powerful cycle of work and spend is becoming entrenched in western society and has an impact on the spending habits of South African people. Pocock

(2008) argues that there is a “competitive consumption” fuelled by corporate advertising and marketing strategies amongst young Australians. This ‘affluenza’ of young Australians contrasts with the relative frugality and thriftiness of their parents. Thus there have been several transitions, both in terms of the nature of work, the nature of the workforce, and finally the lifestyles and consumerism of many working which has significantly impacted women’s attitudes and world views. Individual paradigm shifts and expectations have as a result impacted WLB.

Notably, perceptions of WLB may also be a function of age. Shabi (2002) states that employment surveys in general highlight a distinct attitude to work among Generation Y. This generation is made up of individuals who were born in the 1980s. Generation Y professionals seek a balance between their work and their life and appear to prioritize family over work. Generation Y professionals are in their 20s and early 30’s and have entered the workforce. With numbers estimated as high as seventy million, Generation Y (also known as the Millennials) is the fastest growing segment of today’s workforce globally. As organizations compete for available talent, employers cannot ignore the needs, desires and attitudes of this generation.

A limitation in early research on WLB is that work implicitly has been regarded as a stable and an unproblematic force (Hamilton & Deniss, 2005). Family has been the problem whether because of child-care demands, family dynamics, or other factors. However, there is now recognition that the nature of work itself is becoming increasingly problematic. In a study conducted by Burchielli, Bartram and Thanacoody (2008), it was found that organisations are

increasingly becoming “greedy” and make “total claims” on their employees’ time, attitudes and behaviours. This means that many employees are expected to spend longer hours at work, and display commitment to their work in more significant ways. This is not to say that the issues of child care, elder care, or family and gender dynamics do not impact WLB. These issues however are being overshadowed for many people by the instability and all-encompassing nature of work (Beder, 2000).

Current research indicates that there is a changing psychological perception about the value of work. It has been argued that a new psychological contract exists for many employees (Nzimande, 2008). “This contract frames what organizations and individuals expect to exchange in their employment relationship” (Nzimande, 2008 p. 14). Increasingly, the desire for WLB seems to be a feature of this exchange. For example Worrall, Mather & Seifert (2010) assert that public sector workers and junior managers place more value on their home than working lives. While Baxter (2002) suggests that for women, career development is influenced by their attitudes to motherhood. A research study carried out by Huldi (2002) strongly suggested that graduates with childcare responsibilities participate less in working life. Finally, in Anderson and Kelliher’s (2010) discussion on the Families and Work Institute national study of the changing UK workforce. There is an expanding interest in the number of options available to people with regard to their options around work- life balance. These range from reducing work in their lives to the extreme of giving up careers. The strong sense of commitment to one’s organization and work which characterized previous generations is now being eroded with a view that work must fit the individual’s life and not vice versa.

#### *2.4.2. The Retail Industry*

The workforce in the retail industry internationally and in South Africa is one which is predominantly female. (Statistics South Africa, 2011) highlight that the South African retail industry has grown significantly. The retail sector is booming due to the increasing spending power of South Africans. Shopping Centres in South Africa are easily accessible and can be found in all cities. For instance, Johannesburg has a number of large malls. The inner city business district and the Sandton City precinct are two of the biggest Shopping Centres. The economic powerhouse of South Africa, Johannesburg generates 17 percent of the country's gross domestic product, mostly through the manufacturing, retail and service industry sectors (Statistics SA, 2011). In the Durban region, there is the mammoth Gateway Shopping Centre which offers 150 000 square metres of shopping space and the Pavilion Shopping Centre, which proudly boasts of 1.8 million visitors each year (Statistics SA, 2011).

Despite its growth and contribution to economic development, the retail industry is a demanding work environment in which employees are expected to work long hours (Statistics SA, 2011). Currently, within the Durban region, the two largest shopping malls trade from 9am to 7pm on a daily basis. Retail managers are expected to meet these work hours requiring evening, night or weekend work (Coverman, 2003). Mostert and Koekemoer (2010) have found that long working hours are particularly damaging to WLB, health and wellbeing. This research aims to explore how women in management perceive their own WLB within the retail environment.

“A look at women in middle management positions within retail employment shows them to be on average 34 years old or younger” (Johnson, Houmanfar & Smith, 2010, p. 42). Even if they are married, half of all women managers are, they are without children (Johnson, Houmanfar &

Smith, 2010, p.42). It therefore appears that women are choosing to delay childbearing and marriage to attain management positions. It is apparent also that once women are in managerial positions, they view childrearing and being competent at their work as complex, leading to nearly half of all women within these positions choosing to delay childbearing (Johnson, Houmanfar & Smith, 2010).

Interestingly, with the increasing number of women occupying managerial and supervisory positions Lewis – Enright, Crafford and Crous (2009), indicate that there is a developing organizational culture amongst women. Lewis – Enright., Crafford and Crous (2009) note that in organizations where women are in management positions, these women exclude other women from entering the ranks of power within the organization . On a positive note, the Health Information Resource Services for women, a South African organization which focuses on empowering women in the work place, postulates that female managers take a different approach to managing in comparison to males. Their approach can result in collegial workplaces, more consultative decision making, collaboration and a greater emphasis on personal values in the workplace (Lewis –Enright, Crafford & Crous, 2009).

Working women have diverse needs and often conflicting priorities. This research is an in-depth exploration of the experiences of women occupying managerial positions within the retail sector. The qualitative approach used within the research allowed respondents to speak about WLB from their individual perspective, allowing for a detailed understanding of WLB for female managers in the retail sector of the economy.

## 2.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.5.1. The Life Course Perspective

Life Course (LC) perspective is a perspective of human development formulated by G.H. Elder (Newman & Newman, 2007, p. 55). It offers a framework for understanding and explaining how women perceive and attach meaning to their WLB. The perspective is also significant in that it views WLB as being fluid and shaped by societal conditions and social norms. This framework is useful for the purposes of this research because it offer ways of thinking about WLB as a subjective experience, which changes over time. It recognizes the impact of the historical context on development, the interconnectedness of multiple roles, and the processes which impact on the lives of individuals.

According to Newman and Newman (2007) “The term life course within this approach refers to the integration and sequencing of phases of work and life over time” (p. 55). The life course is made up of various phases and roles which people fulfill in their work domain as well as their life domain. These phases and roles make up the individual’s life course. G. H. Elder, a leader in the elaboration of the LC perspective has created a way of thinking about individual’s lives as embedded in historical and contextual periods and as constantly changing.

There are two central themes in the LC perspective. These themes are ‘trajectories’ and ‘transitions’. A trajectory has been defined as “the long term path of one’s life experiences in a specific domain, in particular work and family life” (Bruening, Dixon, & Warner 2008, p.13). The family trajectory may for example include marriage, parenthood, grandparenthood and widowhood. The view held by the LC approach then is that lives are composed of trajectories

which, in essence, are the experiences people go through in their lives. It also suggests that there are experiences which are unique to specific domains. The distinction between experiences in work domains and life domains however does not mean that private lives and professional lives are separate domains. Literature and research indicate that WLB cannot be understood simplistically and to view domains as separate is reductionist. Managerial women therefore, may experience some aspects of the home domain such as spending time with their children as meaningful and important. Within the work place, women may also experience aspects of their work as meaningful and important as work can, as literature indicates (Gornick & Meyers, 2005); give women a sense of fulfillment and purpose.

