WOMEN'S MOVE FROM EMPLOYMENT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 1997

ABSTRACT

This PhD explores women's move from employment to self-employment, examining their experiences and perceptions of this transition.

In particular, it focuses on the following five central research questions:

1. How does the move from employment to self-employment fit in with a woman's career pattern more generally?
2. How can a woman's decision to leave her organisation be understood theoretically?
3. Why did the women in the study choose to embark on self-employment and what were their expectations in doing so?
4. What factors most influenced a woman's experience of self-employment?
5. To what extent did the women in the study identify themselves as entrepreneurs and what factors impacted on this identification?

Implicit in the first question is an assumption that a woman's career transition can not be understood as a discrete moment or an isolated event; rather, it must be examined within the context of her developing career. The analysis illustrates that the move involves more than a "simple" change between career forms; rather, it is a much more complex transition, involving the balancing of often incompatible career discourses. In seeking to understand women's career transition and development, the analysis emphasizes the importance of occupational identity, the focus of question 5 above.

As regards the second question, in seeking to understand respondents' decisions to leave their organisations, it is necessary to examine both personal and organisational factors, not as a dichotomy, but as integrally related. Notably, gender emerges as significantly impacting on these decisions: in particular the implications of the ideology of the family for women's perceived roles and responsibilities.

Turning to question 3, while for some the move to self-employment was experienced as a single decision, for others it was seen as two distinct, though related choices. Central to this analysis is the significance of family background, and gender. As regard women's fears and expectations, the analysis explores the notion of "risk" , and examines the ways in which women's understandings of concepts such as "freedom" and "control" changed through their experience of self-employment.

Considering question 4, those factors which respondents identified as having a significant impact on their experiences of self-employment, their previous organisational experience was seen as central. Also highly relevant were women's social networks: not only professional relationships and business partners, but also the important role played by husbands and families.

Finally, permeating this analysis is the importance of both structural and agentic dimensions of experience in women's career transition. These dimensions, however, must not be seen as a dualism, but as a "duality" (Giddens, 1976, 1979, 1984; Bhaskar, 1975,1979, 1983). The thesis thus proposes a theoretical model for understanding women's move from employment to self-employment based on this dynamic interplay between structure and agency. Central to this model is the construction of occupational identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to thank for their contribution to this thesis.

First, I want to express my thanks to my supervisors, to Cathy Cassell for her continued support and friendship throughout the process, and to Eileen Green and Liz Lawrence.

I also want to thank my family, who has lived through this PhD with me. To my husband, Ed Myers, for his love, and his amazing ability to behave courteously (and with restraint) - even when asked to discuss qualitative methodology at 4 a.m.! To my children, Hannah, Ben and Isobel, I thank you for your patience, your curiosity, and for making me laugh. Hannah once asked why it was taking me so long to finish my P.E. when it only took her half-an-hour each time! I guess three-and-a-half years is pretty hard to understand when you're six! Ben's persistent questions: "So, what have you found out about those women anyway?" kept me motivated - I had to have answers! And Isobel's arrival at the end of the first year kept me sane. Finally, I thank my parents, Sandy and Stan Cohen, for their enthusiasm and encouragement.

My friends, too, have been the best. I want to thank Gill Musson, for our endless intellectual debates (long may they continue!), and for her unwavering emotional and practical support; and to Mary Mallon for her willingness to discuss women, careers, and PhD's - anytime, anywhere! Outside the world of academia I want to thank Julia Myers, Eleri Davies, Susie Thornton and Leni Solinger, for their friendship, and their unfailing confidence that this thesis would one day be completed.

Finally, I am grateful to all the women who participated in the study. It was their interest, and their enthusiasm in sharing their experiences with me that made this study possible.

PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THIS RESEARCH

Publications

Green, E. And Cohen, L. (1995) Women's Business: are women entrepreneurs breaking new ground or simply balancing the demands of 'women's work' in a new way? *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 297-314.

Cohen, L. and Jennings, P. (1995) Invisible Entrepreneurs, part 1. *Business Growth and Profitability*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 339-352.

Cohen, L. and Jennings, P. (1996) Invisible Entrepreneurs, part 2. *Business Growth and Profitability*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 63-74.

Cohen, L. (1996) Managing the Transition: the move from employment to self-employment. *Small Business and Enterprise Development*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 13-23.

Cohen, L. and Musson, G. (1996) Entrepreneurial Identities: reflections from two case studies. Submitted to and under review by *Organisation*.

Published Conference Proceedings

Cohen, L. and Jennings, P. (1993) Invisible Entrepreneurs. Presented at *16th ISBA National Small Firms Policy and Research Conference*, Nottingham.

Cohen, L. (1994) Women Entrepreneurs: taking a closer look. Presented at *British Academy of Management Conference*, Leicester.

Cohen, L. (1994) From Employment to Self-employment: transformation and synthesis. Presented at *17th National Small Firms Policy and Research Conference*, Sheffield.

Cohen, L. and Jennings, P. (1995) Training for Excellence. Presented at *25th European Small Business Seminar*, Limassol, Cyprus.

Cohen, L. and Jennings, P. (1995) Supporting Transition. Presented at *16th ISBA National Small Firms Policy and Research Conference*, Glasgow.

Cohen, L. (1996) Going it Alone: women's experiences of self-employment. Presented at *Small Business Enterprise and Development Conference*, Leeds.

Cohen, L. and Musson, G. (1996) Enterprise in the UK: perceptions of identity. Presented at *China and the World Entering the 21st Century Conference*, Beijing, China.

Cohen, L. And Musson, G. (1996) Discourse Analysis: storytelling and the construction of the self. Presented as part of the symposium on Qualitative Methods in Management Research, *British Academy of Management Conference*, Birmingham.

Musson, G. and Cohen, L. (1996) Making Sense of Enterprise: identity, power and the enterprise culture. Presented at *19th ISBA National Small Firms Policy and Research Conference*, Birmingham. This paper won the Forum of Private Business prize as the "best paper presented by a newcomer".

Conference Presentations (in addition to those listed above)

Cohen, L. and Green, E. (1993) Women Entrepreneurs: a contradiction in terms? Presented at *Women's Studies Network Conference*, Northampton.

Cohen, L. (1994) Researching Women Entrepreneurs: methodological questions. Presented at *Women's Studies Network Conference*, Portsmouth.

Cohen, L. and Green, E. (1996) Taking Control or Juggling Jobs? An analysis of the employment experience of women workers who leave organisations to become entrepreneurs. Presented at *14th Annual Labour Process Conference*, Birmingham.

Forthcoming Conference Presentations

Cohen, L. (1997) Entrepreneurial Identities. To be presented as part of a symposium on Gendered Work: a feminist perspective, at the *Annual British Psychological Society Conference*, Edinburgh.

CONTENTS

Chapter one

INTRODUCTION

This study explores two worlds: the world of the organisation and the world of the small business owner/manager. Focusing on women who have left middle and senior positions within organisations and set up their own businesses, the study seeks to examine the complex relationship between organisational life and self-employment, and how the transition from one to the other is experienced and perceived.

In recent years there has been an increasing fascination with entrepreneurs who start up small businesses and facilitate their growth and development. It has been argued (Inkson, 1995; Rifkin, 1995; Bridges, 1995) that due to the macro-economic situation and organisations' response, the focus of business in the 1990's is changing from a corporate orientation to an emphasis on the individual. Researchers have thus observed a steady dismantling of bureaucratic structures. Career growth is no longer synonymous with "climbing up" the hierarchy, but "hopping" from one organisation to another (Kanter, 1989), with many managers opting out of corporate life altogether and going into business for themselves (Hakim, 1989; Rosin and Korabik, 1992).

In the case of women more specifically, literature on gender and organisations reveals a growing awareness of the gendered nature of organisations (Mills, 1988, 1989, 1992; Acker, 1992; Cassell and Walsh, 1994; Davies, 1992, 1995). Women's participation in the workforce is increasing, yet organisations remain segregated, both vertically and horizontally (Arber and Gilbert, 1992; Rees, 1992). Although the route to the top appears to be clear and obvious, the path is barred by almost imperceptible obstacles; women can see where they want to be, but can not get there. The result, frequently, is frustration and disillusionment (Morrison, 1987; Davidson and Cooper, 1992).

Some women, confounded in their attempts to grow and progress within their organisations, make the decision to leave corporate life altogether and set up businesses of their own (Simpson, 1991; Still, 1993; Rees, 1992). Contrary to popular myths which

lead us to believe that women are leaving their organisational positions for family reasons, it has been suggested that the reality is more complex, often resulting from organisational factors (Rosin and Korabik, 1992; Marshall, 1991, 1994, 1995).

Female self-employment has increased dramatically in recent years, with women now representing over one-quarter of the self-employed population (Carter and Cannon, 1992; Marlow and Strange, 1993). Women owner/managers have thus become a significant economic force. However, despite the growing number of women entrepreneurs, there is a dearth of qualitative, in-depth literature on the subject, resulting in a lack of theoretical understanding of the experiences of such women: their motivations, problems, successes and aspirations (Moore, 1990). Whilst there is a burgeoning literature on entrepreneurship *generally*, many of these studies have a distinctly male bias (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Allen and Truman, 1993). Indeed, the term "entrepreneur" itself conveys meanings which are often at odds with the experiences of many women (Stevenson, 1990).

Two important studies have identified as a distinct group those women who have set up their own businesses after leaving positions within organisations (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Carter and Cannon, 1992). However, in spite of its said importance, research into this area remains limited. Focusing on women who have moved from employment to self-employment, this thesis thus seeks to develop existing understandings of this under-researched group. In particular, it aims to contribute fresh insights into women's experiences of organisational life, their decisions to leave their organisations and to embark on their own business ventures, their experiences and perceptions of self-employment, and their visions of the future. At the same time, exploring this career transition from the vantage point of self-employment, it seeks to provide a new perspective on women's working lives more generally.

The broad aims of the research are therefore as follows:

- First, to contribute original empirical data to a previously under-researched area;

- Second, to develop a theoretical understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women who leave their positions within organisations and set up their own businesses.

1.1 Overview of the Thesis

This qualitative study is based on data gathered in semi-structured interviews with twenty-four women who left positions within organisations and set up their own businesses. Participants in the study were involved in a variety of employment sectors, and all lived and worked in the Sheffield area. During the course of their interviews, which typically lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours, women described their career experiences, focusing in particular on their transition from employment to self-employment. All of the interviews were tape-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Turning to the structure of the thesis, Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to this study. The focus of this thesis - the lifeworlds of women who have moved from employment to self-employment - does not easily lend itself to a unidisciplinary perspective. Instead, an approach which seeks to work across discipline boundaries and provide insights from a variety of social science perspectives will contribute to the development of more coherent and adequate frameworks for understanding. Central to this study are the following (interdisciplinary) literatures: the culture of enterprise; women in the labour market; women and career theory; "corporate flight" of women managers; gender and organisations; and entrepreneurship. Chapter 2 reviews these in turn, examining in particular the extent to which they provide understandings into the experiences of women who have moved from employment to self-employment. At the same time, the chapter outlines ways in which this thesis will contribute to these developing literatures.

Chapter 3 focuses on methodology, outlining the importance of a qualitative approach, and arguing the case for applying a feminist perspective. It then turns to the more practical issue of research design, detailing the processes of recruiting participants, data collection and analysis. In conclusion, the chapter identifies the research questions to be addressed in the analysis.

Chapters 4 through 8 present the research findings. Chapter 4 examines respondents' move from employment to self-employment generally, focusing on emerging patterns which facilitate our understanding of the transition in terms of women's developing careers. Chapter 5 considers more specifically women's decisions to leave their organisations, while the decision to become self-employed is detailed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 and 8 investigate the experience of self-employment. Chapter 7 examines respondents' fears and expectations as they embarked on their new business ventures, and the extent to which these were realised in practice. Chapter 8 examines those factors which respondents identified as having significantly impacted on their experiences of self-employment.

Finally, Chapter 9 presents a discussion of these findings, while Chapter 10 outlines possible directions for future research, and concludes the thesis.

Chapter two

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to this study of women who have left their positions within organisations and set up their own businesses. Section 2.1 considers self-employment and the culture of enterprise, looking specifically at the relevance of this literature for women in business. Section 2.2 focuses on the literature on women's position in the labour market, and the implications of the move to self-employment. Section 2.3 examines the careers literature, and considers its adequacy both for women, and for individuals whose careers fall outside of traditional, bureaucratic structures. Section 2.4 reviews the developing literature on women's decisions to leave their organisations, situating this "flight" within current research into gender and organisations more generally. Section 2.5 focuses on the literature of entrepreneurship, examining the adequacy of traditional perspectives and considering the developing literature on women entrepreneurs. Each of these sections concludes with a summary of the main points and an outline of the ways in which this study will contribute to the particular literature at hand. Finally, section 2.6 considers important methodological issues emerging from these reviews which will serve to inform this study, outlines the broad aim of the research, and identifies key themes to be explored in the empirical work which follows.

2.1 Self-Employment and the Culture of Enterprise

2.1.1 Introduction

"The discourse of the enterprise culture has become one of the major articulating principles of the age" (Burrows, 1991, p. 1).

The 1980's was heralded as a time in which old, collectivist ideas were replaced by an emphasis on individualism, wealth creation and freedom (Ritchie, 1991; DuGay, 1991; Hobbs, 1991). In the UK, self-employment and small business activity were actively promoted as the cornerstones of enterprise, and as such were encouraged to thrive. While to right-wing commentators the notion of enterprise signified economic regeneration through the development of small businesses, those on the left saw the

emphasis on small business growth, more cynically, as a way of reducing unemployment (Cross and Payne, 1991; Brown and Scase, 1991; Stanworth et al., 1989). This section briefly reviews the literature on the culture of enterprise, focusing on both its material and ideological dimensions, and the extent to which it addresses the experiences of self-employed women.

Self-employment is an ambiguous and often misleading concept. In the first section, the various ways in which the term is defined and theorised are reviewed. Moving on, the chapter considers the increase in self-employment in the 1980's, examining the various ways in which this increase has been explained. The 1980's has been seen as a decade of economic, political and social change. The next section explores the cultural/ideological dimension of the change: in particular it considers the emergence of the discourse of enterprise, its significance, and its durability. Finally, the review focuses on the implications of the enterprise culture for women, noting in particular the ways in which this study can contribute to our understanding of this issue.

2.1.2 Making Sense of Self-employment

The term self-employment, far from describing a discrete work situation, is a multi-faceted term connoting a whole range of employment possibilities and contexts, and including both objective criteria and subjective assessment. Before attempting to explain changes in patterns of self-employment and their ideological implications, it is important to consider the term itself, how it is understood by theorists, researchers and practitioners.

In his analysis of the Labour Force Survey, Daly (1991) suggests that the concept of self-employment is complex because there are many groups of workers whose employment status is unclear: from labour-only sub-contractors to company directors and people with second jobs in self-employment. Rather than limiting the meaning of self-employment to any one of these contexts, thereby excluding the others, the LFS relies on self-definition. Only if a respondent expresses doubt about their classification are they guided further; at this point an individual's tax status is used to determine whether or not

they can be considered self-employed. "In principle, then, the conceptual definition underlying the regular self-employment estimates is aligned to tax status; but in practice the measurement depends mainly on individual's perceptions of their employment status" (Daly, 1991, p. 131). Daly explains that in other circumstances legal definitions, whereby the courts decide whether or not an individual has a "contract of service", can be used to ascertain self-employed status.

Allen et. al. (1991) suggest that in relation to women working at home, classification is particularly difficult. Home-based work includes a whole range of activities: casualised labourers, supplied with work from one or a few suppliers, independent artisans, and entrepreneurs producing their own goods and services. Theoretically, they argue that what differentiates the self-employed from the homeworkers is the extent to which the latter are economically subordinated to providers of work (Allen et. al., 1991, p. 130). Thus alongside self-perception, classification based on tax, and legal definitions, relationships with larger organisations - economic subordination versus economic independence adds yet another dimension to how the concept of self-employment can be understood. Given these diverse possibilities, it has been suggested that self-employment is best understood "as a continuum of positions ranging from the genuinely independent small business through to other forms which are virtually indistinguishable from employment" (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995, p. 222). Clearly, the criteria used to classify an individual as self-employed have enormous implications for research findings, and it is essential that such findings are interpreted in the light of these central definitions.

2.1.3 Small Business Growth and Theories of Economic Change

As suggested above, small business activity burgeoned in the 1980's, in Britain as well as in other Western industrial societies (Hakim, 1988; Mayes and Moir, 1990; Daly, 1991). Between 1981 and 1989, the number of self-employed people grew by fifty-seven percent, from just over two million to nearly three-and-a-half million (Daly, 1991, p. 109). Although the problematic nature of the concept of self-employment necessitates a certain caution in interpreting such statistics, commentators writing from a variety of perspectives agree that the increase in activity in the small business sector during that

decade merits serious academic attention (Rees, 1992; Allen and Truman, 1992; Brown and Scase, 1991).

Burrows and Curran (1991), seeking to account for the growth in "petty capitalist activities" explore the contributions of two important theoretical approaches: *post*-Fordism and *neo*-Fordism. Post-Fordism, they suggest, describes a radical break from the economy of the past, and the emergence of new kinds of capitalism, in which small business plays a central role (see for example, Brusco and Sabel, 1981; Goodman et al., 1988; Piore and Sabel, 1984). Within such a framework, "the design, production, and distribution of products become the subject of a new division of labour between firms and establishments (with an emphasis on small units) who form locally based networks" (Burrows and Curran, 1991, p. 14). In these firms, craft traditions, supported by new technologies, flourish, with work roles being more flexible, committed to quality and oriented towards the need of the market. Furthermore, although post-Fordist operations are regional in their orientation, (Sabel, 1989), their distribution networks are international. This framework does not conceptualise large firms as redundant, but suggests that they play a substantially different role within the economy.

The post-Fordist model has been criticised on several counts, most notably for its lack of empirical evidence (Amin, 1989; Weiss, 1988), particularly in the British context, and for its almost utopian outlook (Storey and Johnson, 1987; Murray, 1988):

"In Britain... sharp increases in the numbers of small enterprises in the 1980's is interpreted not as a symptom of regeneration but as a recession-induced response to decline. In other words, it marks the continuation of a 'Fordist crisis'...rather than the beginning of a new economic regime" (Burrows and Curran, 1991, pp. 14-15).

In contrast to a post-Fordist analysis which sees small business growth as a sign of the emergence of a whole new economic regime, neo-Fordists theorists link such growth with the need for manufacturers to cater more effectively to an increasingly differentiated market (Massey, 1984; Williams et al., 1987). In this case,

"large firms replace older technologies with programmable technologies which frequently operate profitably in small units serving local as well as international markets. The numbers of independently owned small firms may also rise because of an increasingly fashionable strategy for large firms to contract out" (Burrows and Curran, 1991, p. 15).

Whereas within a post-Fordist model the small firm can be seen as the linchpin around which the economy is structured, for neo-Fordists the economy is still dominated by the activities of large firms. What is different, according to such analyses, is that small businesses now play a crucial supporting role.

Neo-Fordist approaches, like their more radical counterparts, have been challenged for their inability to substantiate their claims (Pollert, 1988). In addition, it has been suggested that the core/peripheral (dominant large firm/dependent small firm) analysis fails to account for "leading edge" sectors, like high technology, in which small businesses are the real forces for change and innovation (Rothwell, 1986), "while the seemingly leading 'core' firms have often turned out to be economic 'dinosaurs' struggling to survive and sometimes failing spectacularly" (Burrows and Curran, 1991, p. 16).

Finally, in reference to both restructuring theories, Burrows and Curran take issue with an over-emphasis on manufacturing industries, to the exclusion of the burgeoning service and knowledge-based professional sectors. In the case of this study, in which only one out of twenty-four respondents works in the manufacturing sector, this criticism has particular resonance.

At the same time, it has been suggested that whereas restructuring theories tend to focus on small scale businesses only in relation to larger firms, it is important that such businesses are examined in their own right (Burrows and Curran, 1991). I would support such a direction. However, in my view re-structuring theories nonetheless merit consideration. Although they may be problematic, for the reasons noted above, the ideas embedded within such theories, ideas about large-scale economic change, relationships between small and large firms, and the increasing importance of the small business

sector, have become part of the *public consciousness*. They have acquired significant *ideological* currency. On the level of material reality their explanatory value is questionable. However, they are intrinsic to "the discourse of enterprise" which, it has been argued, is a "central cultural motif of the present period" (Burrows and Curran, 1991, p. 10). Just as it is important to consider the material context in which this study is taking place, so too an understanding of the cultural background against which the respondents' move from employment to self-employment occurred provides insights into their perceptions and experiences.

2.1.4 Understanding the Enterprise Culture

Restructuring theories, such as those introduced above, seek to explain small business growth within the context of changing economic, political and social structures. At the same time, a consideration of culture, as both *constitutive* and *illustrative* of such changes, is essential. Theorists exploring the emergence of "the culture of enterprise" use the concept to link material, structural change with changing perceptions and sense-making processes (Du Gay, 1991; Salaman and Du Gay, 1992; Ritchie, 1991). Such approaches are typically characterised by constructivist notions that reality is constructed through social interaction (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and the centrality of language in these processes (Kress and Hodge, 1985).

The concept of discourse

Fundamental to much of the literature on the enterprise culture is the concept of *discourse* (Ritchie, 1991; Burrows and Curran, 1991; Du Gay, 1991; Salaman and Du Gay, 1992). However, in spite of its manifest importance, the term itself is rarely explored within this literature. Rather, in my view, it tends to be used quite uncritically. It is therefore appropriate at this point to explain how the concept of discourse is applied in this chapter (and in the thesis generally).

My use of the term "discourse" is based on the idea that language is not random, that institutions and social groups articulate their meanings and values *systematically*.

Grounded in the work of Foucault (1976; 1980), Kress and Hodge suggest that a discourse

"provides a set of statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about. In that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions... A discourse colonises the social world imperialistically, from the point of view of one institution... Discourses do not exist in isolation, but within a larger system of sometimes opposing, contradictory, contending, or merely different discourses. Given that each discourse tends towards the colonisation of larger areas, there are dynamic relations between these which ensure continuous shifts and movement, progression or withdrawal in certain areas" (Kress and Hodge, 1985, pp. 6-7).