A transition can be described as a component within the trajectory marked by the “beginning or close of an event or role relationship” (Newman & Newman, 2007). In a person’s work trajectory, transitions may be; being laid off, getting a promotion and advancing to senior management. Transitions therefore are the events that make up the lifelong trajectory. This term is not used specifically for women, but is used for the purposes of this study. A transition is therefore the changes in the work domain and life domain which women experience over the course of their lives. The perceptions and understandings held by women concerning WLB then can and do continually change as women experience transitions. In South Africa, for example, the introduction of a democratic government led to the formulation and implementation of legislations such as the *Employment Equity Act* and *Labour Relations Act* which facilitate the career development of women. As a result, women have the opportunity to participate actively within the labour market. For this reason, WLB within literature has been conceptualized as a subjective experience which is experienced and appraised by the individual and continually changes due to macro factors such as legislature as well as micro factors such as the individual

female's perceptions on the role of a woman within contemporary society.

LC perspective has four basic principles, which allow for an in depth, and contextualized understanding of WLB. The first principle is that “human development takes place in a historical time and place” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.185). This view holds that people, norms and experiences exist within a context. This principle is crucial in gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of women. Issues and challenges which women face within employment are steadily increasing as various societal changes challenge long held views on the roles of men and women in relation to work and home domain. WLB has been associated with positive health implications as well as positive outcomes for organizations. The view of WLB then is a positive one as it is perceived as an important area to understand (Mostert & Koekemoer, 2010; Nzimande, 2008; Pocock, 2008; Wallis & Price, 2003).

The perceptions and meanings female managers ascribe to WLB also exist within a context which they subjectively appraise and perceive as allowing or inhibiting the attainment of WLB. An example is a study conducted by Stewart and Ostrove (1998) describing two groups of women in their mid-20 who graduated from Radcliffe College. One group graduated in 1964 and the other in 1975. While majority of women in the younger group were in the labour force or enrolled in graduate school about two thirds of the older group were married and 16% had children. Thus LC perspective acknowledges the fact that the context in which females exist significantly impacts on WLB, career and life choices.

The second principle which the LC perspective looks at is that “people operate as agents on their own behalf choosing among the opportunities that are available in their time and society” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p. 52). This theory, whilst taking account of the context within

which individuals exist and how this impacts on career and life choices, extends choice to incorporate human agency in career and personal life choices. It argues that people are constantly making choices which impact on their life course. These choices could be to get married, choosing a career path etc.

The LC perspective principle offers a balanced view of understanding WLB because it asserts that the choices that people make are those which are available in their time and society. However, the choice remains an individual choice. The lack of opportunity in many careers for women – during the apartheid era for example – meant that many chose nursing and teaching careers due to the lack of other career options. Having noted that human agency cannot be overlooked, even within limiting macro contexts such as apartheid many African females, despite legislative constraints, were able to enter professions other than those stipulated by the government. In our current society without legislative constraints, women choose various occupations. The focus of this study is on females in the retail industry. This research attempts to understand the choices females perceive they have in navigating the demands of their private and professional roles.

LC perspective also looks at time as important in understanding decisions related to careers and the private lives of females. Social time, it asserts, “focuses on the entry and exit from age graded social roles, the sequencing of these roles and the social and cultural meaning or expectations associated with these roles” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.191). These social and cultural expectations have been termed “the social clock” (Pocock, 2008). Newman and Newman (2007) argue that “adults are aware of existing norms regarding the timing of certain behaviors

and evaluate their own behaviors as being “on time”, or “too soon” or “too late”. The social clock is constantly being reset as people confront the challenges, demands and new structures of modern society. This means that socially acceptable time frames to engage in activities such as marriage and childbearing are continually reset and adjusted in response to challenges and demands of modern society. This is particularly true for the female labour force where, upon entering employment, women have to adjust other areas of their lives such as the age for marriage and childbearing so as to thrive within their chosen careers (Clair & Dufresne, 2007).

The WLB of the women within this research could be significantly shaped by the social time and the social roles the women perceive themselves to be within. A mother will experience WLB in a manner different to a single woman. These two women fulfill different roles within their private lives, and thus will experience WLB differently. In the same token, retail managers fulfill different roles to the ones which they occupied when they were not in a management position. Thus they may attach different meanings to the fulfillment of the challenges within the organization.

The final principle of the LC perspective is that within an “individual life course, the trajectories and transitions are linked and influence each other” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.186). Extensive literature and research exists which show that Work and life are interdependent, and is also experienced at varying periods within individuals’ lives. LC perspective holds that “you can map the convergence of transitions across the occupational and family trajectories over time, highlighting periods of potential harmony and conflict between the demands in the two trajectories” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.187). The interlocking of private and professional roles would look quite different for the woman who extends her educational preparation to

include a professional degree, works before marriage, and delays childbearing into her middle to late 30's. In comparison to a woman who dedicates her entire energy to excellence in a career, the LC perspective of professional woman is different. These two women experience distinct work and family trajectories, entering and leaving roles at different ages and making commitments to certain roles over others. WLB, though subjective, is intertwined, being impacted by private and professional roles. This research has attempted to understand how women perceive the roles they fulfill in their private and professional lives and these can be used to better understand women within retail's experience.

## 2.6. Conclusion

Employment in managerial positions within retail as well as responsibilities outside of work has placed some women in complex positions. These women face the complexity that comes with the individual, socio cultural and organizational factors that affect their work and non-work decisions. The retail environment within South Africa is unique as because although it is predominantly made up of women, the working time schedules do not take account of responsibilities women often carry out such as domestic duties, child care, elder care etc. There is little research undertaken in South Africa, which focuses on how women perceive and understand work-life balance in retail. In particular, the findings of previous studies have revealed how “individual attitudes and behaviors reflect larger structural and social forces at work, not simply individual choices” (Bruening & Dixon 2008). Few research studies have acknowledged the tendency of work to be messy, ambiguous, political and fragmented (Bruening & Dixon, 2008).

In summary, the LC perspective examines “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that

the individual enacts over time (Elder & Giele, 2009, p. 22). The life course paradigm incorporates individuals' historical and socio-cultural contexts, their social networks, and the life choices, or transitions. The components of the paradigm then intersect to form the various trajectories of the life course (Hutchinson, 2007). Therefore the LC perspective is applicable in this study because it allows for a contextual and subjective understanding of work- life balance.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The methods used in this study will be discussed below. A qualitative research methodology was used within the study. This was appropriate because the research aimed to gain an in depth understanding of the work-life balance of women in retail management. The methods to be discussed include the type of research design, the size and composition of the sample, instruments used and the procedure that was followed.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

This research was a qualitative study and sought to “explain, by using evidence from the data and from the literature, what the phenomenon being studied was about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 25). With qualitative studies, researchers attempt to understand the world from the participants’ point of view and unfold the meaning of people’s experiences to their lived world prior to any scientific explanations (Turner, 2010). This research was a study of the experiences of WLB for women within management as they perceive it. A case study design was used in the current research because it provided “intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system” (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley & McNeill, 2002, p. 31), this is particularly useful in the current study. The demarcated group necessitated the use of a case study.

#### **3.3. Sample and Sampling Method**

The study used non-probability sampling to identify the participants within the study. According to (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley & McNeill, 2002, p. 31), a non-probability sampling method “refers to any kind of sampling where the selection of elements is not determined by the statistical principle of randomness”.

This research used purposive sampling and did not aim to generalize findings to a general population. Ulin, Robinson, Tolley & McNeill (2002) described purposive sampling as a strategy which uses sampling methods based on purpose rather than on statistical probability of selection. Participants in the current research were selected based on their individual experience of being female managers. Job tenure was taken into account, participants who had been working at the shopping centre for a year or longer were considered suitable for the study. Participants were also selected on the basis of gender. Only female managers were approached. The motive for selecting participants with these characteristics was the assumption that these participants would provide meaningful insight into work- life balance.

### *3.3.1. Research Participants*

The researcher used ten participants from the selected centre management situated in Durban. The selection criteria were that the participants are working within a managerial position, within the selected shopping mall and that they are female. The researcher approached staff members after having attained permission to enter the organization and ask all female management staff to participate. The demographics that were considered were gender, age; job grade, and tenure.

### *3.3.2 Sample Description*

Table 1: Respondent Demographics

Pseudonyms	Age Bracket	Marital status	Dependents	Race
Nolwandle	25-30	Single	One daughter (two years old)	African
Mbali	25-30	Single	None	African
Eleanor	25-30	Single	None	Indian
Ndalo	25-30	Single	One son	African
Candice	25-30	Single	None	Coloured
Kim	25-30	Single	None	African
Sarah	35-40	Married	Two daughters (13 and 11 years old)	Indian
Robyn	30-35	Married	Two children (son ten years old and daughter seven years old)	White
Sindi	30-35	Single	One daughter (eight years old)	African

Natasha	30-35	Married	None	White
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The participants within the study ranged in ages from 25 – 35. A minority of the participants were married, whilst the women were predominantly single. Half of the participants were parents, with on average one child, whilst the other half were not parents. In terms of social background, the researcher found little communality in terms of education or work experience. The participants came from a variety of economic and social backgrounds. There were a couple of noticeable trends, however. A second was that the vast majority of the mothers were single, and all were employed in the same profession. Of note, was that the women who were both married and parents were older than the single mothers.

### 3.4. Data Collection Techniques

#### *3.4.1. Instruments used*

Semi structured interviews were used within the study. An interview schedule is attached. (See Appendix A). Semi structured interviews allowed WLB to be examined in a natural context “in the form of a conversation with a purpose” (Turner, 2010, p. 36). The flexibility of semi structured interviews was also valuable to the study as the aim was to examine the perceptions of the women and thus participants were given the freedom to discuss their perspectives.

#### *3.4.2. Access*

To gain access to potential participants, the general manager was contacted and permission to speak to the staff was requested. Staff members were requested, through email, to participate in the study. The email contained a brief on the purpose of the study and also contained information

regarding participant anonymity and confidentiality. A meeting date was set for those who expressed interest in the study.

#### *3.4.3. Procedure followed*

The first step was to gain ethical clearance and to have the proposal approved by the Faculty Research Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal to conduct the research. Once ethical clearance and approval was obtained, the next step was to contact the centre management of the shopping centre where participants worked. Once permission was obtained telephonically to conduct the study. Staff members were requested, through email, to participate in the study. The email contained a brief on the purpose of the study and also contained information regarding participant anonymity and confidentiality. A meeting date was set for those who expressed interest in the study. A time period of three to four weeks was set aside to conduct the interviews. Interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants for their convenience. The participants were briefed on what the research was about and given a letter with an informed consent form to sign (Appendix B). Participants were also told that they would be informed of the outcome of the research, and were given the contact details of the researcher and her supervisor should they have any queries regarding the research. In addition, the participants were asked if they would agree to be tape-recorded using a non-visual, audiotape.

#### 3.5. Data Analysis

The interviews used inductive thematic analysis which is advocated by Hayes (2000). While the inductive approach uses the data to generate ideas, the deductive method starts with the theoretical framework and uses the data to verify or disprove the idea (Hayes, 2000). These approaches are framed under thematic qualitative analysis (Hayes, 2000). Themes, in this

context, are “recurrent ideas or topics which can be detected in the material which is being analysed, and which come up on more than one occasion in a particular set of data” (Hayes, 2000, p.3).

Hayes (2000) argues that it is impractical for a researcher to convince themselves that they do not influence what they are studying. Thus at the outset there is an acknowledgement of this effect on the study in the design and carrying out of the interviews and the analysis.

The inductive thematic analysis method, which relies on the emergence of themes as opposed to predetermined or prescribed themes, was used in an attempt to capture the respondents’ experiences of their professional domain and private domain. The study used the Life Course perspective as a framework for understanding and explaining how women perceive and attach meaning to their WLB.

The following stages of thematic analysis (Hayes, 2000) were used:

1. Data was prepared for analysis by transcribing interviews.
2. Each interview was read, noting items of interest that relate to themes.
3. Items of interest were sorted into themes.
4. Themes were examined and an initial definition was developed.
5. Each new theme was taken separately and re-examined carefully against each transcript for relevant material for that theme.
6. Using all of the material relating to each theme, each theme’s final form: name, definition and supporting data was constructed.
7. Relevant illustrative data for reporting the themes was selected.

### 3.6. Validity and Reliability of Qualitative research

Validity and reliability are two factors which researchers should pay attention to while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. This corresponds to the question of “how an inquirer can persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Henning, 2004, p.51). To answer the question, Henning (2004) asserts that the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm's terms. This research therefore used these terms within this study. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The credibility criterion establishes that the results of the qualitative research accurately represent the view of the respondent in the research process (Easton, 2007). In the study, the researcher used the guidelines advocated by (Shenton, 2004) to promote confidence that the experiences of the participant were recorded accurately. Moreover, thematic analysis was used and is a well-established method of analyzing qualitative data (Gilbert, 2008). Furthermore, the process outlined in the methodology of the research was followed within the data collection phase. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of the research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Easton, 2007). To enable readers to make a transfer of the findings, the research included contextual information such as the boundaries of the study. These include the number of participants involved, the number of data collection sessions and biographical information of the participants. Ultimately the results of the study must be understood within the context of the case study. Dependability which is referred to as reliability in quantitative research emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever changing

context within which the research occurs (Henning, 2004). Finally confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the qualitative research could be confirmed or collaborated with others. The collected data was transcribed and the participants were each given the opportunity to check the data themselves. This is called member checking and was used to establish the confirmability of the study.

### 3.7. Ethical Considerations

The study was given ethical clearance by the Higher Degree Committee of the University of KwaZulu Natal, specifically the research committee of the Faculty of Humanities. The rights and dignity of participants were a priority in the research. To ensure that participants were adequately informed about the research an informed consent form was given to participants. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that the interview transcripts and recording were accessible to the researcher and supervisor only. Anonymity refers to substituting or omitting of participant information that would make them identifiable (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley & Mcneil, 2002). The current research ensured anonymity by using pseudonyms instead of participant's names, the study omitted the job title and department within the mall which participants were selected from. Furthermore participants were informed of their right to discontinue the interview at any point.