As suggested above, discourses do not simply represent reality, as experienced by a particular social group or institution. They are also dynamic, serving to construct versions of reality. Central to this notion of discourse is ideology, a concept which is itself polysemic, used in a variety of (sometimes ambiguous) ways. The concept of ideology which is being used in this thesis is based on Alvesson's (1991) definition. In this view, ideology can be understood as:

"as a relatively coherent set of assumptions, beliefs and values about a demarcated part of social reality, being illuminated in a selective and legitimising way, restricting autonomous critical reflection and sometimes favouring sectional interests" (Alvesson, 1991, p. 209).

Discourse, in this sense, can be seen as the embodiment and articulation of ideology.

Discourse, ideology and enterprise

The discourse of enterprise can thus be understood as ideological, a meaning system emanating from and inextricably linked to Thatcher's Britain in the 1980's, against a background of increasing globalisation (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992). During that period of transformation, turbulence and instability, the enterprise discourse emerged as

a justificatory system, working to create a sense of coherence and order in a rapidly changing world. This is not to suggest, however, that the concept is monolithic. As Kress and Hodge point out, discourses are dynamic and evolving, sites of potential struggle. So too the discourse of enterprise: writers examine its ubiquitousness - its impact on both the private and public sectors, on organisations and well as on individuals (Ritchie, 1991; Kelly, 1991). While those on the right tend to focus on individual agency, and the emergence of freedom, industriousness and autonomy, on the left it is more generally perceived in structural terms, as a new form of exploitation. In a similar vein, policy-makers, managers and shop-floor workers interpret the enterprise culture in ways that make sense in terms of their particular circumstances and experiences (Cross and Payne, 1991; Du Gay, 1991; Du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Ritchie, 1991; Musson and Cohen, 1995). Furthermore, Ritchie (1991) points out that not only do meanings vary *between* different individuals and contexts, but also *within* them.

Central to the workings of ideology is the process of hegemony, whereby one (dominant) social grouping exerts its power and influence over others through negotiation and the winning of consent (Simon, 1982). The idea that different groups construct their own understandings of enterprise and use the concept in a variety of ways does not undermine the significance of the enterprise discourse. On the contrary, the way in which such groups are able to appropriate and find relevance in the discourse strengthens its hegemonic potential. Indeed, as regards the cynical interpretations of the enterprise culture, described above as being characteristic of left-wing commentators, Du Gay and Salaman (1992) argue that an ideology does not have to be universally loved to work hegemonically; rather, "it is merely necessary that it have no serious rivals" (Leys, 1990, p. 127) - and as Simon (1982) insists, it must exist both at the level ideas and at the level of the everyday, *lived culture*. Du Gay and Salaman maintain that this is so in the case of the enterprise discourse: "even if people do not take [it] seriously, even if they keep a certain cynical distance from its claims, they are still reproducing it through their involvement in the everyday practices in which enterprise is inscribed" (p. 630).

Du Gay and Salaman (1992) observe a strong link between the discourse of enterprise and everyday practices within organisations and, on a more general level, governments

and societies at large. They suggest that this continuity between abstract ideas and material reality will ensure survival of the enterprise culture. On the contrary, Burrows and Curran (1991) note a distinct contradiction between the discourse of enterprise and the real work of the small business sector. In their study they found that "those directly involved in small scale economic activities do not utilise such cultural sets to interpret their experiences or guide their behaviour to any marked extent" (p. 20). In contrast to Du Gay and Salaman, they see the discourse of enterprise as being a response to a particular historical moment, with only the most tenuous links with lived reality. Thus they predict that the enterprise culture is a short-term phenomenon; as a justificatory system, its survival is ultimately doomed.

This study, exploring the experiences of women who have moved from employment to self-employment, will further this debate. In particular, the ways in which they make sense of the concept of "enterprise", and the extent to which they identify with it, will provide insights into our understandings of the enterprise culture more generally.

2.1.5 Women and the Culture of Enterprise

Given the increase in women's self-employment in the 1980's, the questions arise: "To what extent does (could) the enterprise culture act as an agent forcing change in the existing patterns of gender relations in the labour market, and at home?" In addition, "Does governmental support for the enterprise culture work to challenge such divisions?" (Rees, 1992) This section considers how women have been represented within much of the literature on the enterprise culture; and on the extent to which government support for enterprise has taken into account women's experiences and needs.

Allen and Truman (1992) consider the current interest in the culture of enterprise: as a predominantly cultural (as opposed to an empirical) phenomenon, they suggest that "one of the most remarkable dimensions is the adoption of language, either explicitly male or apparently gender neutral, which in reality reflects the actual or assumed lifestyles of men. Almost without exception research and discussion on small firms and self-

employment has taken it for granted that businesses are started by men" (p. 165). This androcentric focus has important implications for how we conceptualise and theorise self-employment, and on a more practical level, for how small businesses are nurtured and supported.

The difficulties in attempting to define self-employment were described above; in particular the extent to which legal, financial and theoretical frameworks for classifying self-employment yield diverse findings and offer diverse explanations as to what self-employment is and how it is experienced. Rees (1992) argues that this issue is particularly salient for many women homeworkers who do not enjoy the autonomy that self-employment connotes, and yet *appear* in the official statistics. In contrast, the 'micro-business', the firm with fewer than ten employees, sometimes including one person businesses without employees (Stanworth and Gray, 1991), is a particularly common form of self-employment for women (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995), and is often *excluded* from official statistics and, until recently, from the small business literature. For the purposes of this study, where seventeen out of twenty-four women could be described as running micro-businesses, the exclusion of this category of self-employment is significant. Finally, as explained above, restructuring debates on the whole tend to focus on the manufacturing sector. While this is problematic for men, it is even more so for women because of their particularly high rates of participation in the service sector. Hakim (1988) suggests women are further eclipsed by such debates which often assume that while restructuring leads to self-employment for men, for women it results in employment on a part-time basis. Thus, in their tendency to apply gender stereotypes, and to over-simplify self-employment as a conceptual category, official figures and the mainstream literature ultimately serve to disguise the deeply ingrained gender divisions within self-employment as a whole.

Rees (1992) argues that in the United Kingdom, the government has expressed its commitment to enterprise; a great deal of governmental effort has gone into fostering an enterprise culture, in terms of rhetoric, but also in terms of supporting small business growth and development. In considering whether such measures could work to break down the reproduction of inequality in the labour market, Rees maintains that in the

British context this question is unanswerable, because there exists no structure of support mechanisms to foster *women's* entrepreneurialism (it should be noted, however, that in Scotland there are well-developed initiatives aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship; see for example Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993; 1995). In spite of the fact that women have so much to gain from setting up their own businesses, support initiatives have had a restricted impact on women. Given their lack of visibility within the discourse of enterprise, discussed above, this failure to address the needs of self-employed women is clearly no surprise.

Feminist critics maintain that underpinning the enterprise culture, the policies which are supposed to encourage it, and the labour market from which it has emerged, is the persistent ideology of the family (Rees, 1992; Truman and Allen, 1993). It is argued that this ideology, based on the assumption that domestic labour is primarily the responsibility of women, and the conflicting relationship between paid and unpaid work, ensures women's disadvantage. This issue will be explored further in the section on women and the labour market which follows. For the purpose of this section on women and the culture of enterprise, though, the key point is that running parallel to the discourse of enterprise is an equally dynamic, and even more enduring, discourse about the family, and women's roles and responsibilities within it. Because these discourses are fundamentally contradictory; it seems to me that the task for would-be self-employed women is to find a way of negotiating between them, a way of making sense of their inherent incompatibility. Rees, and others (see for example Truman and Allen, 1993; Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993; Kaur and Hayden, 1993) argue that support initiatives which take this dilemma as their starting point, go some way to bridging the gap.

2.1.6 Summary

This section has examined the literature on the culture of enterprise, and the centrality of self-employment and the small business sector within it. After a discussion of the ambiguity of the concept of self-employment itself, the section moved on to a consideration of the ways in which increases in self-employment have been incorporated into theories of economic re-structuring. While such theories can be studied on a

material level, they also have significant cultural implications. The next section thus considered the ways in which we make sense of enterprise, with particular reference to the (related) concepts of discourse and ideology. It was argued that the discourse of enterprise, like any other discourse, must be seen as a site of struggle. The final section considered the relevance of the discourse of enterprise for self-employed women, both in terms of their visibility in the literature, and in policy initiatives.

This study will contribute to our existing understandings of the culture of enterprise in two important ways. First, an examination of the reasons why respondents chose to leave their organisations will shed light on the usefulness of restructuring theories in explaining significant increases in self-employment among women in the 1980's. Second, exploring how women who moved from employment to self-employment in the 1980's and early 1990's make sense of the discourse of enterprise, and the extent to which they identify with it, will provide insights into the relevance of this discourse for women.

2.2 Self-employment and Women in the Labour Market

2.2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous section, the volatile economic (and cultural) context of the 1980's stimulated academic interest in the field of enterprise and small business activity. However, for the most part this research failed to consider the reality(ies) of women's experiences in business. In seeking to understand the process of female entrepreneurship, it is not enough to simply add women to the existing literature. Instead, what is needed is a reformulation of this literature, which takes as its starting point the notion of gender as a central factor in a woman's life experiences. Such an approach, it has been argued (Allen and Truman, 1992) must look not only to the existing literature on entrepreneurship and small business, but should be situated within the literature on women and the labour market, and the domestic division of labour more generally. This literature is examined in the following sections, starting with a description of women's position in the labour market, and moving on to examine how this position has been explained theoretically. The review then turns to the issue of self-employment, in particular exploring the extent to which it can be seen as a way of challenging traditional labour market structures which ultimately serve to disadvantage women. Finally, the contribution of this study to our understandings of self-employment and women's position in the labour market will be considered.

2.2.2 Observing Women's Participation in the Labour Market

In the introduction to their book on women and work, Arber and Gilbert (1992) insist that work on women in the labour market must take as its starting point the notion of diversity - that important differences between women: a woman's social class, her ethnicity, whether or not she is a mother, for example, "are not those suggested by the conventional measures of husband's class, but stem from women's own positions in the labour market" (p.1). They describe this position in terms of four key factors. First, they report a dramatic increase in women's participation in the labour market since 1960 in all Western countries. Second, they suggest that in the UK, in contrast to other Western

countries, growth in participation rates has primarily been in part-time work by married women. Third, Arber and Gilbert emphasise the significance of motherhood for women's participation in the labour market. They maintain that in Britain childbearing seems to be associated with women leaving the labour market, returning to lower status and lower paid occupations, most often on a part-time basis. Echoing this finding, Marlow and Strange (1994) suggest that the "period of 'family formation' leads women to undergo severe downward occupational mobility with an extremely limited opportunity for recovery" (p. 175).

Finally, an examination of the labour market, not only in terms of women's *rates of participation*, but also in terms of the *nature of their participation*, reveals a persistent gender segregation - and women's persistent disadvantage. Such segregation has been described as both *horizontal* and *vertical* (see also Rees, 1992). As regards the former which, it is suggested, has been prevalent throughout history (Hakim, 1979; Bradley, 1989), the labour market is divided into typically women's jobs and typically men's. In the case of both manual and non-manual occupations, it has been observed that relative status increases as proportions of part-timers and women decreases. Horizontal segregation of the labour market thus has significant implications for remuneration, with men typically enjoying far greater earning potential than women - a gap which tends to be widest amongst clerical and manual workers, becoming narrower amongst higher professionals. *Vertical* segregation, on the other hand, refers to the way in which one gender is more likely to be restricted to the lower rungs of an occupational grouping than the other. Such segregation is endemic throughout the labour market, and represents a significant source of disadvantage for women.

Arber and Gilbert maintain that women's rates of participation in the labour force and the nature of this participation are interconnected, and that together these factors serve to limit women's occupational achievement (1992, p. 6).

Feminist scholars agree that the persistence of gender segregation, and gender inequality, in the labour market is not simply a function of economic circumstances; rather, underpinning women's involvement in the labour force is an enduring ideology of the family (Arber and Gilbert, 1992; Morris, 1991; Rees, 1992). Central to such an ideology

is the domestic division of labour, the ideology of motherhood and the assumption that women take primary responsibility for children and the home. Women's position in the labour market, as suggested by the features highlighted above, is thus inextricably linked with their roles as wives and mothers. As such, their employment patterns can, in most cases, be sharply differentiated from their male counterparts:

"Adult men are expected to engage in full-time, regular work until retirement...A commitment to paid work to provide for their own and their dependants' material existence is part of the normative definition of being adult and male. In contrast, adult women, specifically those who are married or living with a male partner, are expected to give priority to the servicing of husband, partner, children, and the sick, handicapped and elderly. Their paid work is seen as secondary and contingent and they are assumed to be economically dependent" (Allen and Truman, 1992, p. 166).

It was argued above that the "family formation period" leads to severely restricted employment opportunities for women. It could be, then, that one way for women to achieve economic parity with men is to work full-time during child-bearing/rearing years. Morris suggests that, in contrast, high levels of participation will not automatically lead to such parity. Instead, given the current situation, far from being liberating, waged work "may simply increase [women's] burden and severely curtail or eliminate any 'unobligated time'" (1991, p. 7). In her view, unless women's status at home improves, unless existing patterns in the domestic division of labour are overturned (which means ideological as well as material transformation), women's participation in the labour force will continue to be restricted and disadvantaged.

2.2.3 Theorising Women in the Labour Market

Scholars have sought to explain women's participation in the labour market through a variety of theoretical frameworks. Human capital theories are based on economic concepts of supply and demand, and functionalist ideas about the sexual division of labour within the family. Such theories suggest that there is a reciprocal relationship between the labour market and the family, arguing that whereas men should concentrate on acquiring the skills necessary to make them marketable in the labour force, "foregoing

the market-oriented human capital of mothers is part of the price for acquiring human capital in children, and more generally a price exacted by family life" (Mincer and Polachek, 1980, p. 203). In this view, social organisation is dictated by the needs of the market: domestic labour is "normal" for women - "functional" in so far as they are rearing the next generation of workers; women's rights as wage labourers are therefore expendable. Human capital theories have been widely criticised - for their stereotypical assumptions as well as their lack of empirical evidence.

In contrast, feminist perspectives focus on gender as a determining factor in a person's position in the labour market, looking not only at the relationship *between* the family and other institutions, but also at the structures and relationships *within* the family itself. Rees (1992) outlines three central feminist approaches to women in the labour market. Liberal feminists, she suggests, seek to explain inequality through the identification of barriers to women's participation in the labour force. Rees maintains that far from challenging unequal power structures and relations, such approaches focus on the issue of access, aiming to integrate greater numbers of women into existing structures.

Rees (1992) argues that Marxist feminists, on the other hand, seek to synthesise Marxism with feminism. As such, they see patriarchy, the oppression of women by men, as linked to a capitalist mode of production. Their "dual labour market theory" (Doeringer and Piore, 1971) is based on the notion that a capitalist economy has two levels, a primary and a secondary sector. The second, referred to as the "reserve army of labour", is expendable, and as such, is typically characterised by low wages and benefits, poor working conditions, little job security, and limited prospects of training and promotion. Women, maintain Marlow and Strange (1994), make up a sizeable proportion of the secondary labour market

"because of the need to accommodate waged work with domestic labour, which restricts choices in employment. For those women without families or domestic responsibilities, for whom this accommodation is not necessary, the expectation is that they will eventually conform to the stereotypical image of women, which prioritises the domestic sphere" (p. 177).

Brown and Scase (1991) cite recent changes in work and employment patterns, in particular the increasing use of part time female workers, and the expansion of self-employment and those on short-term contracts, as examples of the "reserve army of labour". Such changes, they suggest, provide evidence which supports the argument that the labour market can be divided into those "core" workers with secure and high waged jobs, and "peripheral" workers in insecure and low waged work (see also Dex, 1985; Allen and Massey, 1988). On the other hand, it has been argued that the dual market theory is overly reductionist, that the labour market is far too complex to be dichotomised in such a way (Craig et al 1982): "It is argued that rather than distinct sectoral division, there is a continuum of conditions from primary to secondary labour markets, with areas of overlap constantly fluctuating according to labour market conditions... " (Marlow and Strange, p.176).

In contrast to Marxist feminists who seek to integrate feminism within a class analysis, radical feminists base their analyses on the concept of patriarchy as the central determining structure in a woman's experience of life; they see patriarchy as "trans-historical and unchanging: man's need to oppress women is primary, therefore patriarchal relations are fundamental" (Rees, 1992, p. 31). Whereas for Marxist feminists the central relationship is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, for the latter, it is men and women. Radical feminists see the family as the site of ideological and material oppression and struggle; it is thus pivotal in their theoretical analyses.

Radical feminist approaches have been criticised on several counts. First, doubts have been raised about the ability of such approaches to account for both ideological and material changes in women's circumstances (Rees, 1992). Second, the tendency amongst radical analyses to homogenise women's experiences, and thus neglect differences between women, has been called into question (Weedon, 1987). Finally, radical explanations have been challenged for their reductionism, their total reliance on patriarchy as a determining factor, to the exclusion of all other variables (Segal, 1987; Walby, 1990).

Finally, Rees (1992) explores women's participation in the labour market from a dual systems approach. She explains that within all societies two separate systems interact:

an economic system and a sex-gender system; in Western society, these are represented by capitalism and patriarchy. While the precise nature of the relationship between these two systems is subject to debate (Eisenstein, 1979; Cockburn, 1983; Hartman, 1979; Walby, 1986), common to all positions is the oppression of women and, in contrast to radical feminist approaches outlined above, the notion of change as a fundamental aspect of these systems, and of social life.

In response to dual systems theory, and other current theoretical approaches, Morris (1991) expresses her dissatisfaction with what she describes as an over-emphasis on "the characteristics and/or conditions of labour supply, that is on the women themselves, and insufficiently on the nature of the demand for their labour" (p. 85). In addition to exploring women's roles, responsibilities and circumstances, she argues that it is equally necessary to focus on "employers' attitudes and perceptions of women workers, on gendered processes of selection and recruitment, and on the very construction of the jobs to be filled" (p. 86) In Morris' view, what would be more fruitful is an approach which combined supply and demand perspectives, which synthesised the experiences and sense-making processes of women workers with the perceptions of the workplace, and society generally:

"The emerging perspective is one which examines the interaction between women's domestic circumstances, their ideological underpinnings, the social construction of employment and the statutory framework in which this operates..." (p. 86).

Central to this approach is an insistence on the mutuality of structural and agentic dimensions of experience. In contrast to the predominantly structural theories outlined above, she focuses on both the individual and her context. Morris' emphasis on the significance of ideology, and on the notion of employment as a social construction, provides a very useful starting point for this study into women who have left jobs in organisations and set up their own businesses. However, like the other theoretical approaches reviewed above, her scope is very broad - seeking to understanding women's participation in the labour market *generally*, rather than focusing *specifically* on the issue of self-employment. The section that follows looks at how self-employment has

been explained by labour market theorists, and considers the contribution of this study to the debate.

2.2.4 Opting for Self-employment: liberation or a subordination response?

It has been suggested that for women, continuously constrained in their choices in the labour market and marginalised from primary sector employment by their domestic responsibilities, self-employment can be a very useful alternative (Marlow and Strange, 1994).

"If the existing evidence from the female entrepreneurship studies is informed by the extensive analysis offered by the labour market theorists, it is a coherent conclusion that the position and role of women within society currently and historically predisposes them to a set of reasons for pursuing self-employment which is unique to their sex" (p. 179).

For women, then, self-employment can be understood as a way of avoiding gender discrimination in employment. This is not to suggest, however, that the decision to become self-employed is simply a "subordination response" (Stanworth et al, 1989). On the contrary, it has been argued that in many cases women have very positive reasons for choosing self-employment (Cannon et. al., 1988; Carter and Cannon, 1992). Broadly speaking, academic work into the move to self-employment emerges from several distinct perspectives: an *entrepreneurial* perspective (see for example Cooper, 1981; Birley, 1989), a *gender perspective* (see for example Watkins and Watkins, 1984; Goffee and Scase, 1985; Cannon et. al, 1989; Carter and Cannon, 1992) and a *labour market* perspective (Hakim, 1989; Bogenhold and Staber, 1991; Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995; Granger et. al., 1995). The first focuses on business start-up in so far as it represents the first step in the entrepreneurial process, while the second examines the move in the context of women's lives in particular. These perspectives are included in the review of the entrepreneurship literature. The third examines the move to self-employment as an alternative to organisational employment, exploring the individual's move to and experience of self-employment in terms of their participation in the labour force more generally. This perspective is discussed below.

Did she jump or was she pushed?

Section 2.1.3 referred to the economic, social and political changes in the 1980's and to the resulting large-scale organisational restructuring. In a review of self-employment patterns in the 1980's, Hakim (1989) notes that growth in self-employment during that decade was paralleled with a rise in all other "alternatives" to traditional, organisational employment. Labour market statistics reveal that while for women the greatest increases were in self-employment, and in part-time work, either on a temporary or permanent basis, for men self-employment was the most common alternative to conventional employee positions (Department of Employment, 1989, cited in Hakim, 1989, p. 287).

Hakim's quantitative study focuses on the experiences of self-employed men and women with no more than five employees. In particular she is interested in respondents' motivations for embarking on self-employment, their aspirations at the time of start-up, the problems they experienced, and their sources of help and advice. Hakim explains the move to self-employment in terms of *push* and *pull* factors, with unemployment, redundancy and the increasing insecurity of organisational employment cited as the most common *push* factors, and notions of "independence", "flexibility", "choice" and "freedom" the principle *pulls*.

Hakim emphasises the extent to which, in her study, "pull factors clearly outweigh the push factors" (p. 290). First, she argues that in spite of the popular conception that the increase in self-employment can be understood as a direct result of large scale redundancy programmes, this group actually constitutes the smallest entry route to self-employment. Far more significant, according to Hakim, are those who opt for self-employment from the outset, or those who choose to leave their organisational positions to become self-employed. Hakim maintains that only one-quarter of her total sample could be described as "involuntarily" self-employed. Instead, she found that many of those who became self-employed as a result of redundancy regarded themselves as "voluntary", spurred on by the opportunities afforded by their new situations. Intrinsic to Hakim's analysis is an "ideology of self-employment", central to which is the attraction of "being your own boss" (p. 289). She suggests that this motivation, particularly strong

amongst young people and women, helps to explain the recent growth in self-employment amongst these groups.