### 3.8. Limitations of the Design

This research used a qualitative research design and thus lacks generalizability to other organizations. This research was also conducted within the period of a year and this limits the number of participants the researcher interviewed. WLB was studied from the perspective of the female managers, without studying organizational factors which may have impacted WLB, thus

the perspective which this study explored focused on the female perspective. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which has been largely viewed as a subjective process to a degree and thus the researcher within the analysis as well as during data collection aimed to be reflexive and understand the perspectives of the participants.

### 3.9. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of how women perceived work-life balance within the retail centre they worked within. This study was based on a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews using close ended and open-ended questions. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Ten female participants in management positions within the shopping centre were interviewed. The interviews lasted approximately 45-minutes to an hour each. Once the interviews were completed they were analyzed using thematic qualitative analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research explored how women in managerial positions perceived work-life balance (WLB) in both their private and professional roles within retail. The following discussion reports the findings of the study in terms of the research objectives and research questions. In exploring the research questions, several themes emerged in relation to each question. The main themes were: 1) the integration of work and life roles; under this, the sub theme: The impact of technology on WLB was also identified. 2) The career as a learning process which is personally meaningful; 3) the retail industry and people dynamics, 4) the transitions and the value of time and 5) home social capital and wellbeing. These were supported by literature and the theoretical framework of the research. The research questions will be explored using participant's career and life trajectories according to their subjective evaluations. Finally, an examination of how the participants experiences of their trajectories and transitions, reveal some of the gendered assumptions regarding work-life balance within the retail context.

#### 4.1. Theme one: The integration of work and life roles

This theme provided insight into how female managers negotiated and managed their private and professional roles. A recurring concept when the women spoke about their private and professional roles was the concept of integration. This theme relates to the permeability between work and life responsibilities for the participants. The majority of the women stated that they planned as many personal responsibilities around their working day as well as in close proximity

to their work, so that they could fulfill personal and professional tasks. This highlights that it is a “myth” to view work life and family life as constituting two separate and non overlapping worlds (Kater, 2005). From the perspective of some of the participants this was a positive and important benefit which aided them balance the responsibilities of their careers. The word integration therefore is appropriate in this regard because it connotes a positive interaction; the participants also expressed an acceptance of the integration of work and life roles. The women articulated this as follows

**Nolwande:** *“Nkanyezi (participants daughter), goes to school around work, I go to gym around work, there’s an easy flow into things”.*

**Mbali:** *“You should be available via email, via phone, by some means such as a phone while you walk the floor, you are constantly available whether you are on leave or not”.*

**Kim:** *“Because it is a challenge, you need to get positive and creative and that comes through work”.*

**Sarah:** *“Things, I have that I value now, that I couldn’t have back then, but at the same time, there are things that I have lost, and that I don’t do. For example, I have a house now, but I have less free time. Now I can’t study, but when I was younger, I could study”.*

Socio-cultural norms have also played out in the women’s perceptions of the integration of their work and life roles. In fact, researchers have explained that individual level behaviours such as choices (e.g. schooling children in close proximity to work to allow for reduced travel time) do not only reflect micro level negotiations of working mothers, but also interrelated macro level socio-cultural and organizational realities influencing those choices (Bruening, Dixon & Warner,

2008; Kater, 2005; Watts, 2009). The socio-economic realities that influenced this are that the females, who view the integration of work and life responsibilities positively, are single parents. They are therefore responsible for the financial needs of their children. Work is therefore an important part of fulfilling their duty as parents. This is a reflection of important life roles that the women fulfill through their work.

The organisational realities such as “work-time intensity” (Coetzee, Berg & Shreuder, 2010, p.10) have increased and even though the women have attained managerial positions, they have found that increased responsibility at work has also meant increased pressure to succeed and increased hours in order to do so. Thus women take active steps to integrate their life and work responsibilities to fulfil their personal and professional responsibilities. As a result, participants described their career trajectories as being integrated with their life trajectories.

The LC perspective provides a context to view the integration of the career and life trajectories of the women. The perspective suggests that within an “individual life course, the trajectories and transitions are linked and influence each other” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.186). Extensive literature exists which indicates that work and life are interdependent, and that this interdependence is experienced at varying periods within individuals’ lives. The LC perspective holds that “you can map the convergence of transitions across the occupational and family trajectories over time, highlighting periods of potential harmony and conflict between the demands in the two trajectories” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.187). Whilst participants discussed the integration of their career and life trajectories, they held mixed sentiments regarding the perceived integration.

Certain participants in the study held negative perceptions relating to the integration of work and life roles. A participant stated:

**Robyn:** *“We work here, its late, you’re tired and exhausted. I have an indigestion problem because I eat late, I arrive home after seven; you can’t sleep if you have indigestion”.*

The work of this particular woman in the retail environment has negatively impacted on her health and family life. Kirby, Wieland and McBride (2006) argue that work demands affect wellbeing and subjective health and may also result in psychosomatic symptoms as in the case of the above participant. Vast arrays of literature recognize the permeability between work and life and thus define WLB in a manner similar to the sentiments of the women in the study (Maxwell, Gilian & MacDougall, 2004). Research indicates that work-life balance is about “people having a measure of control over when, where, and how they work” (Schneider, 2007, p.25). Research also acknowledges the complexities which arise in an understanding of WLB. These multiple factors include the flexibility in the number of hours worked flexibility in the arrangement of hours, flexibility in the place of work, and breaks from work (Nieto, 2003; Burke & Lewis, 2007). Although employed women could experience conflict between work and family, the interaction between these domains may also be positive in nature. Different factors can have an influence on the interaction between work and home, including demographic characteristics, personality and attitudes (Glynn, 2009). Given these factors, the participants’ subjective experiences of managing their professional and private roles were valuable in understanding the experience of WLB for individual women in the retail sector. An important factor which stimulated the integration of professional and personal roles was the impact of technology.

#### *4.1.1. Sub theme: The impact of technology on work- life balance*

Participants described the impact that technology had on increasing their availability whether they were physically present or not at work. Contrary to the view that technology might have a negative impact some participants did not view it negatively. This suggests that the impact of modern technology in shaping the interface between work and life is an accepted part of a retail career. In addressing this phenomenon, Beder (2000) argues that “there is an overwhelming view that in order to succeed in a profession, it has to be the one and only focus of your life, and that if you are not prepared to do that, you are not a real professional” (Beder, 2000, p. 244). The literature and data therefore indicate that the reality is that in contemporary society, there is integration in work and life roles. This reality is upheld by perceptions of people’s professionalism, which is based on their availability. Technology thus is pivotal in increasing the availability of the worker whilst at work and after official working hours. Whilst some held this view, some were highly frustrated by it. Indeed it seemed that some participants experienced a sense of loss and not being able to be present in more aspects of their lives.

**Nolwandle:** *“It’s great because you can take your laptop home and work anywhere, but you find you’re working all the time, when you are not at work”.*

**Robyn:** *“You spend like 90% of your life at this job, and once time has gone its gone, you can’t retrieve it, it’s gone, but what can I do, it is my job, you spend time away from work doing all the admin that comes with the job, that you could not do at work”.*

**Ndalo:** *“It’s becoming more and more limited especially as time goes on, my son is*

*becoming a lot more demanding of my time and so is work”.*

It is important therefore that whilst participants experience the positive impact of technology on the amount of time spent doing work, it also has had a significant bearing on the worker. According to Beder (2000) another factor to consider is the presence of unemployment that enables employers to demand longer hours from those who feel they are lucky to have a job. This can be applied to the South African context where the unemployment rate is high, **Eleanor** captured this succinctly when she stated the reason she stays in the organization is “*Because I can’t find another job*”.