Like Hakim, Bogenhold and Staber (1991) set out to challenge what they see as a misleading popular image of self-employment. But interestingly, whereas Hakim characterises this image as one of gloom and pessimism, the picture that Bogenhold and Staber seek to dispel sees self-employment as "the cure-all for social problems" (p. 224) - a vivid illustration of the amorphousness of the culture of enterprise! In sharp contrast to Hakim's rosy outlook, Bogenhold and Staber argue that increases in self-employment, far from being a sign of economic health and individual prosperity, is instead "a symptom of labour market deficiencies" (p. 224). Far from attributing the growth in self-employment amongst women and young people to an embracing of an ideology of enterprise, to Bogenhold and Staber such increases are a signal of economic failure.

Bogenhold and Staber identify two opposing "logics" of self-employment: "a logic based on autonomy and a logic based on necessity" (Bogenhold and Staber, 1991, p. 226). The former describes individuals who worked as professionals, or held middle or senior positions within organisations before opting for self-employment. Such people, they suggest, are motivated by "a desire for self-direction in the labour market" (p. 226) - very similar to the ideology behind Hakim's *pull factors*. On the other hand, the logic of necessity describes individuals whose chances for success as employees are limited, and whose decision to become self-employed is triggered by economic necessity - reminiscent of the *push factors* identified by Hakim. However, unlike Hakim who argued that many of those in her sample who were *pushed* into self-employment actually welcomed the change, for Bogenhold and Staber, such individuals invariably found themselves in industries "where profit opportunities are limited and failure rates are high" (p. 224); in these cases, self-employment offers neither autonomy nor independence - rather, it appears to function more like a casualised form of employment.

<u>The move to self-employment: an analysis of "career types"</u>

The view that recent increases in self-employment must be understood in the context of organisational restructuring and economic recession is supported by Granger et. al.

(1995). Like Bogenhold and Staber, they take issue with an image of small business as an economic panacea. They argue that growth in self-employment can not be seen as a sign of economic regeneration, and maintain that government policies aimed at supporting small business initiative must be aware of the "limited 'entrepreneurial ambitions' of the entrants"(p. 500). However, while they recognise the value of Bogenhold and Staber's theoretical framework which combines an analysis of labour market movements with a "push/pull motivational theory", Granger et. al. maintain that without a more qualitative and longitudinal perspective, such an analysis remains too rigid, and too simplistic.

In their study of the self-employed with no employees, Granger, Stanworth and Stanworth (Granger et. al., 1995; Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995) focus specifically on employees in the book publishing industry who became self-employed, and were working free-lance at the time of interview. Their analysis is based on four self-employed "career types": the *refugees*; the *missionaries*; the *trade-offs*; and the *converts*. Briefly, the *refugees* were the most obvious examples of the "unemployment push" factor, identified by Hakim, and Bogenhold and Staber. These respondents, who constituted the largest sub-sample in the study, expressed a strong attachment to their employed positions, and became self-employed, involuntarily, as a direct result of redundancy and unemployment. Given the chance, these *refugees* would return to organisational employment. *Missionaries*, in contrast were *pulled* to entrepreneurship. They typically fell into one of two groups. First, there were those who were pre-disposed to entrepreneurship (possibly resulting from a prior experience of self-employment, or family background), and who made the move to self-employment when the opportunity arose. Second, there were respondents, exemplifying Bogenhold and Staber's "logic of autonomy", whose move to self-employment was motivated by the lack of autonomy afforded to them as employees, and a desire for greater "self-direction in the labour process" (Granger et. al., 1995, p. 507). Although ideologically very different, *refugees* and *missionaries* were both oriented to paid work; that is, individuals falling into these two categories organised their lives around their involvement in economic activity. On the other hand, a further self-employed career type, the *trade-offs*, saw their lives as involving periods of self-employment, arranged to fit in with other "non-work" factors. For *trade-offs*, then, self-employment offers a way of accommodating paid work with other priorities (the needs of

a young family or a dependent relative, for example); such individuals thus exchange job security for greater flexibility "in terms of the spatial and temporal organisation of work" (p. 509). *Trade-offs* were the second largest sub-group in the study, a sub-group in which women were over-represented. The final self-employed career type, the *converts*, embarked on self-employment as *refugees*, but developed an attachment to self-employment, opting for self-employment even when the opportunity for returning to organisational employment arose. In these cases, Granger et. al. observed an ideological shift, where "'unemployment push' becomes 'ideological pull'" (p. 510).

In contrast to a simple push/pull analysis which restricts its gaze to specific triggers to self-employment and considers only those factors directly related to an individual's employment activity, Granger et. al. take a more holistic perspective, exploring the move to self-employment as emerging from both personal and professional factors, in the context of the individual's career pattern more generally.

"Our findings ... suggest that research designs which simply focus on the moment of transition from one labour market state to another, without exploring background career histories, are unlikely to grasp the real dynamics of self-employment career changes... Situational and personal factors always interact, and it is the resulting congruency or incongruency of these factors which determines labour market behaviour" (p. 514).

The self-employed with no employees

The study upon which the above analysis is based focuses on the experiences of self-employed individuals with no employees. Department of Employment statistics reveal that approximately two-thirds of the new businesses created in the 1980's were one-person enterprises (1992, cited in Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995, p. 221). In the period from 1981-1991, the proportion of one-person businesses within the self-employed population generally increased from 61% in 1981 to 69% in 1990. For women the figure is even higher, with 72% of self-employed women working without employees. In spite of the increasing importance of one-person enterprises, Stanworth and Stanworth argue that it remains a relatively under-researched area.

As suggested above, the ideology of self-employment involves notions of independence, autonomy, freedom and flexibility (although interestingly these concepts are rarely explored in any depth in the literature): "the ideal-typical model of self-employment, where there is ownership of the means of production and a high degree of self-direction and autonomy in the process of work, has tended to dominate the literature" (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995, p. 221). In contrast, Hakim (1985) sees the assumption of a direct link between independence and self-employment as problematic. As suggested in section 2.1.1, in Hakim's view, self-employment is best understood as a continuum: while at one end of this continuum are those businesses which are fully independent, at the other are those which she maintains are almost indistinguishable from employment. Such businesses typically have very few - or no - employees, and Stanworth and Stanworth suggest that these enterprises, far from providing autonomy and independence, can be more like casualised forms of employment, involving irregular, insecure work.

In contrast to Hakim who found that the majority of respondents in her study were "voluntary" recruits to self-employment, the data generated in the study conducted by Granger, Stanworth and Stanworth suggests that the "push factor" proved to be more significant; indeed, as outlined above, the *refugee* category emerged as the largest single group in their sample (Granger et. al., 1995; Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995). Rather than establishing new businesses which were autonomous and independent, they maintain that in the majority of cases, respondents had simply "substituted commercial contracts for employment contracts" (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995) - and these new arrangements were almost always less remunerative, and less secure.

Particularly significant is the ideological dimension of Stanworth and Stanworth's argument. They maintain that although their respondents felt that as freelancers they had more autonomy, this sense of increased independence was actually illusory: "in reality their independence of action was very limited... It would appear that they had adopted the 'ideology of enterprise' without most of its accepted trappings" (p. 224). While I accept that *structurally* the move to self-employment may not have provided increased autonomy , I take issue with Stanworth and Stanworth's apparent willingness to dismiss

respondents' *feelings* of greater autonomy and independence. It was argued in section 2.1 that our understanding of the culture of enterprise is based on an appreciation of both material reality (in terms of organisational and wider social and economic structures), and cultural sense-making - a dialectic between structure and agency. Given this perspective, we must seriously consider respondents' claims, and explore them in the context in which they were expressed. However, it is also important to recognise that concepts such as autonomy, independence and freedom must themselves be seen as problematic, and polysemic. As Carter and Cannon explain: "A single notion of independence... masks the complexities of the issue. Women at different stages of their lives cited the need for independence from a variety of different circumstances" (1992, p. 22).

Their gloomy conclusions notwithstanding, the analytical framework proposed by Granger, Stanworth and Stanworth appears to have a great deal to offer: it is based on a recognition of their respondents' diversity, and an appreciation of context - and clearly allows for alternative interpretations. On the level of content, it is the first study I have come across that specifically focuses on the move from employment to self-employment. More theoretically, I am interested in its emphasis on the significance of prior employment experience, its attempt to synthesise structural with agentic perspectives, and its focus on ideology. However, in my opinion the gender dimension needs to be more fully developed. Granger et. al. are clearly aware of the significance of gender in an individual's decision to embark on self-employment: they quite rightly highlight the recent increase in self-employment amongst women and briefly touch on possible reasons for this change, and they note the disproportionate number of women identified as fitting into the *trade-off* category. However, while Granger et. al. signal the importance of these issues, they do not explore them in any detail, or attempt to account for them theoretically.

The central question for scholars interested in exploring self-employment and women's participation in the labour market is whether indeed self-employment can "provide an alternative set of life chances for people disadvantaged by the rigid sets of structures and processes that determine the allocation of opportunities and rewards in the traditional labour market" (Allen and Truman, 1992, p. 179). Thus far, research findings suggest

otherwise. In addition to the study cited above, Curran and Burrows' (1988) analysis of the General Household Survey found the same patterns of horizontal segregation amongst the self-employed that exist amongst the employed population at large, with women's businesses generally confined to traditional, lower status, less remunerative sectors. A study by Hakim (1987) reported similar findings - discrimination against self-employed women, with women's enterprises typically concentrated in the secondary market. Marlow and Strange (1994) speculate that unless there are radical changes in the domestic division of labour, self-employment is unlikely to represent any real liberation for women. On the contrary, self-employed women may find themselves increasingly burdened by the competing demands of business and domestic life.

In spite of these rather bleak forecasts, theoretical frameworks for understanding the position of self-employed women in the labour market remain limited. Allan and Truman stress the need for further academic work in this area:

"The extent to which self-employment among women is influenced by their position in the labour market raises important conceptual issues about what is meant by women's work and the relationship between paid and unpaid work. Detailed research is required to explore these concepts, both in terms of what being self-employed means to women and how women's self-employment fits into our understanding of the labour market" (Allen and Truman, 1992, p. 174).

2.2.5 Summary

This section has focused on the literature on women in the labour market, considering women's disadvantaged position within the labour market, and theoretical frameworks for understanding this disadvantage. Emphasis was made on the importance of considering not only structural factors which impact on a woman's experience of work, but the (dynamic and inextricable) relationship between such factors and individuals' ability to act. Moving on, the move to self-employment was discussed, in particular the "push/pull" debate central to this emerging literature, and the importance of developing holistic perspectives.

This study provides a unique vantage point from which to explore women's participation in the labour market. In particular, it will contribute insights into the extent to which for women self-employment can be seen as an agent for social change, providing an alternative to traditional employment patterns.

2.3 Understanding Women's Careers

2.3.1 Introduction

As suggested above, a woman's move from employment within an organisation to self-employment must be explored against the backdrop of women's position in the labour market generally. Moving closer to the individual, such a move must also be investigated within the context of a woman's developing career. An appreciation of the careers literature, the position of this study within it, and a consideration of the ways in which this thesis can contribute to career theory are therefore essential. In the next section I will briefly review the literature on career theory, focusing in particular on the extent to which existing work sheds light on the experiences of women who have moved from employment to self-employment.

In what follows, I will first consider the key contributions of traditional psychological and sociological perspectives, seen by many as the cornerstones of career theory. Moving on, I will turn to more recent theories which aim to synthesise earlier unidisciplinary approaches and create more adequate, holistic frameworks for understanding. Such approaches, while useful in linking organisational and individual perspectives, have been criticised by feminist scholars who claim that the careers literature in general reflects a male perspective which is of limited relevance to the lives of many women. In the next section, the contributions of such scholars are explored. This study of women who have left organisations and set up their own businesses will necessarily represent a departure from traditional, bureaucratic thinking about careers. The final section of this review thus considers recent debates on new career forms, and outlines the ways in which this study can contribute to these debates.

2.3.2 The Individual and the Organisation

Traditional studies tended to approach careers from the perspective of a single discipline: psychology or sociology. Although such approaches have been criticised as being blinkered or fragmented (Arthur et. al., 1989; Betz et. al., 1989), it is important to

include them in a review such as this, in so far as they provided initial frameworks upon which more holistic models have been constructed.

Traditional sociological approaches see the career as something which is organisationally based, planned and orderly, progressive, and enacted by the rational individual (Inkson, 1995; Evetts, 1992). This literature typically explores careers as social roles, career paths and occupational streams, and career stages within organisations (Bray, 1982; Miller, 1984). Such perspectives, which developed alongside the notion of bureaucracy itself (Gowler and Legge, 1989), are based on a concept of the career as *objective*, *external* to the individual. "Individuals are portrayed as if they join the organisation practically as lumps of clay, ready to be shaped by all those around them... As mainly *receivers* of information, individuals attempt to 'learn the ropes' in the organisation" (Bell and Staw, 1989, pp. 232). This dominant view, privileging *structure* over *individual*, *agentic* considerations, serves to reify the notion of "the career". In this sense, careers are seen as something that exists, *real* and external to the individual.

In contrast, early psychological work on career theory focused on the individual as the main unit of analysis, and on the notion of career as *subjective*. This literature is concerned with such issues as personality traits and their implications for occupational choice, and the importance of person-environment "fit" for occupational stability (see for example Roe, 1956; Strong, 1943; Holland, 1973). These approaches were influenced by trends in developmental psychology. Consistent with current views on human development which saw adulthood as a period of relative stability, such studies tend to view "career" as synonymous with "occupational choice" (Gutek and Larwood, 1987). However, influenced by a growing interest in adult change and development generally (Hall, 1976; Levinson, 1978), more recent theorists see careers as encompassing the whole adult lifespan, and focus on the process of *career development* (Cytrynbaum and Crites, 1989; Dalton, 1989).

It has been argued that this fragmentation, the prevailing tendency to conceptualise the career as *either* external *or* internal, *either* sociological *or* psychological, resulted in theories which were static, creating images of rational, decision-making individuals against a backdrop of order and progression (Inkson, 1995). In contrast interactionist

sociologists from the Chicago School posed a challenge to what they saw as artificial and unhelpful dichotomies. Their work on careers sought to fuse structural and agentic perspectives. This view of career extended beyond "sequences of jobs, formally organised contexts, and movement up and down a hierarchy" (Barley, 1989, p. 47), and included studies into "the careers" of heroin users, tubercular patients and inmates of psychiatric hospitals. According to this perspective, the concept of career was interesting, not as isolated phenomena, but as a way of illuminating social processes and institutions generally.

The complex relationship between the organisation and the individual is central to much recent career theory. This developing literature re-visits traditional areas of interest from more eclectic, interdisciplinary perspectives: (Barley, 1989; Betz et al, 1989 Dalton, 1989; Cytrynbaum and Crites, 1989) At the same time, it explores hitherto neglected aspects of organisational/occupational life, such as power and politics (Barney and Lawrence, 1989), opportunity structures (Astin, 1984), career transition (Nicholson and West, 1988 and 1989 - see below), and the influence of such factors as gender and ethnicity (Gutek and Larwood, 1987 and Thomas and Alderfer, 1989). Such approaches represent a challenge to dominant careers perspectives. Underpinning much of this work is a rejection of the traditional dichotomy of structure and agency, an emphasis on the mutuality and inextricability of these two dimensions, and an interpretive view of reality as socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Thus:

both the internal and external careers can be considered psychological constructs and social typifications. While the external career is said to represent objective work realities, it is highly subjective in that it is influenced by our own perceptions of ambiguous, complex and fast-changing phenomena (Derr and Laurent, 1989, p. 456)

Unlike earlier studies which, as suggested above, were typically based on notions of linearity, order and rationality, these interdisciplinary approaches are more able to accommodate messier, more varied and complex career patterns and orientations. In particular, Driver's work on career logics (1982), and Schein's research into career anchors (1978 and 1982) are worthy of note. Central to both is a recognition of the diverse ways in which individuals make sense of and enact their careers.

2.3.3 Career Transition

It has been suggested that research into career transition enhances our understanding of careers more generally: "However we conceive of and study careers, it is essential that we understand their punctuation: the pauses and turning points that shape their course" (Nicholson and West, 1989, p. 195). This emerging literature on career transition has particular relevance for this study of women who have left their jobs in organisations and have set up their own businesses. Most notably, Nicholson and West's work into managerial job transition (1988, 1989; West, Nicholson and Arnold, 1991) provides insights into respondents' experiences.

Nicholson and West take as their starting point the mutuality of structure and agency. In their view, it is at transitions that this complex relationship is most visibly played out: "transitions are critical incidents in the nexus between self-consciousness and social structure" (1988, p. 195). Their "transition cycle", exploring the relationship between these dimensions, and incorporating a range of disciplinary perspectives, provides a framework for understanding managerial job change.

The model has four stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. Briefly, the preparation stage is primarily concerned with psychological readiness, addressing such issues as motivation, personality characteristics, and occupational choice. From a sociological perspective, it involves the process of socialisation, structural inequality, and structures of opportunity. The encounter phases, focusing on the first few weeks of the job, is explained partly in cognitive terms - how people make sense of their new situation. Equally important, though, is the individual's emotional response, and the use of coping strategies. Adjustment, the third phase, begins once a person begins to settle down; here the task is about "fitting in", and here again, a central theme is the process of socialisation. Finally the stabilisation phase focuses on issues such as leadership, management control and job satisfaction. For many, this stage may not represent stabilisation as such, but preparation for the next transition. Permeating the model are issues concerning career identity, in particular the simultaneous processes of personal and role development.

As far as this study into women's move from employment to self-employment is concerned, Nicholson and West's transition cycle is illuminating, highlighting key themes, providing insights into highly complex, often ambiguous experiences, processes, and incorporating a range of theoretical perspectives. However, given its focus on managerial job change, it does not seem to be wholly applicable to the women in this study. For example, the preparation and encounter phases concern the interface between one's expectations of the new job and the reality of that position. Whereas for the manager moving to another management position the future is, to some extent, concrete and visible, for the person starting up a new business it is all in the making. One can aspire to and plan for a certain type of venture, but it is the entrepreneur herself who constructs that reality. Similarly, the adjustment phase, during which the new recruit becomes socialised into her "new occupational community" (p. 11) must have a different meaning for the self-employed.

More generally, although Nicholson and West do incorporate sociological perspectives into their transition cycle, the model appears to be decontextualised from its wider social, economic, cultural context - it does not seem to take account of the importance of structural factors, external to the employment context, which impact on an individual's experience of career transition. Notwithstanding these limitations, however, the transition cycle provides an extremely useful frame of reference against which to develop a theoretical model which is more immediately relevant to the move from employment to self-employment. Its insistence on the significance of transitions in individuals' career experiences more generally; its integration of perspectives and incorporation of structural and individual dimensions of experience, and its iterative approach - intrinsic to which is an emphasis on the processes of change and continuity, are partcularly promising.

2.3.4 Women's Careers and Men's Theories

Although the more recent careers literature offers potential in terms of achieving holistic theoretical understandings, in general the literature remains androcentric, failing to take into account the significance of gender on an individual's career development. The adequacy of this literature - for men as well as women - therefore remains limited. In the

section that follows, I will review several key contributions to the debate on women and career theory, assessing their relevance, both to my study on women's move from employment to self-employment, and to career theory more generally.

Consistent with traditional approaches, studies into women and their careers draw largely on sociological and psychological approaches. Empirical work focuses on such issues as: women's career aspirations (Martin et al, 1987), networks and reference groups (Zanna et al, 1987); the significance of family and educational background (Boardman et al, 1987); family roles and responsibilities (Valdez and Gutek, 1987; Sekaran and Hall, 1989; White, 1995; Lambert, 1990; Howard, 1992); and women's careers in management (Marshall, 1984; Marshall, 1995; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Cassell and Walsh, 1994). While such studies offer illuminating insights, what is most useful for the purposes of this review is a more macro perspective. In what follows I will consider a central question within the literature on women and career theory: should there be a separate career theory for women, or should women's experiences be incorporated into men's theories? I will then examine the relevance of this literature for this study into women's move from employment to self-employment, with particular reference to recent work on emerging career forms.

Should there be separate theories for women's career development?

This question comes up time again as scholars seek to reconcile the reality of women's career experiences with existing mainstream theory (Fitzgerald and Crites, 1980; Osipow, 1983, 1975; Astin, 1984; Diamond, 1987; Larwood and Gutek, 1987; Gallos, 1989; Marshall, 1989). Indeed, the need for a separate women's social science is a highly controversial issue at the very heart of much theoretical (and political) writing on feminist theory generally (see for example Harding, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1993). Apart from a few early studies which suggested that the career development process is essentially the same for women and men (Fitzgerald and Crites, 1980), there is a general consensus that women's lives are fundamentally different to men's, and that they construct their careers in very different ways. Theoretically, as previously discussed, these differences are explained from both psychological and sociological perspectives. Feminist psychologists take issue with theories of adult development based on the *male*

experience (Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 1977), arguing that their androcentric focus "has distorted our views of women and their lives..."(Gallos, 1989, p. 112). These writers have therefore constructed different theoretical frameworks for women, typically emphasising the link between development and relationships with others, and the role of relationships in identity formation (Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1974; Josselson, 1987; Marshall, 1989). Sociologists, on the other hand, have identified gender as a key structuring factor in an individual's experience of life. In particular, the process of early sex-role socialisation, in the contexts of the family, school, and social life more generally, lead to different career aspirations and choices (Hennig and Jardim, 1978; Valdez and Gutek, 1987; Marshall, 1989; Rees, 1992). Yet in spite of this consensus about the need for career theory to address women's experiences, opinion remains divided as whether such theory must be *separate*.

Incorporating women into existing models

Larwood and Gutek (1987) argue that the need for a new theory depends on three factors: "A theory must apply to a significant population; a theory must be useful to both research and practice; and there must be some reason for believing that the prior thinking cannot be conveniently stretched to encompass the particular population" (p. 170). Their view is that existing career theory is not sufficiently robust to accommodate women's lives, and thus make a case for separate research into women's career experiences and the construction of new theoretical frameworks for understanding these experiences. Their theory (which they insist must be understood as just the "bare bones" (p. 180)) seeks to incorporate women's situations into existing developmental models of career development. As I see it, this approach does little to challenge the ideological assumptions at the heart of such models; instead, it serves to illustrate how and why women fail. Although Gutek and Larwood's aim is to challenge and reform, it could be argued that their proposed theory actually serves to reinforce existing understandings.

Re-thinking "career success"

In a more recent study, White (1995) investigated the career development of "successful" women, exploring the interaction between domestic and professional spheres. White's

findings were consistent with stereotypical notions of career success. Typically, the women in their sample exhibited "high career centrality" (p. 13), working continuously and full-time, and organising family responsibilities around work commitments - or choosing not to have children. However, whereas Larwood and Gutek (1987) appear to accept the status quo, White is critical of these findings. She makes a plea for a change in attitudes which would allow women more flexibility, and which take greater account of women's responsibilities:

"These findings suggest that if we are to achieve [equality] then change is required in the prevailing stereotype of a successful career... Careers should be accommodated around the reality of women's lives allowing them to make a meaningful investment in both occupational and family roles" (p. 14).

Writing from a developmental psychological perspective, Gallos (1989), too, calls for a separate theory of women's career development. Although her work does not culminate in a theoretical model, she argues that any reconceptualisation must involve an analysis of accepted definitions and deep-seated assumptions. In her view, despite increasing attention to women's careers, traditional understandings of careers persist, connoting images of linearity, rationality and steady advancement - any deviation from such a path is interpreted, not as an alternative way of constructing one's career, but as "opting out", as failing:

"Women who limit work time to parent children or refuse to prove themselves during early career years by assuming the standard workaholic stance easily look less committed to their careers. Women who find it hard to define clearly their professional goals or plan a long-term career strategy because of unsureness of what relationships and home demands may bring certainly can look unfocused. Women without an inner drive to aim singularly for the top at all costs can seem unmotivated as their male counterparts zoom ahead, traditional blinders in place. Women who leave successful organisational positions and clearly defined career tracks to gain more control over their lives can look foolish and misdirected" (Gallos, p. 124).

Gallos acknowledges the work of theorists such as Schein (1982), Driver (1982) and Derr (1986) who sought to integrate internal and external perspectives and explored notions of career directions, patterns and orientations within the context of a person's life (and lifestyle) more generally. However, notwithstanding these valuable contributions, like White (1995) she insists that more holistic definitions are needed that can accommodate women's diverse experiences and choices.

Women's careers and structures of opportunity

Astin (1984), like the feminist writers noted above, insists on the centrality of gender as a structuring determinant in an individual's career choice and work behaviour. However, in her view, this recognition is as important for men as it is for women - far from being considered separately, gender must be included as a central feature of *all* career theory. Astin takes as her starting point the notion that while the nature of the work that women and men do differs, their reasons for working are essentially the same. A psychologist, she felt that psychological models, in isolation, were unable to explain the differences in men's and women's career behaviour, arguing for the need to look to wider social and environmental variables. Her "socio-psychological" model, informed by existing theoretical work, empirical findings and her own personal experiences, "incorporates the influence of the social context on the person, [as] work behaviour is a social behaviour" (p. 117).

Astin's model incorporates four constructs: motivation, sex-role socialisation, structure of opportunity and expectations. While motivation is seen as the same for men and women, Astin argues that the process of sex-role socialisation is very different, and that this process has serious implications for an individual's career expectations. Importantly, Astin notes that such processes are not static, and that as the role of women in society changes, so too does the process of early sex-role socialisation. The notion of social change, and within that, career change, is central to Astin's theory. She argues that alongside the socialisation process, which on its own would lead to a stagnant, unchanging model, is the structure of opportunity in the world of work, and that the two are "interactive" and mutually dependant. Taken together, Astin maintains that these

two forces can help to explain existing differences in career expectations of men and women, and also the changing nature of these expectations.

The inadequacy of existing theory - for women and men

Although Marshall's "feminist invitation to re-visit the career concept" (1989) does not explicitly address the question of a separate career theory for women, her call for radical re-thinking of existing theory is based on her view that, as it stands, such (patriarchal) theory is inadequate for women *and* men. She sees her ideas for reform as being equally applicable to both: "[the ideas of this chapter] should be taken into research, working with women and men on their individual and joint processes of career and life creation" (p. 289). Marshall is critical of developments in women's career theory which have simply "modified its basic arrow design"; now, she argues, "we need to re-create it at the core" (p. 282). Such a re-creation necessarily involves challenging the most basic assumptions upon which current theory has been constructed. Marshall takes as her starting point Bakan's (1966) dichotomy between his concepts of "agency" and "communion". In Marshall's view, traditional career theory is based on male, *agentic* principles - with an emphasis on control, individualism, and action oriented towards the achievement of personal goals. Fundamental to the change process is, first, an awareness of this orientation. This awareness must then be followed by a recognition on the value of the female principle of *communion*, with its emphasis on union, co-operation and integration.

In her article, Marshall explores the implications of this conceptual shift for career theory. In particular, she focuses on five (related) aspects: career movement; the individual and the organisation; career forms and patterns; career within the context of the whole life; and career planning, exploring how notions of communion can be integrated into existing agentic discourses. In addition to "re-visioning" the *contents* of career theory, Marshall insists that equally important are its *structures* and *methods*. As regards the former, she challenges the concept of hierarchy which, she maintains, serve as frameworks which structure much of our thinking about careers. In terms of methods, such re-visioning involves a change in focus, from the organisation to the individual.

2.3.5 Career Theory and Bureaucratic Ideologies

The holistic concept of career, encompassing aspects of both professional and personal life, incorporating notions of balance, co-operation and integration, and recognising the significance of gender and other structural determinants, clearly represents a departure from traditional career theory. At the same time, Marshall (1989), Gallos (1989) and other feminist scholars recognise the need to critically examine the bureaucratic orientation which persists at the heart of much career theory, and which continues to limit our thinking about the career concept.

"We must move away from hierarchical thinking... Hierarchies are frameworks for order; established through agentic processes of projection, they become standards outside ourselves... This involves moving away from organisations and society judging the individual from the outside using socially defined criteria for success and towards self-assessment..." (Marshall, 1989, p. 289).

"Identity and self-esteem do not necessarily come from attaching oneself to a prestigious organisation" (Gallos, 1989, p. 126).

However, in spite of these calls for greater flexibility and diversity, what such flexibility and diversity actually looks like in practice, and how it might be conceptualised theoretically is largely unexplored. Passing references are made to other career possibilities (i.e. entrepreneurship) (Gallos, p. 126), but for the most part, such alternatives remain undeveloped within the literature on women's career development. Indeed, Carroll and Mosakowski (1987) maintain that within the career literature more generally, the possibility of self-employment as an alternative career form has been largely ignored - an omission which is particularly relevant given the subject of this thesis.

Gowler and Legge (1989) take as their starting point the bureaucratic ideology which they see as permeating much traditional career theory. Working from a socio-linguistic perspective, they are interested in the relationship between language and ideology, and in

particular the role of language in both reflecting and constructing ideology. Meaning, according to this perspective, is not fixed; rather, it is dynamic, constructed and re-constructed through interaction. Likewise, in their view, careers must be seen as social constructions.

"Just as language is both constituted by human agency yet at the same time is the medium of this constitution, so people construct careers through language, by assigning meanings to their actions, and use these constructs to interpret, and express the experiences that provide the stimulus for such constructions" (p. 439).

The metaphors frequently used to describe career and career development include images of ladders, tracks, paths and races, connoting notions of progress, linearity and movement - metaphors typically associated with the concept of bureaucracy. Gowler and Legge highlight the pervasiveness of bureaucratic ideology in contemporary western thought, an ideology resulting from the emergence of bureaucratic forms of social/political/economic organisation. Their study focuses on "the ways in which rhetorical language constructs careers that reflect and reproduce the ideology of bureaucratic organisation in British and American society" (p. 439). They argue that not only is this ideology central to our commonsense thinking about careers, but is embedded within career theory.

As regards this study into women who move from employment to self-employment, I find Gowler and Legge's analysis particularly insightful, elucidating the inadequacies of much career theory and recognising the need to account for career patterns which fall outside of the bureaucratic norm.

Gowler and Legge maintain that, while persistent, this ideology is not inevitable. First, individuals need not accept "preferred readings", the dominant ideologies on offer; instead, they can "read against the grain", they can resist: "For every individual who perceives and celebrates career as a race to be won... there is another who disdains or fears the competing 'rats' that run in the race, and longs to have a career doing his or her own thing" (p. 450). Second, on a structural level, changing organisational forms and structures (Kanter, 1989b; Pollert, 1991) will result in changing metaphors, and new

ways of thinking and talking about careers: "if bureaucracy is being challenged as the dominant organisational form then the progressive career structure... is itself threatened" (Mallon, 1995, p. 8). Indeed, several recent studies illustrate that the notion of the bureaucratic career is beginning to falter (Leach and Chakiris, 1988; Mirvis and Hall; 1994; Inkson, 1995). Central to such views is the dynamic and complex relationship between individuals and their social contexts.

The "boundaryless" career, and the recognition of alternative career forms

Given this turbulent environment, Mirvis and Hall (1994) argue that the boundaries between work and other aspects of people's lives are changing, as are basic definitions of work, non-work and career. Their study is based on the concept of the "boundaryless organisation" and within it, the "boundaryless career". Such a model, they argue, is based on cyclical, rather than linear patterns of movement, of periods of re-skilling , of lateral rather than upward movement, and of job change, company change, and occupation change. Like Marshall (1989), Mirvis and Hall suggest that careers are no longer defined within organisations, but within individuals. Identity is no longer organisationally determined, but is constructed through "cumulative work experiences and career achievement, [and] also through "work" as a spouse, parent and community member" (p. 387). Their notion of the emerging, boundaryless career thereby links new career structures with the kind of holistic understandings of the career concept introduced by Marshall (1989) and Gallos (1989).

The recognition of changing career forms, and the shift in focus from the organisation to the individual as the context in which careers develop, have resonance in terms of this study into the move from employment to self-employment. The question then arises: where bureaucratic notions of career are rejected, or found to be irrelevant, are there other (new) conceptualisations which are emerging to fill the void?

Kanter, in a challenge to the persistent bureaucratic orientation of much career theory, describes "three principal forms of opportunity from which career patterns derive: bureaucratic, professional, and entrepreneurial" (Kanter, 1989, p. 508).

Kanter suggests that *bureaucratic careers* are defined by:

"the logic of advancement. The bureaucratic career pattern involves a sequence of positions in a formally defined hierarchy of other positions. 'Growth' is equated with promotion to a position of higher rank that brings with it higher benefits; 'progress' means advancement within the hierarchy. Thus, a 'career' consists of formal movement from job to job... In the typical bureaucratic career, all of the elements of career opportunity - responsibilities, challenges, influence, formal training and development, compensation - are all closely tied to rank in an organisation... This pattern best describes administrative/managerial careers in very large oligopolistic corporations and the civil service in the mid-twentieth century" (p. 509).

Professional careers, on the other hand, are characterised by:

"craft or skill, with monopolisation of socially valued knowledge the key determinant of occupational status, and 'reputation' the key resource for the individual.

Career 'growth' for professionals does not necessarily consist of moving from job to job, as it does for bureaucrats, and 'advancement' does not have the same meaning. Instead, those on professional career tracks may keep the same 'title' and the same nominal 'job' over a long period of time.

Opportunity in the professional form, then, involves the chance to take on evermore demanding or challenging or important or rewarding assignments that involve greater exercise of the skills that define the professional's stock-in trade. 'Upward mobility' in the professional career involves the reputation for greater skill" (pp. 510-511).

Finally, Kanter defines the *entrepreneurial career* as:

"one in which growth occurs through the creation of new value or new organisational capacity. If the key resource in a bureaucratic career is hierarchical position, and the

key resource in a professional career is knowledge and reputation, then the key resource in an entrepreneurial career is the capacity to create valued outputs...

Instead of moving UP, those in entrepreneurial careers see progress when the territory grows BELOW them - and when they 'own' a share of the returns from the growth...

Freedom, independence, and control over not only one's tasks (as the professional supposedly has) but also one's organisational surroundings, are associated with the entrepreneurial career" (pp. 515-516).

Kanter applies a macro-perspective to the study of careers, exploring the implications of this model at both organisational and societal levels. It is my view that it could also provide a very useful starting point for understanding changing career patterns at the level of the individual: for the purposes of this study, for understanding the transition from employment within an organisation to self-employment. In so far as she takes a macro view, Kanter does not examine the micro-processes through which these career patterns are constructed. She does not grapple with questions about ideology and sense-making, she does not look problematically at how we are to understand these career forms, or how individuals come to identify with one or another of them - and she does not consider the implications of gender for an individual's understanding of or identification with a particular career pattern. However, what she offers is a framework within which such processes can be more fully explored.

2.3.6 Summary

This section has considered the literature on career theory, focusing on the extent to which particular contributions serve to reinforce existing patterns, both theoretical and practical, and those which seek to reform. Moving from early unidisciplinary studies into career theory, to later work which sought to construct less fragmented, more holistic understandings, the review then turns to feminist approaches which challenged male discourses embedded within the careers literature generally, and called for a reconceptualisation of career theory. Finally, more recent studies are considered which focus on the notion of career as socially constructed, and take issue with the bureaucratic

ideology implicit in our understandings of the career concept. Such approaches, central to which are issues about identity and sense-making, emphasise the need to find alternative ways of thinking which are more consistent with today's changing and unstable work environments.

This study will contribute to the literature on career theory in two important ways. First, in focusing on women who have moved from employment to self-employment it will further develop existing understandings of career transition. Second, although the recent literature on emerging career structures is compelling, much of it is not empirically grounded. This study will thus provide new data on how women construct and make sense of their careers, in particular shedding light on the experiences of women working outside of traditional bureaucracies.

2.4 Women 's Decisions to Leave their Organisations

2.4.1 Introduction

Women's growing involvement in the labour market in the last twenty years (Rees, 1992; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Offerman and Gowing, 1990) has led to a burgeoning of interest in their experiences, both in the academic literature as well as the popular press. Much of this work has focused on women managers; indeed, there is now a rich, diverse (and growing) literature on women managers' lives *within* organisations (Marshall, 1984; Legge, 1987; Hearn et. al., 1989; Long and Kahn, 1993; Green and Cassell, 1996). In recent years it has been suggested that in response to increasing disillusionment and dissatisfaction with what organisations have to offer, many women have taken the decision to leave (Maynard, 1988; Schwartz, 1989; Brett and Stroh, 1994). Attempts to explain this phenomenon have taken both individual and organisational perspectives: whereas the former tend to focus on the particular needs and circumstances of women managers, the latter typically look to the organisations themselves, their structures and cultures, and the extent to which they provide an environment within which women can thrive. Sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 below detail the contributions of two important studies into "corporate flight" (Rosin and Korabik, 1992): Rosin and Korabik's large, quantitative investigation (1992, 1995), and Marshall's in-depth, qualitative study (1991, 1994,1995). Highlighted by both is the significance of gendered organisational cultures in women's decisions to leave. Sections 2.4.4 and 2.4.5 explore this concept, and in particular its implications for "fitting in" and "getting on" in organisations. Finally, section 2.4.6 considers the contribution of this study into women's move from employment to self-employment to our understanding of the phenomenon of corporate flight.

2.4.2 "Corporate Flight of Women Managers"

In response to accounts which suggest that women managers are leaving their organisations in order to become mothers, and which portray women managers as generally less committed to their work than their male counterparts, Rosin and Korabik's

large, quantitative study (1992; 1995) sought to "acquire a more accurate picture of the scope and dynamics of the problem" (1992, p. 31). Their survey of one thousand four hundred male and female MBA's considered a range of variables, including: personal and organisational attributes, work and positional attributes, affective reactions, marital and family characteristics and reasons for leaving employment (1992, p. 31). A multivariate statistical analysis of their data revealed significant misconceptions in how women managers are generally perceived, misconceptions which, they maintain, "are particularly damaging because they serve to justify and perpetuate the barriers which constitute the 'glass ceiling' (Morrison et al, 1987) faced by women in management" (1992, p. 32).

Rosin and Korabik thus use their findings to dispel four common misperceptions about women managers. Specifically, that

1. large numbers of women are dropping out;
2. women are leaving their organisations in favour of motherhood;
3. more women than men managers are leaving organisations, and
4. women who are mothers are less committed to their organisations and careers than are their male counterparts.

First, Rosin and Korabik found that a far smaller number of women managers had opted out than had been suggested anecdotally: of their sample, less than ten percent had left the workforce entirely, and for most this situation was seen as temporary. In contrast to the suggestion that women opt out in order to become mothers, their study revealed that a far greater number of women with small children had remained in their jobs. Furthermore, amongst those who had left, there was a significant group of women who had done so in order to set up their own businesses. As regards the claim that more female than male managers are leaving, Rosin and Korabik found that equal numbers of men and women are opting out of their organisations, but for different reasons. Whereas all the men in their sample had left in order to become self-employed, this was the case for less than ten percent of the women. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to cite parental responsibilities as a reason for leaving than were the men. Finally, contrary to the suggestion that mothers are less committed to their work than women managers who are not mothers, the study found that there was no significant different in ambition, loyalty or commitment between these two groups of managers. In spite of their manifest

inaccuracy, Rosin and Korabik (1992) emphasise the persistence and insidiousness of these "fictions", and most importantly their damaging effects on the careers of women managers.

In my view what is particularly significant about Rosin and Korabik's study is not the number of women who had *actually left* their organisations, but the very strong *propensity to leave* amongst women managers in general, a finding echoed by Hakim (1989). Four factors in particular appear to contribute to this inclination: the specific characteristics of the job; the extent to which one's expectations were being met; office politics; and being in a male-dominated environment. Contrary to stereotypical assumptions that women managers' decisions to leave result from their domestic responsibilities, here the reasons emerge as firmly rooted within the organisation itself. In response to the individual/organisational debate highlighted above, Rosin and Korabik conclude that: "although it may be more comfortable for organisations to assume that women managers leave due to family, our results suggest that workplace and gender-related reasons are the catalyst for their dissatisfaction" (1992, p. 35).

Rosin and Korabik's study is a very useful starting point in seeking to understand the phenomenon of corporate flight. In providing a more accurate picture of the scope of the "problem" than anecdotal accounts previously afforded, it serves to define the parameters within which key issues can be explored. Theoretically, in raising important issues to do with organisational practices and processes, it shifts the focus from an individual to an organisational perspective, a focus which will ultimately afford richer, more complex and adequate understandings.

2.4.3 "Women Managers Moving On"

Whereas Rosin and Korabik's quantitative study aims to provide an overview of the incidence and character of women managers' corporate attrition, Marshall (1991; 1994;1995) offers deeper, qualitative insights. Although her approach is very different, like Rosin and Korabik, Marshall's aim is to break down limiting, reductionist stereotypes which serve to shape organisational policies and practices, and which ultimately discriminate against women.

Consistent with Rosin and Korabik's findings, Marshall's starting point is that whereas in everyday discourse explanations for corporate flight tend to lie within the individual, equally (if not more) important are organisational factors. She takes issues with approaches that focus on motherhood as women managers' primary reason for leaving their organisations, and which insist that it is women who must be flexible, who must accommodate the needs of their organisations (see for example Schwartz, 1989). Marshall's study, in contrast to that of Rosin and Korabik, does not aim for statistical significance or generalisability. Instead, it is about interpretation, an exploration of the stories of sixteen (originally seventeen but one dropped out of the study) women at middle and senior management positions who have left their jobs. Her intentions are threefold: it is "an exploration in sense-making"; it "seeks to tell quite full stories about the women's experiences"; and within the study "contentious aspects of organisational life are brought to the fore" (1995, p. 10).

Marshall categorises her respondents' reasons for leaving their organisations into seven broad areas.

1. *Wanting different lifestyles*, more consistent with their developing self-image. The women in this category, all of whom worked in personnel departments, felt that they had lost touch with their own needs. One wanted a child, while others were looking for different sorts of changes, including moving into consultancy.
2. *Wanting a more balanced life*, which would more easily accommodate the demands of young children. There was only one example in this category.
3. *Leaving change management roles which had become untenable*. The respondents in this group had all been involved in change initiatives within their organisations; their decisions to leave were largely due to the pressures resulting from these roles.
4. *Blocked promotion prospects*, involving issues to do with gendered organisational cultures and the difficulties of fitting in.
5. *No longer wanting to battle*. Closely related to the previous category, this group includes women who felt worn out by the struggle to establish themselves within male-dominated organisations. Their decisions had to do with trying to regain lost energy and enthusiasm.

6. *Fighting for legitimacy.* This category concerns the story of one woman, a lesbian trying to establish an acceptable identity within her organisation. After her initial interview, this woman withdrew the full version of her story; what remains is therefore sketchier and more general than the others.
7. *Being forced or pressured to leave.* As members of the "old regime", the two women in this category, having already decided to resign, were put under intense pressure to do so earlier than they had intended. Marshall explains that several other women, grouped elsewhere, had similar experiences.

Marshall outlines the rigorous process through which she arrived at the stories presented in her book: a process involving in-depth discussions with interviewees, consultation and feedback on preliminary drafts, and generally immersing herself in the data. Her detailed accounts effectively illustrate the variety within each of the categories outlined above, and the extent to which they overlap and intersect. From these stories, Marshall identifies a number of recurring themes, which she explores in her concluding chapter. Amongst these, gender emerges as a

"possible frame of analysis... This involves interrogating different levels of possible operation, from overt interactions to the potential gender patterning involved in foundational assumptions of organisational life" (1995, p. 99).

Marshall insists that her focus on gender does not mean that women's experiences within organisations are entirely different from men's, nor does it suggest that men can not be marginalised or bullied. However, she argues that

"in this symbolic world of conformity it seems important to acknowledge that women are usually more different from idealised norms than are many of their male colleagues - and are more readily identified as such. People of colour may be seen as more different still" (1995, p. 101).