The LC perspective provides insight from a different outlook on an explanation for the variation of views regarding the impact of technology on work. The LC perspective views time as important in understanding decisions related to careers and the private lives of females. Under the theory, there are cultural and social expectations which are termed the “social clock” (Newman & Newman, 2007). The basic premise is that “adults are aware of existing norms regarding the timing of certain behaviors and evaluate their own behaviors as being “on time” or “too soon” or “too late”. This sheds light on why some participants view it as positive and acceptable to have their work infiltrate many aspects of their lives. This could be a result of their age and that they do not have responsibilities like parenting, whilst other participants wanted to start a family and thus were frustrated at work encroaching on all spheres of their lives. The life stage that participants were in influenced the participant’s management of their private and professional roles and provided valuable insight into the different ways participants spoke about their professional roles.

In order to understand the perceptions surrounding the influence of technology on WLB, it is

important to take into account that “human development takes place in a historical time and place” as argued by the LC perspective (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.185). The participant’s lives are embedded in a context, where technology has enabled people to work anytime and anywhere. This has occurred against the backdrop of an increasingly integrated global economy.

One of the valuable aspects of the LC perspective is that it allows individuals to highlight turning points or critical incidents in their lives that seem to have changed their life course. The women who perceived the impact of technology negatively, and were frustrated by this were those who had plans to start their families or were already single parents. As these women had families they were confronted with the reality of a lifestyle in retail that required weekend work, and a long working day. The combination of full time employment in a managerial role and attempting to raise young children has placed some of the women in unique positions. These women have been impacted in both their career and lives. Potentially promoting the presence of women who have young children can add diversity of the workplace and even begin to reshape gender relations (Bruening, Dixon & Warner, 2008). The women’s experience is contrary to the view that the institutional barriers that women faced in the past have been broken down (or at least mitigated) and replaced by a set of individual choices that they may pursue. The value of the latter view is that it allows organizations to reframe the question of women’s WLB as one of personal achievement, rather than institutional change.

This is a simplistic view for the reason that the debate is shifted away from any acknowledgement of women’s oppression. In fact, post-feminists argue that women’s oppression is a thing of the past and now the battle is one of individual choice and fulfillment (Pocock, 2008). In this view the greatest problems faced by women are not lack of child care,

institutionalized sexism, or poverty, but the price of success paid by professional women. This is not a reflection of how participants experience their professional roles and WLB.

#### *4.2. Theme two: The career as a learning process which is personally meaningful*

This theme was significant in understanding how participants spoke about and experienced their roles as managers. An overview of literature and research indicates that work is personally meaningful and significant to people (Roesch, 2004; Stephen & Franks, 1999; Frederickson, 2001). This view was also expressed by some of the participants. The career was viewed as a means of personal and professional development, this was particularly because through the formal qualifications participants had, they were able to occupy managerial positions as well as have a sense that they were developing as individuals. The knowledge based economy of contemporary society places value on knowledge. As a result, organizations value learning and continuous knowledge attainment. The economic imperative on knowledge is reflected in the attitudes of the women toward their own career trajectories. The women demonstrated remarkable insight into themselves as people and how they were developing both professionally and personally. This is reflected in the statement below:

**Nolwandle:** *“All human beings are multi-faceted and can do many things; it is about unlearning certain things and learning new ones”.*

Tomlinson & Durbin (2010) assert that “as one enters the job market and does what is necessary to get ahead, one accepts new responsibilities and commitments that bind one to the system and change one’s point of view”(Tomlinson & Durbin, 2010 p. 52). In this way work, has a socializing effect which the participant alludes to when she speaks of unlearning certain things

and learning new ones.

**Ndalo**, animatedly described a period when she was expected to make decisions while the General Manager was on leave.

**Ndalo:** *“One morning, I would come into work and say my God, I don’t know what to do and in an hour, I would’ve figured it out and that kept it exciting, I love it”.*

From the above excerpt it is clear that the women also experienced a sense of personal fulfillment through their work, even when it was challenging and demanded a lot of time (Urban, 2010). This suggests that participating in multiple roles may provide the individual with more opportunities and resources that can be used in promoting growth and better functioning in other domains of life (Mostert & Van Aarde. 2010). This is in contrast to research which argues that females who are exposed to high job pressure, work overload and time demands may experience stress (Coetzee, Berg & Shreuder, 2010). **Ndalo’s** experience of a period of high job pressure, and time constraints indicate that when individuals are given the autonomy to make decisions, a situation that could have had the outcome of being highly stressful is met with excitement and the perception that growth accompanies the uncertainty and this helps people cope with the uncertainty.

The participants also recounted difficult periods in their careers which had an impact on their personal wellbeing.

**Candice:** *“I tell you, things will happen to you that you never expected to happen, and you grow and develop a second skin”.*

**Eleanor:** *“You need to be a strong person, when I came here I was a very quiet person, and this job made me strong, there’s no lie about that”.*

**Candice** had remained employed after a dismissal of a colleague in the same department. She expressed feelings of guilt, because she was retained rather than her colleague and as a result of this, she was doing more work without the support of the co employee she had worked with. This is termed “survivor guilt” within literature (Roan & Diamond, 2003). Literature postulates that people who don’t get fired may be initially relieved to still have a job, but may experience feelings of remorse and discontent at the office. Those that are left behind are usually dealing with an “increased workload, and the atmosphere of tension and uncertainty that remains after layoffs” (Mayton, 2002, p. 52). Participants therefore spoke of their professional roles impacting their sense of security at work as well as psychological wellbeing.

From the above participant’s experience, career expectations therefore are not static or unchanging conditions. This is captured by the LC perspective which argues that as adults develop, they undergo continuous biological, psychological and social changes. Thus, a transition in the career trajectory as experienced by **Candice** has an impact on her psychological and social trajectories. “To further clarify the impact of a career transition on an understanding of WLB, a view of the workplace as a social system is important” (Mayton, 2002, p. 44). “Job loss in particular, changes the relationships with people. This can lead to a disconnection which could cause feelings of loneliness and isolation” (De Klerk & Mostert, 2010, p. 7). From **Candice’s** discussion of the dismissal of a colleague, although meeting the organizational needs, did not

address the effects on her as an employee, and thus led to feelings of loneliness and overwork. In describing the effects of this however, **Candice** also stated that because of this she had developed a “second skin”, alluding to having become resilient as a result of the challenges experienced at work.

Some of the other women also held the view that their difficulties led to their becoming “stronger” people. The principle of contextualism, which holds that human development cannot be separated from the context in which it occurs, is important in this regard (Hernandez & Simmons, 2006). From the accounts of the women of their careers as a learning experience, it is important to view trajectories across and within the different domains of human behaviour and functioning and to see that these have mutual effects on one another. An example is **Eleanor** who describes her change from being a “quiet” person which implies that she was meek to being a strong person, and the implication here is that she has become assertive as a result of the retail centre and the people that she works with. Thus from a LC perspective human lives can be better understood if they are viewed in their changing worlds. The context of the women’s work has a direct bearing on the women’s changed personality disposition from the time they began working to the mental and emotional outlook they now have as in the case of **Candice** and **Eleanor**.