At issue here is the notion of organisational fit, and in particular the ways in which women experience/make sense of/cope with life within organisational cultures which are

constructed around male definitions and male realities. These are explored in the section which follows.

2.4.4 The Gendering of Organisations

The notion of the labour market as gendered, segregated both vertically and horizontally, was discussed in section 2.2.2 above. On a more micro-level, these patterns are repeated within organisations themselves. Reporting on a study into gender discrimination in a local authority, Itzin (1995) describes the extent of women's disadvantage in organisations generally, citing both external and internal explanations for this disadvantage. As regards the former, citing Clegg's inclusion of gender in the "category of extra-organisational rules" that govern behaviour within organisations (Clegg, 1981), she suggests that women's domestic responsibilities are the category most often used to explain women's "inferior" positions in organisations. "This study has certainly shown how 'shopping, cooking, cleaning and childcare' do pose real restrictions on women's ability to work full-time and participate fully in organisational life" (Itzin, 1995, p. 45). Such rules operate ideologically, too. Indeed, it has been argued that because women are viewed as having a primary commitment to domestic life outside of their organisations, they are frequently perceived as lacking in organisational commitment, and thus their status as organisational members is cast in doubt (Itzin, 1995, p. 46).

At the same time, though, Itzin (1995) acknowledges that such explanations alone are insufficient, that internal factors, too, must be considered in seeking to explain women's disadvantage within organisations. Morgan (1986) suggests that organisations are dominated by male values which result in gender segregation, and ensure that men are better placed to achieve more powerful, higher status positions. Likewise, Mills (1988) insists on gender as a key factor in determining an individual's experience of organisational life, "'permeating not only extra-organisational rules, but each and every area of rule bound behaviour' (Mills, 1989, p. 33). Mills uses issues such as restricted access to important networks, lack of mentorship and male-oriented language as illustrative of the wide range of organisational practices that "signal to females that they are not regarded as full organisational members" (Mills, 1989, p. 39).

The concept of organisational culture has been used to explain the phenomenon of gender discrimination in the workplace, both within the academic literature (Marshall, 1995; Green and Cassell, 1995; Davies, 1995; Itzin, 1995; Davidson and Cooper, 1992) and in more practitioner-oriented publications (Maddock and Parkin, 1993). Indeed, Mills (1988) argues that:

"Sexual discrimination is not only evidenced in a number of OVERT organisational practices but, more significantly, is embedded in the cultural values that permeate both organisations and the concept of organisation itself" (p. 352).

Similarly, Davies (1995) sees gender as deeply embedded in the very heart of organisational life. "Regarding gender as an active and continuing process in this way is often signalled by a shift from using gender as a noun to using gender as a verb. Thus it becomes possible to speak of the 'gendering' of organisations" (p. 34). Davies argues that an analysis of gendered organisational cultures must work at two levels: on the one hand, it must address the visible, everyday manifestations of gender in organisations; at the same time, it must look beneath the surface, to the very design of organisations themselves.

As regards the visible, surface level, Davies looks to patterns of sex segregation in organisations, and seeks to explain how these are understood by the people working in them. Her starting point is the notion that gender is constructed through everyday interaction, "and this process of doing gender both creates and normalises differences between men and women" (Davies, p. 35). Her analysis focuses on organisational structures, and organisational "rules" (both explicit and implicit), as well as such phenomena as dress codes, speech and the presentation of self.

Itzin (1995) agrees with much of the current literature which portrays organisational culture as "gendered and discrimination based on gender as embedded in organisational culture" (p. 48), yet suggests that in general this literature fails to adequately conceptualise organisations' gender cultures, in particular in terms of understanding the power relationships upon which they are based. Itzin identifies several features characteristic of "the gender culture", suggesting that it is typically: hierarchical and

patriarchal; sex segregated; sex-stereotyped; sex-discriminatory; a sexualised environment; misogynist, resistant to change, and characterised by sexual harassment and gendered power relations (pp. 50-51). Itzin argues that while this particular constellation of factors may in some ways be unique to the local authority on which her study is based, gender cultures in other organisations are likely to include all of these features in some form.

Maddock and Parkin (1995) look beyond the gender culture generally and construct a typology of male-dominated organisational cultures which they found operating in public sector organisations. Whereas the *gentleman's club* is typically paternalistic and overprotective, those in powerful positions within the *barrack yard* culture bully their subordinates into submission, rather than listening to them. Women are actively excluded from the *locker room*, a staunchly heterosexual culture in which conversation revolves around sports, sex and "girls". The *gender blind* culture denies difference altogether, be it to do with gender, ethnicity or able-bodiedness Here the reality of women's experience is ignored - thus creating an illusion that everyone is white, able-bodied and male. On the other hand, "new men" within *feminist pretender* cultures pay lip service to equal opportunities issues, and then learn to manoeuvre around them for personal advantage. Finally, the *smart macho* culture stresses performance and competition - those who fail to keep the pace are frequently sacked, demoted or simply ignored. While not explicitly excluding them, like the gentleman's club, the barrack yard and the locker room above, women experience such cultures as discouraging and demoralising.

Similarly, Mills (1992) emphasises the masculine values underpinning many organisations' cultures; like Maddock and Parkin, these are articulated in a variety of ways, depending on the particular context. He cites studies of manual labourers which demonstrate the way in which men see the dangerous and difficult conditions in which they work as a celebration of maleness. Such cultures are typically articulated through crude and aggressive images of sexuality, exemplified by particular sorts of language, and artefacts (pin-ups, trade calendars, etc.). On the other hand, the world of business (and politics) is frequently characterised by the language of military adventures, with targets, strategies, victory and defeat. In such contexts business leaders and entrepreneurs are

seen as cultural heroes. Common to both Mills' and Maddock and Parkin's analyses is the idea that masculine discourses are played out within organisations, and thus serve to construct organisational realities whose rules are defined by men, and in which women play certain designated roles.

Davies (1995) and Green and Cassell (1995) argue that male-dominated organisational cultures do not always result in the exclusion of women, but they do "impact on definitions of appropriate behaviour for both men and women" (Green and Cassell, 1995), and serve to define which skills and competencies are seen as valuable, which behaviours are recognised and rewarded.

Davies (1995) thus concludes that:

"The question of gender and organisation...is not only a matter of describing the patterns of sex segregation in the workplace, it is also a matter of seeing how people infuse them with meaning, interact in ways that call on gender codes and confirm gendered identities through their lives in the workplace. Both the cultural and the interaction approaches draw attention to this and to the ways in which it enacts power relations that secure the superiority of men. It is now clear that gender is a key part of the 'interactional scaffolding' that holds organisations together" (p. 37).

What is intriguing about the "interactional scaffolding" metaphor is its essential contradiction. On the one hand scaffolding, made of steel and used to hold up an unstable building, is absolutely solid and secure. On the other hand, "interactional" connotes a picture of fluidity and change. Gender, therefore, is seen as something which is at once stable and supporting, and elusive and dynamic. This ambiguity is perhaps best illustrated by the concept of "gendered processes" (Davies, 1994; Acker, 1992), which Green and Cassell refer to as "an integral part of organisational power and the maintenance of the traditional status quo in organisations" (p. 17). They cite Acker's model of gendered organisations which incorporates four sets of organisational processes: the first set involves the production of gender divisions, including the practices which produce gendered jobs, wages and hierarchies. Managers, unions and workers are involved in such processes, which vary over time. Second, Acker identifies

the creation of organisational symbols, images and forms of consciousness which explain, and sometimes oppose gender divisions. The third and fourth sets of processes include interaction and subjective interpretations - "the interactions occurring between individuals to create social forms which enact hierarchical relationships involving alliances and exclusions in the workplace" (Acker, 1992, p. 18). Gendered organisations, thus, are constructed through social interaction - such interaction, maintains Acker, constitutes an important part of the concrete 'work' of the organisation.

As suggested above, in addition to these processes which are *internal* to the organisation, Davies (1995) argues that there is

"yet another deeper level where we can find the gendering of organisations, one that draws attention not so much to the daily process of recreating organisations as gendered, but to gender as embedded in the design of organisations and the logic of their functioning" (p. 37).

Here, Davies draws on the work of Acker (1989, 1990, 1992) who critically examines our basic understandings of concepts like "job" and "hierarchy". Acker's starting point is that these concepts, though appearing to be abstract and neutral, are in fact gendered, based on certain assumptions about work, men's and women's lives, and the separation of the public and private spheres. Just as "the concept of a job assumes a particular gendered organisation of domestic life and social production" (Acker, 1990, p. 179), so too is the notion of "hierarchy" better suited to the typical patterns of men's life experiences. Thus Davies concludes that not only does the daily work of organisations serve to reinforce their gendered structures and cultures, but at the same time the logic underpinning our understandings and constructions of organisations is based on a masculine vision of reality.

This discussion is reminiscent of Gowler and Legge's (1989) notion of the bureaucratisation of the career concept, considered in section 2.3.7. Just as Gowler and Legge called into question theoretical positions based on the notion of career as neutral and unproblematic, so too does Davies seek to "make strange" our assumptions about organisations, and explore the male, bureaucratic ideologies in which they are grounded.

"Organisations now begin to emerge not only as arenas to which we bring and act out our gendered identities, but ones whose prior logic is a masculine one. Jobs, hierarchies and associated careers are generic features of organisations that are built on a masculine vision of how work is to be structured" (Davies, 1995, p. 40).

2.4.5 Gendered Cultures and the Concept of Organisational Fit

The questions of how women respond to being part of an essentially "alien" culture, and the impact that such marginality has on their behaviour have been raised by Cassell and Walsh (1994). Their study of women professionals reveals that women experienced considerable discomfort about how they fitted into their organisations. This appeared to result from how they perceived their organisations' dominant cultures, and how they saw themselves vis-à-vis this culture. In general respondents felt constrained by what they saw as a limited range of appropriate behaviours and careers available to women. Cassell and Walsh conclude that: "in such male-dominated cultures women, as a result of stereotypical expectations of their role and their own psychological make-up, develop strategies to compensate for the negative experience associated with not 'fitting in'" (p. 5). Their model of "organisational fit" thus "outlines the processes by which women attempt to fit into 'alien' organisational cultures" (p. 5).

Most relevant to this study is, first, the sense of discomfort felt by women in attempting to fit into a culture in which they do not really belong. This discomfort leads to a form of cognitive dissonance (see Festinger, 1957) which individuals then respond to at either an internal or an external level. Whereas an internal attribution leads to strategies associated with changing the self, an external attribution focuses on changing the organisation.

As regards the level of the individual, Cassell and Walsh identify two main strategies: lowering career expectations or using gender specific organisational roles. At the organisational level, a woman can attempt to change her organisation, can try to generate support for her own position, or can leave the organisation altogether. Marshall's study

(1995), considered above, provides rich and detailed examples of both internal and external attributions and their associated coping strategies, and echoes Cassell and Walsh's finding that each has significant psychological (and in some cases physical) costs.

"The bottom line", for Cassell and Walsh "is always exit from the organisation." (p. 9). Within their framework, leaving is thus a response laced with despair. Powerful though this model is, however, it must be remembered that lack of fit is not the *only* reason why women choose to leave their organisations. On the contrary, as Marshall (1991, 1994 1995), and Rosin and Korabik's (1992, 1995) studies demonstrate, such choices are based on a whole range of factors, some hopeful, some tinged with feelings of failure and regret - most often in a complex and tangled web.

Similarly, it is important to recognise that while gender, and particularly the notion of gendered organisations and organisational cultures must be central to an analysis of why women leave their organisations, there are other factors - both structural and situational - which must also be taken into account. Indeed, Cassell and Walsh highlight the applicability of their models for "other groups who perceive themselves to be different as a result of ethnicity, age, sexuality or any other dimension along which people are stereotypically assessed" (p. 10).

2.4.6 Summary

This section reviewed, first, the emerging literature on the "corporate flight" of women managers, emphasising in particular organisational factors which contribute to these decisions, and thus taking issue with stereotypical explanations. Moving on, it explored recent work into gender and organisations, specifically considering the concept of gendered organisational cultures and the processes through which these are both represented and constituted. Finally, a framework for understanding the issue of "organisational fit" was introduced. Here, a woman's decision to leave was linked to a lack of fit between herself and her organisation. While acknowledging that this may be only one in a constellation of variables which can result in a woman's departure, the model serves to elucidate the significance of organisational factors in that decision, and in particular the damaging effects of marginalisation.

The emerging literature on corporate flight, and the more extensive literature on gender and organisations which informs these developing perspectives, are clearly central to this study of women who leave their organisations and set up their own businesses. I see the study as making a significant contribution to this literature. Whereas Marshall's study (1991, 1994, 1995) focused on women at the transition, this study explores the next stage - women who are making a go of self-employment and are looking back, reflecting on their experiences within their organisations, and their reasons for leaving. This perspective will thus contribute new data to what is currently known about how women make sense of their experiences of organisations and the phenomenon of "corporate flight".

2.5 Women Entrepreneurs: a contradiction in terms?

2.5.1 Introduction

Since the mid 1970's there has been an increasing fascination with entrepreneurs who start up small businesses and facilitate their growth and development. Entrepreneurs are commonly seen as the self-made business people of today, creating their own wealth rather than inheriting it. Small businesses are regarded as playing a vital role in regenerating the economy, in Britain as well as in other Western and, more recently, Eastern European countries. The popular press, as well as more serious academic and business publications, frequently contain articles describing exceptionally successful entrepreneurs who are revered as the role models which aspiring business people should seek to emulate. Furthermore, the act of entrepreneurship is portrayed as an economic necessity within a modern economy, promoting structural balance, employment choice, economic growth and national and personal prosperity.

Many new enterprises are founded, owned and/or managed by women. Female self-employment increased by eighty-one percent between 1981 and 1989, whereas male self-employment increased by only 51% in the same period (Daly, 1991). Women now represent over one-quarter of the total self-employed population in the UK, and have thus become a significant economic force. Yet, despite the increasing number of women entrepreneurs, there is a dearth of in-depth, qualitative literature on the subject, resulting in a lack of theoretical understanding of the experiences of such women: their motivations, problems, successes and aspirations (Moore, 1990). Whilst there is a burgeoning literature on entrepreneurship *generally*, many of these studies have a distinctly male bias, not only in terms of examples and case studies, but also ideologically (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Goffee and Scase, 1985; Stevenson, 1990). Simpson (1991) points out that even where female samples have been used, they are frequently grafted onto male models and set against male standards, thus serving to reinforce stereotypes and myths about women in business. Indeed, the term "entrepreneur" itself conveys meanings which are often at odds with the experiences of many women (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Stevenson, 1990).

Just as the concept of self-employment was described in section 2.1.2 as problematic, so too the question of how to define "entrepreneur" reveals ambiguities and a lack of consensus in the way in which this term is understood by academics working in the field, the general public, and "entrepreneurs" themselves. The first section of this review grapples with this vexing question, stressing its centrality in the construction of useful frameworks for understanding. Second, key theoretical approaches to the study of entrepreneurship will be reviewed and evaluated as to the extent to which they address and in turn shed light on women owner/managers' perceptions and circumstances. Third, the growing literature on women entrepreneurs will be considered, highlighting in particular the importance of feminist perspectives. Finally, the review turns to the growing literature on women entrepreneurs, outlining in particular the importance of a perspective which sees gender as a major determining factor in a person's experience of self-employment.

2.5.2 The Problem of Meaning

The term "entrepreneur" conjures up images of people like Henry Ford, Anita Roddick and Richard Branson - and notions of individualism and independence, charisma, risk-taking, creativity and innovation, and profit-seeking. Yet does this term really only apply to these mythical, somewhat eccentric and rare individuals, or can it be used more generally to describe anyone who sets out to create a new business venture? Would a women setting up her own consultancy firm consider herself (or be considered) an entrepreneur? To academics working in the field of entrepreneurship, the term remains elusive and problematic: "There seem to be as many definitions of entrepreneurship as there are pundits or practitioners of the art" (Kao, 1989, p. 91).

Although our understandings of the term "entrepreneur" depend partly on our personal circumstances and experiences, they are also embedded in a cultural context. Kao describes entrepreneurs as "the new cultural heroes" (p. 92), remarking that entrepreneurship is "increasingly synonymous with 'good'" (p. 92). However, the term can equally be seen as "bad" - excessively individualistic at the expense of the collective good, aggressively profit-oriented, working to bolster a system which is essentially

oppressive. This "positive"/"negative" dichotomy serves to highlight the limitations of the myth of the entrepreneur and its narrow, stereotypical applications.

Traditional understandings

As suggested above, there is a growing literature on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Scholars have sought to construct definitions that reflect their particular theoretical approaches. Schumpeter (1934), in attempting to differentiate entrepreneurs from business owners and managers maintained that it was *innovation*, the creation of new combinations of means of production, that distinguished the entrepreneur. Schumpeter's model was economic; he approached the entrepreneur from a functionalist perspective - as having a key role to play in the development of the economy.

Carland et. al. (1984) take Schumpeter as a starting point, but focus, not on the function of the entrepreneur as regards the economic system, but on *his* (sic) character and behaviour. They examine the difference between the entrepreneur and the small business owner, characterising the entrepreneur as *innovative*, oriented towards *profit* and *growth*. An alternative view but complementary definition is provided by Stanworth and Curran (1976) who distinguish three types of small business activist: the *activist* who seeks intrinsic satisfaction from business activity; the *manager* who seeks recognition for managerial excellence in business; and the *classic entrepreneur* who seeks to maximise profits. McClelland (1961), too, considers the character and function of the entrepreneur, suggesting that *risk-bearing* is central to both, and emphasising the entrepreneur's *need for achievement*.

The image of the entrepreneur as a risk-bearer is criticised by Stevenson (1989), who maintains that most entrepreneurs would prefer to play safe wherever possible. Stevenson rejects approaches which focus on the personality and character of the entrepreneur, as well as those which concentrate on their economic function. Instead, he defines the entrepreneur as one who takes a particular approach to management, suggesting that it is the pursuit of opportunity without regard to currently available resources that defines the entrepreneur.

What the above examples illustrate is the myriad of ambiguous, often contradictory definitions abounding in the entrepreneurship literature. Each reflects a particular theoretical perspective, yet taken together the picture lacks coherence. Moore (1990) maintains that such fragmentation makes comparisons between studies and the building of theory particularly problematic. From her feminist perspective, it appears that some of the above examples fail to challenge existing myths about entrepreneurs, and thus serve to reinforce stereotypes. Far from being applicable to the experiences of real women and men, the term remains excessively narrow and biased.

As regards the emphasis on innovation, highlighted by many definitions, Lee-Gosselin and Grise (1990) suggest that research into women owner/manager - who by virtue of making atypical career choices are clearly innovators, regardless of the actual nature of the businesses they establish - forces us to review our understanding of this concept. New meanings are constructed when considering the contexts in which many business women operate. Equally, the notion of the entrepreneur as a risk-bearer has different (possibly more personal) connotations when applied to a woman establishing herself in business.

The concept of the entrepreneur as "founder" is central to some definitions, a concept rendered useless when one considers how in reality both men and women set themselves up in business: in partnerships; through buying or inheriting existing companies; in collectives. Arguing for a "flexible interpretation" of the term, Carter and Cannon (1992) included in their study women working in a wide variety of economic sectors, with different structures of ownership and a range of personal experiences.

As regards the aims of entrepreneurial activity, feminist scholars challenge the view that identifies profit and growth as essential to the very definition of entrepreneur (Lee-Gosselin and Grise,1990; Marlow and Strange, 1994). Instead they found that many women in business had quite different criteria for success - aiming to establish small, stable organisations. Once again, a consideration of the experiences of women owner/managers reveals the inadequacy of existing definitions.

With the incidence of female entrepreneurship on the increase, what the above illustrates is the need for new ways of thinking about the entrepreneur, for new meanings which more accurately reflect real life. Such a reconceptualisation is vital in the development of useful frameworks for understanding.

2.5.3 Theoretical Approaches to Entrepreneurship

As the diversity of interpretations of the term "entrepreneur" aptly illustrate, the literature on entrepreneurship is wide-ranging, encompassing a number of different disciplinary perspectives and theoretical orientations. In summarising current research, Stanworth and Gray (1991) suggest that analyses can be broadly classified into three principal categories: individual factors; situational or contextual factors; and socio-economic background factors. In the section that follows, these categories will be explored, with reference to key examples of each. In particular, the review will focus on the extent to which such perspectives facilitate an understanding of the experiences of women entrepreneurs.

Individual factors

A number of conceptual frameworks have been developed which focus, in different ways, on aspects of the entrepreneur's personality. Such approaches have gained wide (popular) acceptance; indeed they are the basis upon which everyday myths and stereotypes are constructed. Three approaches in particular will be examined: the personality traits approach, which seeks to identify the essential personal traits that distinguish the entrepreneur from other social groups; the psychodynamic approach, which examines the entrepreneurial personality from a psychoanalytic perspective; and a social psychological perspective which looks, not only at the entrepreneur's personality, but also at the social context in which the individual operates.

A traits approach

Significant research attention has been devoted to identifying key features of the entrepreneur's personality (for a review see Brockhaus, 1982). Among these "core" traits are:

- a strong need for achievement;
- leadership qualities;
- opportunity and goal orientation;
- risk-seeking and risk-taking;
- creativity and innovativeness; and
- an internal locus of control.

This approach, consistent with traits approaches to leadership more generally (Steinberg and Shapiro, 1982) has been widely criticised - for its lack of empirical evidence as well as its underlying assumptions. As regards the former, Brockhaus and Horwitz (1986) consider this approach, but find little to differentiate the successful entrepreneur from the successful business manager. They emphasise the dynamism of entrepreneurial processes, suggesting that as a business venture develops, the personal qualities needed to make this venture successful change. In their view, those traits identified as central to the successful entrepreneur must not be seen as fixed or static.

In terms of its underlying assumptions, Kao (1989) point to gender and cultural biases which render the approach over-general and stereotypical. Also, he takes issue with the "positive" nature of all the traits identified, and the tendency to portray the entrepreneur as "good". Likewise Chell (1985) raises questions about the concept of traits in relation to entrepreneurship. To what extent are these so-called traits learned or innate? At what point in time should they be measured? How enduring are they? How consistent are individuals in expressing these traits in a variety of situations? She suggests such an approach is "equivocal and inconclusive" (p. 47), and challenges the claim that there is any correlation between the assessment of the trait and actual behaviour.