#### *4.3. Theme three: The retail industry and people dynamics*

This theme unearthed the interface between private and professional roles and provided an understanding of how participants spoke about their private roles and professional roles. The retail industry is one which is based on constant interaction between customers and the research participants. Literature indicates that this sector is a predominantly female sector (Hernandez &

Simmons, 2006; Leonard, 2005). The retail industry contributes to economic growth, and is also a time demanding industry to work within. Currently, within the Durban region, the two largest shopping malls, trade from 9am to 7 pm on a daily basis. This also includes one weekend per month (Statistics SA, 2011).

Participants highlighted that the view that females are more people centered and thus suitable for retail is still prevalent.

**Mbali:** *“The perception is that females are people that understand people”.*

As a result of this, most women within the company are expected to have face to face interaction with customers, and in many ways their job encompassed emotional labour. The term “emotional labour” is frequently used in discussions among women, and appears all the more in scientific literature. It has however, never been a part of the official language of work. Emotional labour can be understood as “the control of a person’s behavior to display the appropriate emotions” (Pal, Medway & Warnaby, 2010, p. 53). This means that the person evokes or suppresses the expression of certain emotions to conform to social norms. The concept of emotional labour appears quite pertinent in the retail industry. All the participants interviewed discussed in one form or another, the impact of working in an environment of ongoing customer interaction. It can be argued that successful service within retail is affected by emotional labour.

**Eleanor:** *“you deal with people on a day to day basis and people are very nasty”.*

**Mbali:** *“There is an expectation that you are fully theirs, they don’t really care”.*

**Kim:** *“You deal with people, who have good days and bad days, and sometimes, they are polite and others they offload on you and leave you with their anger and frustration”.*

**Eleanor:** *“We kinda take that same anger home, because you can’t take it anywhere”*

Literature indicates that faking and suppressing emotions on a continuous basis can be very stressful (Pal, Medway & Warnaby, 2010). Individuals within this research appear to have built up emotional stress. This is because there was no means of discussing the impact of dealing with frustrated, angry customers continuously but there was an expectation that women would accept this as part of the job and manage it individually. Participants spoke of the emotional impact of working within retail because it was an industry which placed special emphasis on the conveying of helpful, and cheerful dispositions to ensure that customers were satisfied.

**Nolwandle:** *“Sometimes you have to look at senior leadership and see how they’ve remained strong”.*

One underlying issue in the comments made by participants concerning their feelings of anger and the need to stay strong was race. Race had an impact on the interactions between the participants and customers, as well as employees perceptions on the legitimacy of employment equity policies.

Ndalo who uses her English name at work she stated:

**Ndalo:** *“It’s been hard at times, I’ve had a number of times where I spoke to a potential tenant and when they see me, they feel that you are not going to be able to help them”.*

**Mbali:** *“Daily abuse – they think we are still in Apartheid times”.*

De Beer’s (1998) comparison of the AA and diversity management approaches reflects the aforementioned views. The view held in this study is that organizational transformation relies on

changes in the mindset of all attached to an organization (Clair & Dufresne, 2007). This implies that a part of organizational transformation is influenced by the transformation of South African customers. The argument is that an appreciation for diversity lies at the core of societal transformation and reconciliation between different race groups and this is a process that continues even after seventeen years of freedom. An important developmental area that South African organizations should become aware of is that the presence of people from previously marginalized groups can make a qualitative difference in how power is exercised (Van Tonder, 2004). However, as the retail sector has demonstrated, different faces do not necessarily mean different rules.

In addition to the racial undertones which characterized interactions with customers, participants also felt frustrated and unfairly treated at work on the basis of race.

**Candice:** *“Um, I don’t mean to be rude but if you’re black there’s a lot of favoritism, if you are Asian you are not noticed”.*

While the progressive Constitution and laws of South Africa have been applauded for its role in fighting for and protecting the rights of socially and economically marginalized groups, there are interesting ways in which activists are discovering that even the most progressive laws can be subverted. The laws around affirmative action serve as an example of both the power and the limitations of the law in effecting social change. According to Duke, Goodman, Treadman & Breland, (2009) fear among different race groups often still leads to both “latent and covert resistance and skepticism about AA” (Msimang, 2007, p 21). They also list the fear of revenge/retribution from black people, the loss of standards, and punitive taxation among the

fears from white people. Black South Africans, according to the same authors share different fears, including white manipulation, victimization, tokenism and marginalization.

In terms of work-life balance then, it is not only the tangible elements which affect women's perception of work-life balance, but also the intangible. The process of transforming South African society then appears to have a direct bearing on the women's discussion of their professional roles, due to the varying perceptions around the appropriateness of the legislation.

#### *4.4. Theme four: Transitions- The value of time*

This theme was pertinent in highlighting that individual attitude and behaviors sometimes reflect social forces at work, and not simply individual choices (Bruening, Dixon & Warner, 2008). This theme therefore reflected the individual and social forces in women's discussion of their private and professional roles. The participants all acknowledged working long hours, and that they often did not have the time they would like to engage in activities outside of work. Having noted this, participants aimed to get value out of the time that they did have. This is supported by literature which indicates that WLB is achieved when “ an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society” (Emslie & Hunt, 2009, p. 52).

In contrast to the changing perceptions around WLB, which is becoming important to individuals, society and organizations, there appear to be no significant interest in retail industries in the WLB of their employees. There were no WLB initiatives which participants discussed, or any flexi time policies this absence of WLB initiatives may have led individuals to

view the task of balancing time as their own responsibility.

**Kim:** *“Personally it has taught me a lot about planning, setting goals and sticking to them”.*

**Natasha:** *“It can consume, quite a bit of your personal life and that you only realize when your personal life or personal relationships start suffering”.*

As a result of the awareness and acceptance that the environment would not facilitate WLB, the women had personal strategies in managing their time. This was a result of an awareness that time needed to be managed. For many of the participants, this realization was a process which occurred over time. The awareness that the environment which they worked within would have constant demands on their time alerted them to the need to manage their own time in order to fulfill responsibilities and roles in their private lives.

Many of the women, spoke of personal transitions they made from being willing to do any task they were asked to as a request from a colleague for example to putting up boundaries, so that they did not jeopardize their lives outside of work on a continuous basis. The LC perspective provides a sound perspective for this. It posits that “people operate as agents on their own behalf, choosing among the opportunities that are available in their time and society” (Newman & Newman, 2007, p.63). The concept of human agency is prominent with the LC perspective and this is an important way of viewing individuals in relation to their broader social context. Within the constraints of their world, “people are planful and make choices among options that construct their life course” (Elder, 1994, p.10). thus within the context of long working hours, the women take active steps to ensure they do not habitually take on more work which minimizes their

ability to be active in other spheres of their lives. In understanding WLB it is important then to see the link between individuals and institutions and the varying strategies employed by women in response to their institutional structures.

#### *4.5. Theme five: home social capital and well being*

It was informative to hear how the participants spoke about their home social capital. This theme highlighted that home social capital for the women was critical in maintaining a sense of wellbeing and balance. A wide array of literature indicates that home social support for women has an impact on their professional lives and wellbeing (Mostert & Van Aarde, 2010; Patel, Govender, Paruk, & Ramgoon, 2006). Research suggests that women with children and those cohabiting with their partners are particularly vulnerable to home or work stress; it also indicates that different sources of social support work in unique ways to relieve the strain of home/work stress (Freeman & Edwards 2003).

An example is the Survey Work-Home Interaction Nijmegen (SWING) questionnaire which measures work-home interaction (The SWING is a 22-item work-home interaction measure that measures four types of work-home interference (WHI), namely (1) negative WHI e.g. “you do not have the energy to engage in leisure activities with your spouse/family/friends because of your job”; (2) positive WHI e.g. “you fulfill your domestic obligations better because of the things you have learned on your job”; (3) negative HWI e.g. “you have difficulty concentrating on your work because you are preoccupied with domestic matters”; and (4) positive HWI e.g. “you take your responsibilities at work more seriously because you are required to do the same at home” (Mostert & Van Aarde, 2010). Literature therefore provides a

dynamic understanding of the various ways home factors can interact with the work domain. Some of the women in the research also spoke of different factors within their private lives which impacted on their WLB and sense of wellbeing.

**Sindi:** *“My entire family depends on me”.*

**Kim:** *“I had to become a man, I had to be like a father in the family, and a father will bring the family together, which is the thing that is missing at home”.*

**Mbali:** *“I can’t get to everyone”.*

From the sentiments of the above participants, there are home pressures which have an influence on participant’s ability to concentrate at work. In this particular instance it was participant’s experiences of a lack of home social support which had an impact on their work. These results suggest that it is particularly those females who experienced high levels of home pressure and a lack of social support autonomy at home who experienced negative feelings that spilled over to their work domain. As a result, females become worried about their home and family members whilst at work. In a study by Koekemoer & Mostert (2010), it was found that home demands (emotional and mental demands) were significantly related to both negative and positive WLB.

The principle of “interdependent lives” by the LC perspective is indispensable in providing an in depth perspective on the interaction between home demands and the work domain. Human lives are embedded in social relationships with family and friends across the life span. Social support occurs through these relationships. Within the study when participants who were single mothers, spoke of their parenting responsibilities, they also spoke of the support from other family

members as important in fulfilling their parenting roles. As a result, they did not worry excessively at work about their children whilst at work. **Ndalo** said:

*“My gran looks after my son during the day”.*

In South Africa, particularly within African households, grandparents often assist in childcare. This has also reinforced the practices of multi-generation households where mutual support between generations improves the wellbeing of a person throughout his/her life cycle. Other studies in KwaZulu-Natal found that grandmothers perceive themselves as important in building families, educating younger generations, and providing generational continuity (Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2005).

**Kim** however did not have the sense of social home support, because as she stated, she was required *“to be the man at home”*. Since she was the eldest in the family, she had to assist her single mother financially as well as be a mentor to her younger siblings. This was also the case with **Sindi** who stated that her entire family depended on her. In the rapidly changing society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the participant’s discussion of their lives cannot be separated from the historical time that many professional women find themselves within as well as the social support available to women.

The practical implication of these findings is that females who are under high pressure at home, but also have high levels of support, experience more positive spill-over effects from their home to their work. In many ways then, social support may buffer the effects of working under

pressure. More recent studies have shown that social capital in the form of social support buffers individuals against chronic and acute forms of stress (Coverman, 2003; Ostrove & Jaon, 2005). Therefore, females who experience high levels of pressure at home, but who also have high levels of support, experience positive moods, which in turn spills over to their work domain.

The LC perspective postulates in terms of the interdependence of social support on women's experience of WLB, "you can map the convergence of transitions across the occupational and family trajectories over time, highlighting periods of potential harmony and conflict between the demands in the two trajectories" (Newman & Newman, 2007, p. 187). The concept of social capital or support is important in understanding participant's perception of their ability to cope and the stress that participants experience. Therefore whilst social capital at work is very important, social capital in the home environment is also important to female's experience of WLB. This is an important consideration apart from the organizational factors such as long working hours which characterized the retail industry.

The predominant focus of research on the work-home interface has been in the work to non-work direction, simply an investigation into how factors at work impact the home domain. A less frequent perspective is the impact of the home social support on the work domain as emerged in this study. This research therefore addresses this limitation, by illustrating the impact of home social support for working women. An important consideration from the women's account of the role of social support at home is that stress is usually appraised as a common experience that can be legitimately shared with others. However, in the case of **Sindi** and **Kim**, the intimate and unique stresses of their own lives might not be considered a legitimate subject for social

exposure. It appears that social support cannot be brought into effect when the agenda of stress is hidden from significant others (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010).

Realistically therefore, an outcome within retail context is unlikely to be a downward trend in hours worked because some employees have access to a number of effective coping strategies. The real constraint that confronts employees who work long hours is that they would be unable to work shorter hours while retaining their current jobs, status, salaries and career prospects. In other words, their situation is not one of “no choice” but of preferring the balances of advantages and problems that accompany their current hours to the packages that are available in shorter hour’s jobs (Tomlinson & Durbin, 2010). (Watts, 2009) argues that there should be acknowledgement that for some employees the problems of coping with the status quo may be a more attractive package than any of the realizable alternatives.

#### 4.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the results of the study. The participant’s experiences of their career trajectories and transitions reveal the individual, socio-cultural, and structural factors that affect their WLB (Bruening, Dixon & Warner, 2005).

In revisiting the research questions, the themes highlighted the broad concept of career and life trajectories (e.g. retail managers and motherhood) and the linked lives that are a part of these trajectories. First as consistent with the LC perspective, the themes on the integration of work and life roles, as well as the home social capital and wellbeing theme indicate the role of specific life linkages. Through the words of the participants; significant others helped or presented challenges for the women in their careers. The participants discussed the impact of having

additional family members provide child care when they had to work longer hours and how valuable this additional help was in their perception of a balance between work and life. Participants also highlighted that the challenge of WLB was not restricted to married women or those with children. One of the participants lived with her single mother and younger siblings and described herself as taking on a breadwinner role. This example is indicative of two factors, the first is that WLB is subjective and encompasses unique factors for individuals. The second consideration is that WLB is influenced by societal norms which are in a constant state of flux. The participants are a part of a larger process which includes the decline of the traditional family, an increase in dual-career couples, and a rise in the number of single parents. These factors mean that employees are juggling more responsibilities outside work (Tomlinson & Durbin, 2010).

Second and important in understanding career trajectories is the view that the career is a learning process which was personally meaningful, as demonstrated in earlier comments. The participants indicated that they worked to not only make a living for themselves and their dependents (children and parents), but to develop and learn new skills as people. Following this was a discussion of the retail industry and people dynamics. The sector within which the women worked was characterized by interaction with people and these emotional exchanges appeared to cause strain, which was viewed as the women's responsibility to deal with. Previous research (Johnson, Houmanfar, & Smith, 2010), has shown that many employers have viewed this aspect of the job as an individual level concern for the employee. Yet this study highlights the importance of the employer and customer in work- life balance. The study highlights that building an organizational culture which supports work-life balance is a long term process for

organizations. It involves changing the way people think and talk about their work and about work-life balance so that using flexible working options and other work-life initiatives become accepted and normal for everyone regardless of their gender, seniority within the organizational or personal commitments (Anderson & Kelliher, 2010).