A feminist perspective would take issue with the traits approach, both with the specific characteristics identified, and the approach more generally. First, as stated above, the theory is implicitly male-oriented - based on male examples and idealised images of successful men. In her critique of early theories of entrepreneurship, Stevenson (1990) cites a study which suggested that "entrepreneurship was a way of demonstrating maleness" (p. 440). Several important questions thus emerge. First, to what extent do these traits describe women business owner/managers? Second, if these are the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs, does it follow that if women do not embody these traits they will not be successful? Third, to what extent do women entrepreneurs themselves identify with the core traits identified by this approach? Finally, are those traits traditionally considered to be "female" irrelevant to the entrepreneur, as is suggested by their absence in this literature?

The above criticisms relate to the specific "constellation of traits" (Chell, 1985, p. 46) typically described as being characteristic of entrepreneurs. However, it is not only the traits themselves that feminists would find problematic, but also the approach more generally. Carter and Cannon (1988, 1992) highlight the futility of attempting to extract an individual from their social world; rather, they suggest that the two are inextricably linked. Many of the women in their 1988 study spoke of the relationship between their roles as wives, mothers and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, links with their local business communities proved vital to their experiences, and to the success of their ventures. On a more structural level, feminist theorists such as Harding (1987) maintain that in order to understand an individual's experiences, they must be situated within a wider context of gender, class and ethnicity. It is my view, therefore, that while a consideration of an entrepreneur's psychological traits may be illuminating, on its own, this approach is insufficient. Instead, to provide real insights into a woman's experience of entrepreneurship, these traits must be examined within the dynamic context of her social world.

A psychodynamic approach

A further psychological perspective to be considered is the psychodynamic approach. Here, early childhood experiences are said to mould adult personalities and patterns of

behaviour; thus the entrepreneurial personality is studied as the product of a particular kind of family background. Kets de Vries, a leading proponent of this perspective, sees the entrepreneur's family background as "more often than not filled with images of endured hardships" (1977, p. 45). These experiences leave the individual scarred, with "problems of self-esteem, insecurity and lack of confidence", and with "repressed aggressive wishes towards persons in control" (p. 46). According to Kets de Vries (1977; 1989), these problems are manifest in occupational settings, where the entrepreneur is unable to submit to figures of authority (an important distinction between the entrepreneur and the manager), and becomes rebellious and non-conformist. As a last resort, these troubled individuals strike out on their own.

Kets de Vries describes the entrepreneur as a social deviant, an individual who, because of a difficult past, fails to function in society's mainstream. Interestingly, in contrast to traits researchers who characteristically see the entrepreneur in glowing terms, the psychodynamic theorist paints an image of the entrepreneur as "aggressive and impulsive" (Chell, p. 44); as regards their business ventures, the entrepreneur is potentially destructive. What is apparent here is the value judgement implicit in both approaches; one perspective constructs the entrepreneur as positive, and the other as negative. Such dichotomies are used persistently as a way of making sense, of imposing some sort of order on a particular phenomenon (Stanley and Wise, 1993). I see the tendency to categorise and dichotomise in this way as particular unhelpful and limiting, contributing to the construction of stereotypical meanings.

The analysis of the entrepreneur as a social misfit has been widely criticised. Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) maintain that such models are without a sound empirical basis, and that they exaggerate the extent to which entrepreneurs differ from "normal" people. Furthermore, Chell (1987) suggests that what Kets de Vries describes as the entrepreneurial personality might well be applicable to a whole range of unfortunate people with troubled pasts.

In a study of successful women entrepreneurs in Canada, Belcourt (1990) introduces a gender dimension to Kets de Vries' analysis. She, like Kets de Vries, highlights confusing relationships with authority figures, a general distrust of the outside world, and

the entrepreneur's subsequent need to construct her own environment. In addition, Belcourt identifies the experience of an "unreliable male figure in childhood [usually an entrepreneurial father] as one which the female entrepreneur takes with her into the worlds of marriage and work" (p. 437). In the male world of the corporation, she does not fit in; she thus seeks business ownership as a way of dealing with her subordinate, outsider status. In her analysis, Belcourt situates a psychodynamic approach within a gender perspective, identifying patriarchy as a key structuring factor in a woman's experience, and locating her psychological analysis within this structure.

Psychological approaches in context

In response to psychological approaches of entrepreneurship which she finds partial and inadequate, Chell's (1987) takes as her starting point Mischel's concept of "person variables", "'the products of each individual's total history...that in turn regulate how new experiences affect him or her'" (Mischel, 1981, p. 345, cited in Chell, 1987, p. 48). Included in Chell's model are *competencies, encoding strategies and personal constructs*, and *expectancies*, and she illustrates how these can be applied to the entrepreneurial context. For example, as regards *encoding strategies and personal constructs*, she considers how the entrepreneur perceives their unique situation, and how this perception impacts on behaviour. Chell maintains that these person variables are crucial in understanding "how each person generates distinctive complex behaviour patterns in interaction with the conditions of his or her life" (p. 48-49).

As regards the adequacy of Chell's approach in shedding light on the experiences of women entrepreneurs, although she does not specifically address the question of gender (or other structural determinants), aspects of her context-based model could be useful. Her "person-variables" are based on diversity rather than homogeneity, and allow for wide variation, and she recognises the multi-faceted and ever-changing nature of entrepreneurial activity. Central to Chell's analysis is the concept of roles; it would be interesting to examine the ways in which women entrepreneurs negotiate their various roles, and how the assumption of particular roles enables them to make sense of the diverse situations which they invariably encounter.

Contextual and demographic factors

Although the psychological approaches outlined above have been most influential in terms of our commonsense understandings of the phenomenon, there are other important perspectives on entrepreneurship which merit attention. In particular, in addition to psychological approaches, Stanworth and Gray (1991) identify those studies which focus on a) the socio-economic background of the entrepreneur; and b) situational and contextual factors.

Socio-economic variables

Studies which focus on the entrepreneur's socio-economic background examine the propensity for an individual to become self-employed, looking in particular at structural factors such as gender, age, social class, ethnicity, marital status and education, and seeking to construct typologies of those most likely to establish their own businesses (see for example Meager, 1989; Curran and Burrows, 1988; Birley and Norburn, 1986). While Stanworth and Gray argue that the complexity of these factors make it impossible to make hard-and-fast predictions, the literature does suggest that certain factors do increase the likelihood of business ownership:

"that they are male; that they are either middle-aged or beyond formal retirement age; that they come from a family background within which either their mother or their father (and preferably both) were engaged in some sort of small business activity; that they are married; that they have carried out some sort of apprenticeship; and finally, that they have an ethnicity which originally derives from either the Indian sub-continent or the Mediterranean" (p. 17).

In my view, these approaches are problematic. My first criticism is methodological, and relates to the lack of consensus in the actual definition of self-employment, and the subsequent difficulty in amassing statistics and making claims about this diverse and ambiguous group of individuals, a problem discussed in section 2.1. The second criticism is more theoretical, and asks what value such typologies actually serve. In terms of the actual factors identified as important, such studies fall short of explaining

why this is so. For example, while the Labour Force Survey provides us with statistics about the rate of self-employment amongst widowed men (Meager, 1989, p. 13), it does not offer any insights into *why* widowhood seems to have this impact. As far as women are concerned, quite apart from the methodological questions about women's representation in such studies, my concern is that the typologies yielded offer powerful (negative) messages about women and self-employment, and could potentially serve to limit women's participation as owner/managers in the small firm sector.

Situation and context

In general, the psychological perspectives on entrepreneurship considered above (excluding Chell's model of person variables outlined above) tend to consider the issue of *context* only in so far as it impacts on the entrepreneurial personality. In contrast, Stanworth and Gray (1991) identify as a distinct group those studies which focus on the importance of situational and contextual factors in the experience of entrepreneurship. These perspectives typically seek to explore the ways in which issues such as: the socio-economic structure of a particular area; the influence of wider socio-economic issues on that area; and the dominant culture of the locality, impact on small business start-up and development (Birley, 1989; for a review see Goss, 1991). Hobbs' work on entrepreneurs in London's East End (1988; 1991) aptly illustrates the relationship between these three contextual dimensions, focusing in particular on the significance of the local culture in entrepreneurial processes, identities, and experiences. Whilst fascinating, both methodologically and empirically, Hobbs explores a very male, very macho world, and in terms of providing us with insights into the lifeworlds of East End business*women*, it has significant limitations.

Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) focus on the issue of context from a *network perspective*, outlining three key dimensions to such networks: density, reachability and centrality. Looking in particular at the experiences of ethnic minority groups in the United States, they argue, first, that entrepreneurial activity will be encouraged through the development of extensive social ties and links. Second, they claim that increased accessibility between people will facilitate the dissemination of vital information and resources. Finally, they stress the importance of 'weak ties', a range of diverse

acquaintances, with access to people in powerful positions (rather than a closely-knit group of friends) in establishing the most useful social networks. Although they fail to look specifically at the issue of gender, Aldrich and Zimmer's work begins to address key issues concerning culture and cultural fit, issues central to the experiences of women (Cassell and Walsh, 1994), and could therefore be an interesting dimension from which to explore the experiences of women entrepreneurs.

Integrated approaches

In addition to the studies outlined above which highlight a particular factor, issue, or perspective, there are theoretical frameworks which take a more integrated approach. Central to such positions is the view that although unitary perspectives provide certain insights into the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, in isolation their explanatory value remains limited. Instead, approaches are needed which seek to understand the subtle and complex ways in which these perspectives interact and, together, impact on the entrepreneurial experience.

Three examples in particular aptly illustrate this more integrated approach. Cooper (1981), seeks to explain the factors which contributed to an individual's decision to set up in business. First, *antecedent influences* relate to the personality and character of the entrepreneur, and include psychological traits as well socio-economic factors; family influences; educational choices; and previous career experiences. Second, Cooper highlights the importance of the *incubator organisation*. Here the entrepreneurial decision is considered as a product of existing situational factors, in particular, the organisation in which the entrepreneur had previously worked: its geographical location; the skills and knowledge acquired during the period of employment; the extent to which it provided entrepreneurial opportunities; and reasons for leaving. Finally, *environmental factors* focus on factors external to the individual and his or her organisation. The move to self-employment is thus seen as resulting from a particular social/economic/cultural context, both in terms of the immediate environment and more generally.

Likewise Carsud et. al. (1986) lament the fragmented nature of much of the work into entrepreneurship, and the tendency to group "entrepreneurs into broad, over-generalised categories" (p. 369). Their proposed "research paradigm" attempts to synthesise a hitherto disparate and somewhat incoherent literature. Their model starts with four "primary causal factors": psychological variables; personal/demographic variables; organisational/sociological variables; and situational/environmental variables. It is suggested that these broad groups of variables have a significant impact on "secondary predictor variables", such as the stage and nature of the business under examination. Together, these primary and secondary factors "have both a direct and indirect influence on various outcome measures of success" (p. 375). Significantly, unlike earlier, more unitary perspectives, Carsud et al do not define "success"; rather its meaning emerges as the outcome of the interaction between this broad spectrum of variables. →

These approaches have considerable potential. Both attempt to synthesise key structural determinants with individual circumstances. In particular, Cooper's emphasis on the importance of the "incubator organisation", in combination with a range of other influences, has clear relevance to this study. Second, both offer the possibility for diversity without being bland and over-general. Finally, these approaches are dynamic. Rather than building on hackneyed stereotypes, they seek to construct new, more relevant understandings. However, it is notable that neither Cooper nor Carsud et. al. mentions gender specifically, although it is a factor that quite clearly cuts across both models. Here again, the significance of gender as a key factor in the experience of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurial processes is unrecognised.

A further limitation is that although both approaches consider the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in terms of a number of intersecting factors, they do not attempt to examine an individual's experience as an entrepreneur within the context of their life more generally. Finally, in common with the entrepreneurship literature generally, these approaches fail to consider the subjective, interpretive dimension of experience. This issue will be discussed more fully in chapter 3 which follows. However, the key point here is that in its pursuit of an objective reality, this largely quantitative literature fails to

account for how entrepreneurs make sense of their experiences, and why. What is needed, therefore, is more qualitative research which provides insights into entrepreneurs' perceptions of their working lives.

Scase and Goffee's (1980) research into the lives of real small business owners poses an interesting contrast to the two studies noted above. Scase and Goffee sought to understand, not how entrepreneurs *should* behave, or what business start-up *should* be like, but how people who had actually started their own businesses experienced that process. Their study focuses on such issues as: motivation (and in particular its relationship with taxation); coping with the market; management in the small firm; business growth; and significantly, the role of the family and relationship between business owners' personal and professional lives. Goffee and Scase's work thus provides important insights into the lifeworlds of small business owner/managers. However, like those studies outlined above, it focuses on the experiences of men. It is significant that five years later, with their research into women entrepreneurs (1985) Goffee and Scase sought to redress this imbalance. This work is discussed below.

2.5.4 Studying Women Entrepreneurs

A critical examination of traditional definitions and theories of entrepreneurship reveals a persistent male bias from which the experiences of women are largely excluded. (A stereotypical notion of) male experience is taken as the norm; not only are women frequently absent from examples and case studies, but they are also marginalised/subordinated ideologically. This, in combination with a significant increase in the numbers of women embarking on entrepreneurial ventures, has drawn feminist scholars' attention to the subject.

The 1980's saw the emergence of several important studies into women entrepreneurs. Simpson (1991) suggests that, broadly speaking, such work can be examined in terms of three categories: (1) motivations to go into business (Watkins and Watkins;, 1984; Hisrich, 1986; Cannon et. al., 1988; Carter and Cannon, 1992; Cromie and Hayes, 1988; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990) (2) problems/barriers faced by women, at the start -up

and later on (Hisrich and Brush, 1983; Hisrich, 1986; Watkins and Watkins, 1984; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990)); and (3) typologies of female entrepreneurship (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Cromie and Hayes, 1988; Cannon et. al., 1988; Carter and Cannon, 1992). The section that follows considers the findings of three noteworthy British studies, and reviews the development of the literature in the 1990's. Finally, it focuses on this study, outlining the ways in which it might contribute to the development of this literature.

A 'woman's business'

Comparing and contrasting the backgrounds and experiences of fifty-eight female and forty-three male entrepreneurs, Watkins and Watkins (1984) found that the women in their sample differed widely from their male counterparts in terms of marital status, educational background and work experience. They argue in particular that a general lack of relevant work experience tends to constrain women's "business-choice decision", possibly forcing them into "stereotypically female businesses". Whereas the men in their study were typically well-prepared for the move from employment to self-employment, "little or nothing in [the women's] educational and professional backgrounds had prepared the women interviewed for running an independent business" (p. 286). Watkins and Watkins identified a certain disjuncture between women's strong desire for what they perceived as the autonomy and independence of small business ownership, and the extent to which their prior training and experience had prepared them for such a venture. They suggest that this tension may have led women to seek out business sectors where requirements for entry are low, and where managerial requirements are not immediately essential, ie. "female-type"; businesses: "thus the choice of business can be seen in terms of high motivation to immediate independence tempered by economic rationality rather than a conscious desire to operate a 'female-type' business" (p. 286). Watkins and Watkins concluded that as a consequence, women entrepreneurs take greater risks than their male counterparts.

A typology of entrepreneurs

Goffee and Scase (1985), noted in the previous section, gathered qualitative data from fifty-four respondents from which they developed a typology of women entrepreneurs,

based on two factors: (a) their relative attachment to entrepreneurial ideals (concepts of independence and individualism) and (b) the extent to which the women were willing to accept conventional gender roles. Using this as a framework, from their data they identified four types of women entrepreneurs. The *conventionals* were predominantly working-class women with fragmented employment histories who were forced into self-employment by virtue of economic necessity. Such women were committed both to entrepreneurial ideals and conventional gender roles. The *innovators*, believing strongly in entrepreneurial ideals but much less so in conventional gender roles, were largely professional women, who had achieved some career success but had chosen self-employment as a reaction against (or solution to) what they saw as restricted prospects. With little attachment to entrepreneurial ideals, but adhering to conventional gender roles, *domestic* entrepreneurs prioritised their domestic responsibilities, fitting their business in around these duties when possible. Finally, *radical* entrepreneurs, frequently involved in collective ventures, political in nature and aiming to promote women's interests, held little attachment to either entrepreneurial ideals or conventional gender roles.

This typology has been criticised on several counts. Allen and Truman (1988) question their theoretical framework. First they take issue with the concept of "attachment to entrepreneurial ideals", as this notion presupposes a choice that in reality is not available to a large number of women. Secondly, Allen and Truman argue that implicit in the notion of "attachment to conventional gender roles" is an assumption that women's experience of subordination is uniform, thus failing to account for the diversity of women as a social group.

Heterogeneity and change

Canno et. al. (1988) and Carter and Cannon (1992) question the way in which Goffee and Scase's typology represents small business ownership, and indeed the small business owners themselves, as static and unchanging. "The sector is inherently turbulent. Ventures are started, grow, decline, face change and develop. This ferment calls for many and varying behaviours and attitudes among entrepreneurs". (Carter and Cannon, 1992, p. 10). Their theoretical framework, based on a wide-ranging study of sixty

business owners in London, Nottingham and Glasgow, takes as its starting point the notions of heterogeneity and change. They identified five "ideal types" of women entrepreneurs. *Drifters* were typically young women, opting for self-employment as a response to unemployment. *Young achievers* were aspiring, generally well-educated women who used training as a way of making up for their limited experience. The *achievers*, similar to the young achievers in attitudes and values, were somewhat older and had considerable relevant work experience. While some achievers had children, others had no intention of having a family. In contrast, the *returners* were seen as those women who chose self-employment as a route back into economic activity after a career break. Although their businesses tended to be organised around domestic responsibilities, Carter and Cannon found that most of these women were keen to see their businesses develop and grow. Lastly, *traditionalists* were typically older (forty-five plus) women who had always worked in family owned and managed businesses. Coming from families where self-employment was the norm, such women had limited, if any, experience of employment. What Carter and Cannon stress, however, is the flexibility of these categories, and the essential dynamism and variety of small business ownership.

In the British context, these three exploratory studies set a broad agenda for further research into the lives of women entrepreneurs. Although in general, academic work into this area still remains sparse and fragmented, several recent feminist contributions deserve mention. In one very interesting collection of essays (Allen and Truman, 1993a), topics as wide-ranging as women entrepreneurs in rural areas (Jones, 1993); businesswomen in developing countries (Epstein, 1993); EEC initiatives on women's enterprise (Turner, 1993) and business training and advice (Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993; Truman, 1993) are examined. What emerges is a picture characterised by both diversity and commonality, fundamental to which is the notion of gender as a key factor in the experiences of women entrepreneurs. Several important themes recur throughout this collection, including women's position in the labour market, sex role socialisation, family background and educational experience. In addition, more immediate questions about, for example, domestic roles and relationships, the role of social and professional networks, obstacles to setting up on one's own and women's experiences of support agencies and training initiatives are explored. This collection builds on Marlow and Strange's article (1994) which considers "business success" and what constitutes such

success for women entrepreneurs. This discussion is set within the context of debates on women and the labour market, arguing that it is women's particular (disadvantaged) position which leads them into self-employment.

2.5.5 Summary

This section of the literature review examined the literature on entrepreneurship. Taking as its starting point the ambiguity of the term entrepreneur itself, it examined the various ways in which it is has been defined and the adequacy of such definitions. Next, it considered existing perspectives on entrepreneurship, looking first at traditional, unitary approaches, and moving on to more integrated, interdisciplinary frameworks for understanding. Notwithstanding the value of these emerging approaches, it was argued that the entrepreneurship literature remained largely androcentric, failing to account for the experiences of women (and, no doubt, of many men). At the same time, it was suggested that the literature would be further enhanced by more qualitative research into how entrepreneurs themselves experience and make sense of their working lives.

This qualitative study of women who have left middle/senior positions within organisations and set up their own businesses will contribute to what is currently known about women entrepreneurs, and provide insights into developing feminist perspectives. The perspective of women with previous organisational experience provides a new lens through which to examine women's experiences of self-employment, thus enriching our understandings of the phenomenon. At the same time, considering the experience of entrepreneurship in the context of women's lives more generally, examining the relationship between women's personal and professional lives, and between structural and agentic levels of experience, the study will further enhance emerging holistic perspectives.

2.6 Conclusion

This review has examined five separate, but related literatures: women in the labour market; the culture of enterprise; career theory; "corporate flight" and entrepreneurship. As well as outlining the major contributions and considering recent developments in each, the review considered the extent to which the respective literatures serve to illuminate the experiences of women in their move from employment to self-employment.

In addition to the specific issues raised in the previous sections, a number of methodological points emerge as relevant to this study. In particular:

1. *The importance of a qualitative approach.* As suggested above, our understanding of self-employment and the small business sector depends not only on an appreciation of economic and organisational *structures*, but also how these structures are *experienced* and *perceived* by the individuals working in and around them. However, in so far as this interpretive perspective is lacking in much of the existing work on entrepreneurship in particular, an emphasis on how women *make sense of* their move from employment to self-employment will make an important contribution.

2. *An emphasis on the mutuality of structure and agency.* In contrast to perspectives which serve to dichotomise structure and agency, the theoretical frameworks which were described as most useful and relevant to this study examine the interaction between wider organisational, social and economic structures and individual thought and action. For example, Granger et. al.'s model for classifying career types (1995), and Nicholson and West's transition cycle (1988) were seen as particularly promising. This study will seek to develop theoretical understandings based on the relationship between these two dimensions of experience.

3. *The importance of a holistic approach.* Such an approach will involve both an interdisciplinary perspective, and a consideration of women's careers in the context of their lives more generally. As regards the first point, the review argued that

unidisciplinary research, while providing deep insights into certain aspects of experience, in general fail to account for the complexity of social life. Thus, in seeking to construct more useful theory, this study will draw on a range of disciplinary perspectives. At the same time, an individual's professional life does not exist in isolation, but in a dynamic social context. A consideration of the complex (and sometimes conflictual) relationship between a woman's professional and personal lives will be central to an understanding of her move from employment to self-employment.

4. *A consideration of gender as a key factor in a women's career experience.* Underpinning this review is an emphasis on the centrality of gender in a woman's experience of work. Indeed, a major criticism of much of the literature on entrepreneurship and careers in particular is the extent to which it has rendered women invisible. In challenging the stereotypical assumptions upon which traditional theories are based, and in focusing on the issue of gender as problematic, this study aims to construct new understandings which are not only more relevant to women's lives, but also to the lives of many men.

These issues will be addressed and more fully developed in the methodology chapter which follows.

2.6.1 Research Aims and Emerging Themes

To summarise, the aims of the research are:

1. First, to contribute new empirical data to a previously under-researched area;

2. Second, to develop a theoretical understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women who leave their positions within organisations and set up their own businesses.

Having considered the literature, the following broad themes can be identified as central to this study:

- Respondents' organisational experiences and their decisions to leave;
- The decision to become self-employed;
- The experience of self-employment;
- The significance of families and other social networks;
- The extent to which respondents see themselves as entrepreneurs.

The research methodology, designed to facilitate the investigation of these themes, is detailed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Section 3.1 provides a brief overview of the qualitative, interpretive approach taken in this study. Section 3.2 outlines the relevance of a feminist perspective, detailing the typical aspects of such a perspective, and signalling key debates within feminist theory which serve to inform this study. Section 3.3 considers qualitative interviewing as a research approach, while section 3.4 focuses on the specific processes of sampling, data collection and data analysis. Section 3.5 summarises the methodology, while section 3.6 introduces the research questions to be addressed in the analysis which follows.

3.1 Taking a Qualitative Approach

This study will be exploratory in nature. In addition to "mapping the field", and setting up a broad agenda for research into women entrepreneurs, I aim to focus specifically on the experiences and perceptions of women who leave positions within organisations and set up their own businesses. I am interested in examining the ways in which such women explain and make sense of their transition from employment to self-employment. In so far as my goal is discovery, my primary interest is not quantification or hypothesis-testing - I am not aiming to uncover some objective reality. Instead, I intend to collect rich, detailed data from a selected number of individuals which, taken together, will be the foundation upon which theoretical frameworks for understanding can be constructed. In this sense, theory development will be grounded in and inseparable from the data from which it emerges.

Most broadly, my methodology can be described as qualitative. In contrast to the traditional scientific view that there exists an objective reality which positivist methods, rigorously applied, can reveal, a qualitative approach is based on the interpretive notion that "social life emerges from the shared creativity of individuals" (Cassell and Symon, 1994, p. 4), seeking explanations "within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 28). Thus qualitative researchers are

"characteristically concerned in their research with attempting to accurately describe, decode and interpret the precise meanings to persons of phenomena occurring in their normal social contexts" (Fryer, 1991, p. 3).

Several important points emerge here. First is the issue of subjectivity. Whereas a positivist perspective, aiming for objectivity, sees subjective research as tainted and lacking in rigour, the elucidation of subjective meanings is at the very heart of qualitative research (Cassell and Symon, 1994; Reason and Rowen, 1981; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This subjectivity is fundamental, not only on the level of epistemology, but methodologically at every stage of the research process, from the identification of the research questions, to the processes of data collection and analysis, and finally to dissemination (Hagan, 1986).

Second, central to this focus on interpretation is the process of sense-making (Garfinkel, 1967; Starbuck and Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995): an interest in how individuals "construct what they construct, why, and with what effects" (Weick, 1995, p. 4). This process, argues Weick, is grounded in the construction of identity, and is at once individual, and social. It is also based on retrospection, on the notion that "people can know that they are doing after they have done it" (p. 24). Thus, research into sense-making does not aim to reveal the nature of "truth", but to provide insights into the conceptual frameworks that people construct which enable them "to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict" (Weick, 1995, p. 4). In short, it seeks to provide insights into the ways in which people, over time, construct their realities.

Third, unlike an objectivist stance which sees "truth" as single and unseamed, apparently existing above and beyond its context, qualitative research sees social life and its context, agency and structure, as inextricably linked: "the production and reproduction of social institutions across time and space is accomplished through the 'essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices' (Giddens, 1979, p. 5). In this sense, the social (political/economic/cultural) worlds in which an individual is located must be recognised not merely as aspects of *context* (important but tangential), but as central and

fundamental to that individual's "lifeworld" (Giorgi, 1970). This focus on holistic understanding is central to a qualitative perspective.

Fourth, the emphasis placed by qualitative research on subjectivity and its interest in uncovering and understanding people's subjective meanings leads to relationships between the researcher, the respondent and the project, based not on neutrality and rigidly demarcated roles, but on participation, co-operation and a recognition of the essential "human-ness" of the research process: "the idea of a balanced, non-involved encounter with another person is based on a false conception of what human interaction is like" (Hagan, 1986, p. 352). Thus within a qualitative framework the respondent, far from being "objectified", is seen as active and involved. This point will be further developed in the section on feminist research.

Finally, in so far as the social world, the subject of social research, is understood as "active" and "dynamic", what is needed is an approach that can accommodate movement and change. Cassell and Symon maintain that qualitative methods allow such flexibility: "Thus the responsiveness to the individual's... conceptualisations of themselves is also related to a willingness to formulate new hypotheses and alter the old ones as the research progresses, in the light of emerging insights' (Cassell and Symon, 1994, p. 7). Here Hammersley and Atkinson's notion of "progressive focusing", and their "funnel" metaphor are particularly illuminating:

"ethnographic research should have a characteristic 'funnel' structure, being progressively focused over its course. Over time the research problem needs to be developed or transformed, and eventually its scope is clarified and delimited, and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about; and not uncommonly it turns out to be about something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems" (1983, p. 206).

This has certainly proved to be the case in this study, and will be discussed in greater detail in sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4.

Broadly speaking, it could be argued that my approach is **inductive**, and involves "moving from the 'plane' of observation of the empirical world to the construction of explanations and theories about what has been observed" (Gill and Johnson, 1991, p. 33). However, in spite of neatly delineated textbook definitions of "induction" and "deduction", at times it can be difficult to disentangle the two processes. Indeed the contradiction raised by Glaser and Strauss in their introduction to grounded theory, that "the researcher does not approach reality as a tabula rasa" (1967, p. 3) has particular resonance. As regards my research, I see the processes of induction and deduction as working in concert: whereas in the early stages I "map" the field in a searching, open way, as the project develops I become progressively focused, "testing" emerging theoretical insights, probing for inconsistency and exploring ambiguity, in order to produce rigorous and useful theoretical frameworks for understanding.

3.2 The Case for a Feminist Perspective

Because the world of the entrepreneur is defined very much in male terms, both on the level of commonsense and in the academic literature, I feel that adopting a broadly feminist approach is particularly appropriate. What this perspective should provide is a) access to and analyses of the lifeworlds of women entrepreneurs which have been largely ignored thus far, and b) a critique of the male biases in many existing accounts of entrepreneurship.

3.2.1 What is Feminist Research?

The question "What is feminist research?" has generated fascinating, often passionate, debate. In attempting to answer this question, it is important at the outset to stress that the term "feminist" should not be understood as monolithic. Just as the category "woman" encompasses a vast array of experiences and lifeworlds, so too the term "feminist" conceals wide variations and, frequently, contradictions, both theoretical and, on a more concrete level, in terms of actual research method and techniques (Reinharz, 1992). This, clearly, makes it very difficult to categorise feminist research in any kind of simple or concise way. In this section I will consider a formulation of feminism which I feel will be most useful in providing a framework for understanding the main

characteristics of my research process, and for action. This will include both aspects which are uniquely feminist, and those which feminists share with other social scientists. Following this focus on epistemological and methodological issues I will address, more concretely, the question of method - on how precisely I plan to gather my data, and my approach to data analysis.

Gender: A key explanatory variable

A focus on gender as a key explanatory variable in a person's life experience is a central feature of feminist research. Such a perspective takes as its starting point the notion that social relations and an individual's experiences in the world are structured by their social position, in particular, by their relationship to power. Society, in this view, is patriarchal - defined in male terms and structured around the experiences, interests and goals of men. In this view, women are oppressed, both materially and ideologically.

The centrality of gender within feminist research has been challenged by social scientists sceptical of the whole idea of feminist methodology. Hammersley (1992) argues that in many cases other factors, such as ethnicity and class, may be equally, if not more significant, and suggests that the privileging of gender may obscure other important issues. Although within this chapter I am not able to consider this debate in detail, it is important to mention, first, that feminist research does not claim that gender is the most or the only important variable, nor does it claim that gender exists in some sort of vacuum, isolated from all other factors in a person's life experience. Indeed, it is the diverse ways in which these factors interact with and are mediated by one another that is at the very heart of feminist inquiry (Gelsthorpe, 1992).

In addition, I would argue that social research is never "gender-neutral", that research which does not consider gender will ultimately reflect patriarchal beliefs and values. Patai (1984) stresses the importance of acknowledging the gendered nature of social science research, urging us to "start to treat the many areas of research that involve men and men's activities in terms of men's gender identity...We must cease to accept the male as the human norm" (p.184).

If we accept the case for the consideration of gender as a key determining variable, then the question we must address is: "What does it mean to consider gender in this way?" A central focus on gender has several important implications for the research process, raising issues about:

- who produces feminist research, about what and whom;
- the role of the researcher;
- the relationship between the researcher and her subject matter;
- the purpose of the research.

Who produces feminist research?

Questions about who carries out feminist research, who and what feminist research is about and who it is for are vigorously debated within the literature on feminist methodology. At the centre of this debate are basic epistemological problems about where knowledge comes from and who can be a knower. On the one hand, feminist standpoint theorists argue that because of their different and unequal social positions, men and women do not have access to the same knowledge - that men's structural and ideological dominance prevents them from producing "reliable knowledge claims" (Harding, 1987, p. 183). Located at the fringes and subordinated to pervasive male cultures, this view maintains that women have access to two worlds, and are in a unique position to understand the implications of both.

On the other hand, Ramazanoglu (1992) maintains that the issue is not that only women can honestly claim knowledge, but that knowledge can be produced from different perspectives, and that feminist methodologies have given us ways of "accessing these voices", of making them apparent. In this view, what is important is an understanding of gender and an awareness of the material and ideological filters through which one is looking and speaking.

The debate on how we can justify claims to knowledge has informed feminist thinking on the questions identified above. As regards the first, 'Who can do feminist research?', the answer clearly depends in part on where you stand in this debate: if you support the view that women have a "truer understanding of reality" than men, this will obviously

have implications for who you think should be doing feminist research (or any research, for that matter!). In contrast, others maintain that men can and do make important contributions to feminist research. In this view what is important is that the gender of the researcher, and its implications, must be acknowledged as an important factor in the research process, and must be made explicit.

The subject matter of feminist research

A consideration of the researcher leads to a focus on her subject matter. Here again, the feminist focus on gender has implications for the questions feminist researchers ask and the contexts they study. Feminists take issue with social science research whose subject matter reflects male interests and perspectives. In contrast, feminist approaches start with issues that are relevant to women, with women's definitions and experiences.

The role of the researcher

I have already noted the need to consider the gender of the researcher and its implications as a central feature of feminist practice. This issue raises questions about the role of the researcher and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and her project. In contrast to traditional, positivist approaches to social research which strive for a sort of objective neutrality, feminists (together with some other social scientists working qualitatively - see for example Reason and Rowan, 1981; Cassell and Symon, 1994) place a great emphasis on participation and personal investment.

The concept of "reflexive research", a consideration of the position of the self vis-à-vis the phenomenon under investigation, and an appreciation of the effects of the researcher on their research, is crucial to many social science perspectives (see for example Cassell and Symon (1994), Gill and Johnson (1991), Reason (1988) , Hagan (1986)), and to feminism (see Harding (1987), Stanley and Wise (1993), Reinharz (1992), Roberts (1980)). Some writers, including many feminists, suggest that not only is reflexive research about making the role of the researcher explicit, but it also is based on the researcher's *identification* with her subject matter. Reason (1988) argues that in so far

as the researcher is an inextricable part of the research, failure to acknowledge this relationship results in approaches which are piecemeal, fragmented and inadequate.

Relationships in the research process

The concept of reflexive research and a view of the research process as subjective lead to a consideration of the relationship between the researcher and the respondent. Ideas about this fundamental relationship are central to feminist research processes. These ideas are based on feminism's commitment to equality and challenge to exploitation and oppression, and on its insistence on participation. A focus on this relationship is not unique to feminism - here again, other social science approaches also see this relationship as critical (see for example Hagan, 1986). However, what is different about feminism is its particular interest in the gender dimension of this relationship.

Feminist research challenges rigid dichotomies between the "researcher" and the "researched", and sees the "'objects' of research as 'subjects' in their own right as much as researchers are subjects of theirs" (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p. 200). An attempt to establish relationships based on equality is fundamental to feminist approaches. Equality within the research relationship raises issues about agenda setting. Unlike structured interviews, the "guided discussions" preferred by many feminist researchers give the respondent the opportunity to "tell her story"; indeed, these stories in which women reveal their "lifeworlds" are often at the very heart of feminist research. This is not to suggest that feminists achieve total equality in the research relationship - what is important is their recognition of the problematic issues of power and control within the research relationship, and their commitment to grapple with the contradictions that such issues raise.

A discussion of what equality means in the research relationship also raises questions about who does the asking and who does the telling. Oakley (1981) considers whether a researcher should ever answer questions, and the issue of researcher self-disclosure. Oakley stresses the moral imperative in answering respondents' questions. Furthermore, on a practical level, she maintains that a relationship between a researcher and respondent which is based on mutual respect and trust, and in which a respondent feels

able to ask questions as well as answer them, will ultimately yield the richest insights (see also Reinharz, 1992).

Similarly, in her studies of playgroup mothers and clergy wives Finch (1984) established close, trusting relationships with her respondents. While on one hand Finch firmly believes in the value of such relationships, both on ideological and practical grounds, she also recognises the ethical dilemmas they pose. Although it could be argued that the reflexive interview is more acceptable morally than traditional approaches, in so far as it transcends conventional boundaries, it is potentially vulnerable to corruption and misuse.

Feminist research and the transformation of gender relations

A central focus on gender concerns issues of oppression and exploitation; in exploring and explaining such issues, feminist research aims to "'challenge and ultimately overturn traditional views of women, men and human society along with the social structures that both legitimise and perpetuate these views." (Patai, 1984, p177.) This section considers the idea of research as a political activity.

Social research, seeking to understand, explain and change human society and social relations is essentially a political activity; oriented towards the needs and interests of particular social groups, it is never value-neutral (Finch, 1981). Ramazanoglu (1992) maintains that "there is no alternative to political commitment in feminist or any other ways of knowing. Since knowing is a political process, so knowledge is intrinsically political." (p 210). What feminist research does, unlike many other approaches, is to make its political aims explicit.

The goal of social change, of challenging exploitation and promoting emancipation informs and influences feminist research at every step: from the generation of an idea and articulation of research questions, to the reading of the literature, the consideration of methodology, the processes of data collection, analysis and, finally, dissemination. As regards my own research on women entrepreneurs, I intend to re-examine and re-conceptualise traditional approaches to entrepreneurship in light of women's experiences, taking issue with the view that such approaches are "gender-free" and highlighting the

implicit and insidious androcentricity of such approaches. Ultimately, I intend to make the lifeworlds of women entrepreneurs more visible, and on a theoretical level to provide more adequate frameworks for understanding these worlds. Seeking to raise the profile of a shadowy group and to challenge the status quo, I see these aims as political.

3.2.2 Feminism and Post-modernism

Although a detailed analysis of the range of feminist perspectives is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter, the debate between feminism and post-modernism is worthy of note: first, because it is currently a topic of vigorous debate, and thus is central to the theoretical context in which this study was undertaken; and second, because it raises important epistemological issues which in my mind serve to elucidate certain key aspects of feminist methodology.

Just as there are many different "feminisms", so too theorists make sense of and theorise postmodernism in a variety of (sometimes contradictory) ways.

*"Just as postmodernism can be summarised or even 'unified' as assault on unity (Power, 1990), so quite understandably there can be no one postmodernism. At the very least there is the tension between post-**modernism** and postmodern-**ism**. The term is used in a plurality of ways, often drawing on and citing one or more of the several 'key figures' 'male heroes', usually from the shortlist... of Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, Eco" (Hearn and Parkin, 1993, pp. 151-152)*

Clearly, then, deciphering the relationship between postmodernism and feminism is no easy task! The debate typically focuses on the extent to which postmodernism and feminism can be seen as compatible. After briefly outlining the key positions in relation to this issue, I will consider the significance of the debate generally for this study.

It has been argued that, indeed, the two movements have a great deal in common. Hekman (1990) maintains that in so far as both are radical movements which call into question the fundamental principles of modernism, they should be seen as allies. In particular, she points to the rejection, implicit in both postmodernism and feminism, of

Enlightenment epistemology, and its principles of dualism. At the same time, both take issue with a hierarchical view of knowledge which privileges a scientific paradigm, promoting instead a view of knowledge as diverse, and socially constructed.

In Hekman's view, the strength of postmodernism is its challenge to the "metanarratives" of modernism, to absolutism and structural determinism. Where standard feminist accounts have been criticised for being "quasi-essentialist" and "quasi-universalist" in their approach (McLennan, 1995, p. 398), for their failure to acknowledge the category "woman" as itself diverse and multi-faceted, postmodernism's emphasis on difference and interpretation is potentially very powerful. Likewise, Wearing (1994) suggests that it is only through such an approach that we can begin to deconstruct the categories of "woman" and "man", "in order to resist, subvert and transform inferiorised subjectivities" (p. 1). However the relationship between feminism and postmodernism must not be seen as "one-way", but as mutually enriching. While Hekman supports the postmodernism's critique of Enlightenment dualisms, she argues that feminism "can complete this critique [of postmodernism] by defining those dualisms as gendered" (p. 8).

Other theorists, however, have questioned the compatibility of feminism and postmodernism. It has been suggested that although postmodernism, and in particular Foucault's analysis of power, knowledge and resistance, could provide a very useful perspective for understanding gender and oppression, it is frequently not used in that way. Instead, postmodernism has been used to justify theoretical neglect of such issues. Indeed, Hearn and Parkin (1993) argue that:

"The debates around the move from modernism to the postmodernist view... seem to be an epistemological leap over issues such as those around feminism and other oppressions, still not accommodated and analysed within the grand narratives of modernism. It is as if the small amount of progress made can now be leapt over by stating we are in a postfeminist, poststructuralist, postmodernist era which can assume that theorising and political change has been accomplished for and by various categories of people suffering oppression. A further dimension of power over oppressed groups is the power to control theory. If the abolition of structural analyses leads to the apparent abolition of categories of people it also de-politicises issues which have not

yet been fully politicised The danger is in assuming these issues of oppression have been dealt with rather than ignored or leapt over as theory moves on." (p. 161).

Oppression, in this sense, is associated with modernism; having arrived in a postmodernist era, inequality and gender have slipped down, or off the agenda (see also Hartsock, 1990 and Holmwood, 1995).

Other theorists question what is left for feminism if it relinquishes its structural analysis, if it "gives up on a hierarchy of theory" (McLennan, 1995, p. 393). In this sense, McLennan argues that perhaps feminism is indeed an essentially modernist project, that its dispersal into multiple realities and competing discourses will result in its failure as a political movement:

"epistemological issues and aspirations to cross-contextual objectivity prove to be obdurate matters which can not be dismissively consigned to a boring modernist past. This is because matters of action, knowledge, and subjecthood remain indispensable to all politically-inspired theories" (p. 401).

Likewise, Walby maintains that postmodernism has "gone too far" in fragmenting the concepts of sex, "race", gender and class, and dismissing meta-theories of capitalism and patriarchy (1992). While she recognises the problems that such grand theories have in dealing with diversity and change, she insists that such structures should not be categorically abandoned. Instead, she suggests that such problems can be solved by more complex theorising, which takes into account diversity, change, and a multiplicity of causal factors. Walby maintains that the "ability to theorise different forms of patriarchy is absolutely necessary to avoid the problems of simple reductionism and of essentialism" (p. 36).

At the heart of this debate on the relationship between feminism and postmodernism are problems about how to adequately theorise power, and about feminism's political agenda. While some theorists argue that it is within a postmodernist framework that such issues can be most powerfully addressed, others maintain that such a framework will only result in their fragmentation, and ultimate disappearance. While I find this debate fascinating, it

is not within the scope of this thesis to explore it further, nor do I see it as within my remit to commit myself to a particular position within it. As far as this study is concerned, however, the debate raises important questions about the relationship between the individual and her wider social context: her family, her organisation, her occupational sector, and the society in which she lives more generally. In sections 2.6 and 3.1 I briefly referred to the relationship between structural and agentic dimensions of experience, an issue which re-emerges in this discussion of feminism and post-modernism.

"It is frequently argued that inequalities may be masked by ideologies which, internalised by actors, serve the reproduction of their disadvantage. Thus, a central argument of critical social theory... is that an adequate social science must combine an emphasis upon the 'internal', subjective meanings of actors with an 'external' appreciation of the operation of large-scale social processes, in terms other than those of actors' meanings" (Holmwood, 1995, p. 420).

"All women may currently occupy the position 'women'... but they do not occupy it in the same way" (Wearing, p. 6).

Implicit in this relationship between structure and agency are issues concerning power, resistance, and about the potential for political action and change. I am interested in exploring how these issues are articulated in the (diverse) accounts of the women in this study.

3.3 The Qualitative Research Interview

"[Qualitative interviews] provide the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply, to uncover new clues, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts... that are based on personal experience." (Whyte, 1982, p. 107).

Whereas the previous section focused on methodological and epistemological issues, this section, more practically, concerns questions of *method*. The principal method used in

this study is the qualitative interview. Following a brief discussion of its typical characteristics, its appropriateness for feminist research, and the issues of reliability and validity, the section will turn to this study, focusing specifically on the processes of sampling, data collection and data analysis.