Second, the study highlights that the work-life balance debate needs to progress to a more holistic understanding of life. Life is implicitly assumed to be a positive experience that individuals prefer over work. This generalisation is of little use for understanding and shaping concrete work-life balance practices for specific organizations and occupations (Urban, 2010). Whilst “care commitments, and especially those of women, do continue to be an important issue, it is essential to be aware of and overcome this particular understanding of life and the limits it imposes on the work-life balance debate” (Urban, 2010, p. 5).

Finally the themes explored the transitions in participant’s view of the value of time. This transition demonstrated the role of human agency on the part of the women. Within this the women took decisions which they deemed best in their individual circumstances. The participants within this research shared examples of their individual efforts (**Nolwandle, Kim, Sarah**). In addition to this, the participant’s experiences highlighted the gendered nature of work. While it is not a novel observation that managerial work is largely built on a male model (Baxter, 2002) this study certainly highlights the impact of this model on the lives of individuals who live and work within these assumptions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### 5.1. Summary

The purpose of this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of work-life balance of female managers within the retail sector. The study aimed at understanding how these women experienced and gave accounts of how they balance their work and life.

The research was based on a qualitative research design and used the life course perspective as an explanatory framework for the accounts of the women's experience. The participants were interviewed using semi structured interviews. These interviews lasted between 30 – 60 minutes each. The interviews were then analyzed using thematic analysis.

The results of this research indicated that work-life balance was perceived as a combination of individual, socio cultural and structural factors. The participants experienced their career in retail as integrated with many aspects of their lives outside of work, through technology and the retail context. The participants also highlighted the significance of home social support on their wellbeing. The women's view of WLB was also influenced by the retail context and the people dynamics which accompany this sector. Thus WLB from the perspective of the women was influenced by organizational factors. The South African newly transformed society also impacted the interaction between customers and the participants leading to tensions around the extent to which society was truly transformed as well as concerns over the appropriateness of labour legislation. The results also highlighted the value of time and the human agency of the

participants in making decisions which they deemed best in their individual circumstances. The study highlights the importance the impact of an organizational culture based on long work hours on the lives of individuals who live and work within these assumptions.

It is important to note that even minor considerations would considerably alter these women's experiences. In their own words, adjustments or accommodations like acknowledging their family lives, granting flexible scheduling, and staffing improvements can go a long way in supporting the participants during turning points in their lives.

## 5.2. Conclusion

This study concludes that the women experienced work-life balance uniquely based on their age, home social support and individual personalities. This indicates that the experience of WLB is subjective encompassing individual factors. The participants within this study shared examples of their individual efforts to establish harmony between the responsibilities of their careers and lives. Furthermore, the experience of WLB changes over time as described by the participants and of note is that this is a process facilitated by the interconnectedness of multiple roles. This highlights the importance of capturing the "big picture" which the life course perspective enables.

The current study highlights that the debate on WLB needs to bring "the workplace and work experience back into the frame of analysis" (Van Tonder, 2004, p.55). So far, work features almost exclusively as paid labour and is assumed to be a negative experience. This assumption

contradicts the experiences of some of the participants within the study who take the view that work can be satisfying and motivating.

Moreover, an important consideration is that whilst there are challenges to work-life balance in all occupations, these occupations do not face exactly the same problems and have unequal access to coping strategies. As demonstrated in earlier representative comments, the retail environment had led to both positive and negative experiences for the women and for some these experiences were viewed as turning points within their careers and lives. Some of the participants interacted with colleagues and customers in an assertive manner which they had adopted over time as a result of working within retail. The life course perspective was valuable in providing a framework to view the various changes the women went through over time.

The changes in attitude that the women discussed must be considered in relation to their contexts and perhaps differences according to class, age, and race. These differences need to be recognized in any search of a holistic in depth understanding of work life balance. The research also provided insight into how people make choices and how they interpret those choices based on their experience. This had a direct bearing on their accounts and experience of work life balance.

In addition to considering the context, it is important to note that even minor considerations would considerably alter these women's' experiences. In their own words, adjustments or accommodations like acknowledging their family lives, granting flexible scheduling, and staffing improvements can go a long way in supporting a group of employees during critical turning

points in their lives. One of the ways this can be done is to research the WLB practices of other industries and how this could be applied within retail, Wallis and Price (2003) point out, it is necessary to look “at those on the outside rather than the inside and how policies, practices, and structures can be made more inclusive” of those who are employed (Wallis & Price, 2003, p. 28).

### 5.3. Recommendations

An overview of some of the issues overlooked in the work-life balance debate indicate that what is needed is a more nuanced appreciation, thorough research of the complex relationship between work and life that goes beyond the current zero-sum assumptions of work-life balance. Future research should also examine more representatives from different racial groups. This is because this research suggests that work- life balance may be experienced differently based on race and from different classes. It would also be valuable to gather the life course stories of women who have left retail management as a comparison group to the women who have stayed. Insights from those who have chosen to leave may shed light on how individual in nature trajectories, turning points, and life linkages are in how they impact a decision to leave retail.

A few suggestions emerged from the interviews indicating that it would be of benefit to have internal systems and structures to deal with negative emotions; or the provision of helpers or counselling teams to allow for the processing of strong emotions. Finally, it would be valuable to get insights from the various lives linked with these participants (spouse/partners, children) to assess their perceptions of the WLB balance within these women’s lives and to continue uncovering limiting assumptions within both realms that could lead to valuable individual and social change. Furthermore, the perspectives of directors within retail and their own assumptions

and views on WLB would add further insight into the perceptions of WLB. This could lead to valuable individual and social change at the work environment.

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**APPENDIX A**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

My name is Nosipho Mshololo and I am currently completing my Master’s degree at the University of KwaZulu Natal. A requirement of my degree is to complete a research study. My study is interested in female manager’s perceptions of work-life balance within the retail sector.

You are being invited to participate in this research because of your experience as a female manager within retail and can contribute to the knowledge and understanding of work life balance. There will be no direct benefit to you if you participate in this research, but your participation is likely to help generate knowledge and greater understanding on Work-life balance within retail. Confidentiality will be ensured through the interviews being available to the researcher and her supervisor only. Anonymity will be ensured by omitting any identifying characteristic, such as your name, or department.

Nothing that is said to me during interviews will be shared with anybody outside the research team. If you have any queries please feel free to contact me (Nosipho Mshololo 072 256 4078/ 207508153@ukzn.ac.za) or my supervisor (Shaida Bobat Bobats@ukzn.ac.za).

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

## APPENDIX B

### RESEARCH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### Demographic Questions

How long have you worked in this job?

What race group are you?

What is your marital status?

Do you have any dependants?

Please describe your relationship to your dependants

What age category do you fall into? 20-30, 30-40, 40-65.

1) How do participants narrate their experiences of their private lives?

#### Sub Question

Please describe the responsibilities, you fulfil within your private life?

How do you manage the responsibilities of your private life on a day to day basis?

Do you feel that you have sufficient time for your personal life/personal roles?

2) How do participants narrate their experiences in their professional lives?

#### Sub Question

Please describe the responsibilities you fulfill within your professional role?

How do you manage the responsibilities of your professional role?

What are your perceptions and experiences of being a female manager within your profession?

3) How do female managers negotiate and manage their private and professional roles?

Sub Question

Please describe the challenges you face in managing your private and professional roles?

What do you think would enable you to achieve a balance between you private responsibilities and work responsibilities?