Qualitative interviews, also known as "depth", "exploratory", "semi-structured" and "unstructured" interviews (King, 1994, p. 14) are used to explore the ways in which particular events, situations and processes are experienced and perceived by the individuals involved. Their purpose, according to Kvale, "is to gather descriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1983, p. 174). In their focus on exploring subjective meanings, rather than uncovering some objective "reality", and their use of an "interview guide" rather than a "schedule", they can be differentiated from other types of research interviews, such as *structured interviews* (typically used in survey research), and *structured, open-response interviews* (using a schedule, but less rigidly and with more "open" questions) (King, 1994, pp. 15-16). At the same time, in so far as they can stand alone, not always used in conjunction with observation, they can be differentiated from traditional ethnography.

Qualitative interviews often vary widely in terms of both their foci, and practical considerations such as location, timing and recording techniques (King, 1994; Reinharz, 1992). However, notwithstanding these significant differences, King identifies a number of characteristics which qualitative interviews share. First, they have a relatively low degree of structure, with a high proportion of open, searching questions. Second, they tend to explore particular situations which are relevant to the respondent, rather than dealing in the world of abstractions and generalisations. Finally, central to the qualitative interview are issues concerning the relationship between the interviewer and the respondents. As suggested in sections 3.1 and 3.2 above, whereas in survey research the individual respondent is often seen as a "subject", something from which to extract information, and the interviewer as neutral and uninvolved, within the qualitative interview the relationship between the researcher and the respondent is considered a vital part of the process.

3.3.1 Qualitative Interviewing and Feminist Approaches

As suggested in section 3.2, the reciprocity described above is central to feminist approaches. Indeed, the qualitative interview has been described as "the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives" (Graham, 1984, p. 112).

Contrasting the difference between survey research and more qualitative techniques, Sexton maintains that:

"Unfortunately, the abundance of statistics and generalisations about 'work and its discontents' gives us little real understanding of how women lead their daily work lives, experience their jobs, or perceive work-related issues. Personal documents are needed, individual and group portraits of workers, slices of real working life, statements by the women themselves - the handwoven fabric of their daily work lives" (Sexton, 1982, p. 5).

Feminists, argues Reinharz (1992) find such techniques valuable in so far as they provide insights into respondents' perspectives, and give respondents the opportunity to speak in their own words. This is particularly relevant in the case of women entrepreneurs who, as suggested in the literature review, have been largely silenced or ignored, in both theoretical debates as well as more popular fora. Linked with this is the issue of control, described above, and the extent to which the qualitative interview challenges traditional power relationships in the interview process, constructing the respondent as an active-meaning maker, rather than as a subject of study. At the same time feminists (and no doubt other social researchers) appreciate the flexibility afforded by the qualitative interview. This has been particularly important in this study, where the method has given me the freedom to introduce new questions and to follow up important issues as they emerge. Far from masking diversity, the qualitative interview has provided me with a way of elucidating the richness and complexity of the sample.

3.3.2 Reliability and Validity

Central to debates on quantitative methods are issues concerning reliability and validity; while such issues are equally important in the qualitative context, the precise ways in which reliability and validity are assessed differ from one research context to the other.

Reliability

As regards reliability, King (1994) argues that unlike quantitative research which seeks to ensure that the measures used by one researcher will produce similar results when administered by a different researcher, in qualitative research "the interviewer's sensitivity to 'subjective' aspects of his or her relationship with the interviewee is an essential part of the research process" (p. 31).

Reliability, in the qualitative context, concerns the researcher's interpretation of the data, and the extent to which this interpretation reflects what it was that the respondent was trying to say. King suggests that reliability can be assured, first, if researchers explicitly acknowledge their prejudices and assumptions, and "make a conscious effort to set these aside. They should allow themselves to be surprised by the findings" (p. 31). Furthermore, during the coding stage, inter-rater comparisons can be used to avoid idiosyncratic responses. Likewise Fisher et. al. (1986) extol the virtues of co-research in ensuring reliability in qualitative research. I certainly see the value of collaborative research, but am unsure of its suitability for PhD research, which is by its very nature a solitary activity. As a PhD student I find discussion and consultation with supervisors as well as other colleagues extremely useful, and seek it wherever possible. However, more formalised collaboration with colleagues, in the sense described by King, and others, is more difficult.

On the other hand, what *is* possible is to check on the accuracy of one's understandings with the respondents themselves. I would argue that during the interview itself it is important that the researcher explore key concepts and ideas to avoid making incorrect assumptions about the respondent's meanings. For example, as will be explained in subsequent chapters, respondents in this study made frequent reference to the terms

"entrepreneur"; "freedom"; independence" and "support". However, what became obvious after just a few interviews was that they were using these terms in very different ways. Indeed, in the words of one respondent:

"Laura [her business partner, who I also interviewed] and I both talk about freedom and control. But what we mean by freedom and control is completely different" (Personnel officer to training/development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

This was an illuminating comment, drawing my attention to the diversity in respondents' understandings, and the extent to which I had assumed a consensus. At the same time I realised that listening to women's accounts, I was interpreting their meanings through my own conceptual (ideological) lens. Fortunately this was recognised quite early on in the process of data collection, and I was able to approach subsequent interviews with greater awareness and insight.

Validity

As regards the issue of validity, King (1994) explains that, just as in quantitative research where "a valid instrument is one which actually measures what it claims to measure", a qualitative study "is valid if it truly examines the topic which it claims to have examined" (p. 31). Thus, validity in qualitative work concerns "the truthfulness of the data" - notoriously difficult to establish when one is working in the realm of perceptions and meanings. Here again King, and other social researchers make a case for collaborative research (Reason and Rowan, 1981; Fisher et. al., 1986).

In addition, Reason and Rowan (1981) emphasise the value of "respondent validation", suggesting that researchers take their tentative findings back to respondents for further clarification and elaboration. This approach, however, has been criticised by a number of writers (Bloor, 1978; Bryman, 1988; Silverman, 1993). Indeed, Bryman maintains that "such feedback cannot be taken as direct validation or refutation... [but] should be treated as another source of data" (1988, p. 78-79). In the case of this study, respondent validation was not deemed appropriate. Whilst respondents were willing to be

interviewed and welcomed a report on the findings, none was interested in further participation in the study.

Reason and Rowan (1981) identify a number of further guidelines for dealing with the issue of validity in qualitative research. Most relevant to this particular context are their emphasis on "high quality awareness", and the importance of "actively seeking contradictions in the data", a point reiterated by Silverman (1993). The first of these issues was raised in the discussion of reliability above, while the second two will be considered in greater detail in the sections on data collection and analysis below.

One further point which I feel is worthy of note. As suggested above, this research, far from aiming to uncover some objective "reality" about "what *really* happened", focuses on women's perceptions of their past experiences. The world of the study is that of interpretation; its aim is to explore the ways in which respondents made sense of that experience *at the time of interview*. The question of validity, therefore, must consider the data, and the conclusions drawn from them, in these terms.

3.4 The Research Process

King outlines four basic steps in the process of qualitative interviewing: 1) defining the research questions; 2) creating the interview guide; 3) recruiting participants, and 4) carrying out the interviews. In the broadest sense, my study could be described as proceeding in this way. However, whereas this model appears to be quite linear, this study was much more iterative; as suggested in sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4 it became progressively focused and specific.

The research questions, for example, were defined and re-defined as the study progressed. As discussed in the conclusion to Chapter 2, my review of the literature resulted in the definition of one very general question, and a number of key areas of interest. These provided me with a very loose framework upon which my four initial interviews were based. The aim of these interviews, as discussed more specifically below, was to elicit a more specific set of issues, relevant to the participants, from which an interview guide could be constructed. However, it was not until the data collection

was completed, the interviews were fully transcribed and the process of coding had been completed, that the final set of research questions emerged. These questions were the basis of the subsequent analysis. Each of these stages will be outlined more fully below. What is important here is that the definition of the research questions, and likewise the creation of the interview guide, must be seen, not as discrete "steps", but as iterative processes.

3.4.1 Recruitment of Participants

This research is based on data collected from qualitative interviews with twenty-four women who left jobs within organisations and set up their own businesses. My aim, initially, was to construct a small, but diverse sample. However, because of the "invisibility" of women entrepreneurs, and the fact that there are, to my knowledge, no relevant databases or useful directories, and because I am looking for a small sample, "probability sampling" (Gilbert, 1993) and "random sampling" (Hornby and Symon, 1994) were not possible; neither were they appropriate.

My approach can therefore best be described as "nonprobability" sampling, the purpose of which

"is not to establish a random or representative sample but rather to identify those people who have information about the process. It is a search not for a 'generalisable person' but for a specific group of ***relevant*** *people" (Hornby and Symon, 1994, p. 169).*

The first step of this approach was to construct a sample through networking: accessing relevant women entrepreneurs through organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, local professional and businesswomen's networks, and through employment start-up projects and government agencies such as the Training Commission.

Typically, I would attend, for example, a Chamber of Commerce event, where I would give a very brief presentation about the project. Interested women who fit the criteria (having moved from employment to self-employment) would then approach me informally, at which point they received an "Invitation to Participate", a document which

provided a very brief summary of the project and outlined just what participation would involve (see Appendix One). Women were in general very interested in the project, and everyone who took an invitation, and who fitted the said criteria, agreed to participate.

Once I had begun the interviews, I was able to ask respondents if they knew any other women who may be willing to get involved. In fact, approximately half of the respondents were identified through these informal contacts. In some ways, therefore, my approach resembled that of "snowball sampling", "where the researcher uses one informant to identify further informants and so forth" (Hornby and Symon, p. 169), although in so far as "word-of-mouth" was just one of a number of techniques, and also because the sample was actually very diverse in terms of economic sector, I would not describe it as a snowball sample exclusively.

I decided to restrict my sample to women based in the Sheffield area. Although I was aware of the limitations of such a decision, I thought that it had several distinct advantages. First, given the diversity of the sample in terms of economic sector, I felt that this shared context would provide a useful frame of reference. Second, because my aim was to gain holistic understandings, it seemed to me that an appreciation of the context in which women lived and worked was central. Attempting to deal with both a varied sample and a varied social/economic/cultural context would have been very unwieldy. And finally, a Sheffield-based sample made sense given my sampling approach - accessing potential respondents through local business networks and informal contacts.

A brief note about the criteria for participation in the study. Section 2.1.2 of the literature review discussed the ambiguity of the term "self-employment", and the difficulties researchers face in attempting to categorise particular business ventures. In view of such difficulties, Carter and Cannon (1992) adopted a "flexible interpretation" of the terms, and included in their sample "women in a variety of industrial sectors, using different forms of ownership structure... In each case, though, the respondent took the lead in the establishment and organisation of her particular enterprise" (p. vii). The interpretation taken in this study is equally flexible. After grappling with the vexing question of who *really was*, and *really wasn't* self-employed, which did not seem to be a very fruitful exercise, I decided, like the Labour Force Survey (Daly, 1991), to opt for

self-definition. Thus I included in my sample women *who said that they were self-employed.* Although I am aware of its ambiguity, I feel that this was the right decision. The following career profile therefore reveals considerable variation in the nature and structure of respondents' businesses. While some were sole proprietors or sole practitioners, other worked in partnerships, and in the cases of numbers 9 and 10 below, their "business" was a registered charity.

3.4.2 Description of the Sample

Although the study explores the move from employment to self-employment, respondents' careers did not always follow this neat pattern. For example, several respondents worked in a number of organisations, or a number of departments within the same organisation, before embarking on self-employment. In some other cases, having left their organisations, respondents worked in what I have termed "transitional jobs" before setting up their own businesses. The profiles that follow, therefore, must not be understood as summaries of the respondents' career histories. Instead, rather like photographs that have been "selectively enlarged" in order to focus on a particular detail, they identify those jobs most relevant to this study. In the subsequent analysis and discussion of the findings, these jobs are examined in the context of respondents' accounts of their careers more generally.

Table 3.1 Career profiles of respondents, in the order in which they were interviewed

Number	Career profile
1	Product manager to owner/manager of environmentally- friendly nappy firm to marketing manager
2	Race relations officer to management consultant
3	Social worker to management consultant
4	National Health Service sister to owner/manager of nursing home
5	Sales representative to director of form distributing firm
6	Personal Assistant to recruitment consultant in large organisation to independent recruitment consultant
7	Educational psychologist to independent psychologist
8	Marketing and sales manager in multi-national company to owner/manager of travel business
9	Personnel manager to chief executive of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities
10	Personnel officer to training/development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities
11	Marketing manager to managing director of tool distributing firm
12	Office manager to Principal/owner business college
13	Operating theatre sister to reflexologist
14	Public relations manager to director of public relations firm
15, 16	Design managers to co-directors of graphic design firm
17	Sales Representative to pyramid sales representative to owner/manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency
18	Civil service trainer to management consultant
19	Civil service trainer to independent trainer
20	Hotel manager to hotel co-owner/manager
21	Computer operator to owner/manager of bakery
22	Catering manager to co-owner/manager rock'n'roll catering company
23	Sales manager in newspaper company to co-owner/manager of clothing manufacturing business to office manager of recruitment agency
24	Assistant solicitor in firm to sole practitioner

Table 3.2 Pre-transition employment sectors: numbers of respondents in each

Employment sector	No. of respondents
Design, Advertising, Public Relations	5
Sales and Marketing	4
Human Resources, Training and Development	4
Health Care	2
Secretarial/Administration	2
Hotel Management and Catering	2
Social Work	1
Race Relations	1
Recruitment	1
Psychology	1
Law	1

It should be noted that these categories could have been devised on the basis of business (organisational) sector, or on the basis of the job that the respondent was performing within that organisation. Because the focus of this study is the women rather than the organisations, I have focused on the latter. Respondents can be counted more than once if they had more than one significant "pre-transition job" (for example, respondent number 6 has been included both in secretarial and recruitment).

Table 3.3 Self-employment - number of respondents in particular business sectors

Business Sector	No. of respondents
Management Training and Consultancy	6
Design, Marketing, Public Relations	3
Hotel Management and Catering	3
Healthcare	2
Recruitment	2
Sales	1
Psychology	1
Travel and Tourism	1
Clothing	1
Engineering	1
Secretarial and Administration	1
Law	1
Domestic Services	1

Table 3.4 Age of respondents

Age range	No. of respondents
30-40 years	12
40-50 years	7
50-60 years	5

Table 3.5 Relationship status

Relationship status	No. of respondents
long-term relationship	19
single	5

Note: whereas a long-term relationship was seen to be significant, whether a respondent was married or co-habiting was not. This table does not include those who were divorced, divorcing or separated at the time of interview. "Single" refers to status at the time of interview - these respondents may have had previous long-term relationships

Table 3.6 Relationship status according to age

Age range	No. of respondents in relationship type
30-40 years	10 - long-term relationships 2 - single
40-50 years	4 - long-term relationships 3 - single
50-60 years	5 - long-term relationships

Table 3.7 Numbers of respondents with children

Children	No. of respondents
Yes	16
No	8

Table 3.8 Numbers of children according to respondents' age

Age range	No. of respondents with children
30-40 years	7 have got children 5 have not got children
40-50 years	4 have got children 3 have not got children
50-60 years	5 have got children

It is notable that during the course of the interview, two of the women in the first age bracket who did not have children explained that this was due to infertility. Both felt that this situation significantly impacted on their subsequent career decisions.

Table 3.9 Ages of children at the time of interview

Age band of children	no. of respondents
Pre-school-aged	3
School-aged	6
Post-16 years	7

Table 3.10 Numbers of children per respondent

no. of children	no. of respondents
one child	6
two children	6
three children	2
four children	2

Other caring responsibilities

None

Education and professional qualifications

Table 3.11 Higher education

Educational qualifications	No. of respondents
degree-level or above	10
currently pursuing B.A.	1

Respondents have a range of qualifications, from professional qualifications in law, social work, nursing, teaching and psychology, to vocational qualifications in secretarial work and catering. In addition, over half of the respondents in the study had pursued sector-

specific, in-house and trade union training opportunities, receiving certificates and qualifications where relevant. The scope and diversity of respondents' qualifications make them extremely difficult to classify into a simple table. For example, should a Masters degree in Organisational Development be considered an academic or a professional qualification? Similarly, is a Certificate in Public Relations professional or vocational? However, what emerges very clearly is that the respondents in this sample are, in general, highly-educated and well-qualified. This is in stark contrast to other studies into women in the labour market, reviewed in section 2.2.2, which reveal both vertical and horizontal sex segregation, with women typically occupying low-paid, low-status, and often precarious positions, with limited education and training (Arber and Gilbert, 1992).

Table 3.12 Social class and partners' occupations

Using the Registrar General's scale, respondents' husbands' and partners' social class can be categorised as follows:

Partners' social class	No. of respondents
I Higher professional or managerial	15
II Lower professional or managerial	2
IIIN Supervisory and lower/routine non-manual	none
IIIM Skilled manual	2
IV Semi-skilled manual	none
V Unskilled manual	none

This classification has been challenged, particularly by feminists who take issue with using a man's occupation as the basis upon which to identify a woman's social class (Acker, 1973; Oakley and Oakley, 1979; Abbott and Sapsford, 1987; Abbott and Wallace, 1990). I support these criticisms, and would not apply the scale to the women

in the study in a categorical way. However, together with the data, outlined above, on respondents' occupational status, education and qualifications, it emphasises the fact that this is a largely middle-class sample, and must be examined in this light.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity, like class, has been shown to be a significant factor in women's experience of the labour market (Brown, 1985). However, in this sample there is only one non-white respondent. Given the difficulties in accessing participants, this was inevitable. However, it is important to recognise the limitations of this predominantly white sample and, here again, to examine the data in light of these limitations.

Table 3.13 Respondents' relationship to Sheffield (Including Rotherham, Barnsley, Chesterfield and Northeast Derbyshire)

Relationship to Sheffield	No. of respondents
lived and worked locally prior to self-employment	19
Moved to Sheffield at time of transition to self-employment	5

3.4.3 Data Collection

Like the identification of the research questions and the construction of the interview guide discussed in section 3.4, in qualitative research the processes of data collection and analysis can not be thought of as separate stages. Instead, they are always inter-connected, often overlapping and sometimes happening simultaneously.

"This constant interplay of data gathering and analysis is at the heart of qualitative research. It is therefore difficult indeed to discuss coding, processing, analysis and writing without also discussing planning and data gathering, for in no other approach is the interrelatedness of all portions of the research act quite so obvious" (Wiseman, 1974, p. 113).

Bearing in mind the difficulty of separating the processes of data collection and analysis, for the purposes of clarity and precision, it is important to examine the key aspects of each. This section will therefore consider, first, the role of the four preliminary interviews. Moving on, it will focus on the collection of the data corpus, and the issues arising in the course of that process. Section 3.4.4 which follows will then outline the approach to data analysis undertaken in this study.

The pilot: A discrete phase or the start of an organic process?

The term "pilot study" is often used in relation to survey research, where such a study is used to refine an already prepared questionnaire or interview schedule (Gill and Johnson, 1991). In my view, though, initial investigations in qualitative research have a different, somewhat ambiguous function: far from "fine-tuning", they are used to elucidate key areas of concern, to raise issues and to begin a process of progressive focusing. In this sense, instead of being a distinct, self-contained phase, they are integral to the qualitative research process as a whole.

My aim, in my first four interviews, was simple: I wanted to hear the respondents' "career stories", from their previous jobs in organisations to the present. Although my topic is work-related, I did not want to limit our discussion to the work setting. Instead, I was eager to hear how they described their personal lives, too, and in particular their thoughts about the relationship between these two contexts. In all four interviews discussion flowed easily and the women had a lot to say. Interviews lasted between one and a half and two hours.

After each interview, I listened to the tapescript, making notes on my reactions and on those of the respondent. Next I transcribed each tape, jotting down emergent themes

and important issues. After all four tapes were thus transcribed and annotated, I noted down particularly interesting, revealing or colourful quotations, and useful illustrations. Finally, I wrote a brief summary of each interview. The next step was to use the themes which emerged from the first four interviews (together with the literature) to construct a set of "working" research questions. As explained above, my intention was not that these would be definitive, but that they would serve as the basis upon which to create an interview guide (see Appendix 2). I fully expected that in the process of analysing the data, these questions would be "re-visited" and revised. The "working" questions were as follows.

1. How do women who have left positions within organisations and set up their own business describe their experiences of these two work contexts?

2. What are seen as the motivating/enabling/inhibiting factors in a woman's decision to leave her organisation and set up on her own?

3. What factors impact on the experience of the transition between employment and self-employment?

4. How do women who have moved from employment to self-employment see their businesses (and themselves) developing in the future?

5. What factors impact on whether or not a woman describes herself as an entrepreneur?

The guide was to be used flexibly, in order to enable respondents to give their accounts in ways that were relevant and meaningful to them.

Wiseman (1974) suggests that early on in the analytical process researchers must decide on the "major pattern of organisation of the social world being presented" (p. 115). This model, emerging out of the data already collected, helps to structure further data gathering, and becomes the "organising scheme of the analysis". Two major patterns emerged from the initial interviews. First is what Wiseman refers to as a "time order or

careers model", a broadly chronological model in which the respondent's move from employment to self-employment provides the basic "storyline". While the "career" model provides a framework for understanding how a woman experiences the move from organisational life to self-employment *chronologically*, what is equally necessary is a *model for understanding* the important relationships between a woman entrepreneur and her social world ***at any one time***. Here Reinharz' (1992) discussion of "genealogies" and "networks" (p 225) is potentially useful. Taking a woman's experience of self-employment, for example, exploring her relationships with colleagues, with friends and with family members could provide valuable insights into the nature of that experience.

A "career" model, moving diachronically from a woman's experience of working in an organisation through to running her own business, and "relational" model, examining social networks and contributing a synchronic perspective, are complimentary. Together, they contributed to my developing understanding of the "confusions, ambiguities and contradictions [as well as the continuities] that are played in everyday experiences" (Plummer, 1983, p. 68). Such an approach is consonant with my aim of exploring the lifeworlds of women entrepreneurs in a holistic way.

Collection of the data corpus

As stated above, my intention was to carry out twenty-four qualitative interviews (including the four preliminary interviews) with women who had left their jobs within organisations and set up their own businesses. These "guided discussions" lasted from between one-and-a-half and two hours, and took place at a mutually convenient location. Interviews were taped and fully transcribed. My aim in conducting these interviews was to gain insights into the lifeworlds of these women entrepreneurs, to learn about their experiences and about the ways in which they made sense of those experiences.

All the interviews began with a brief discussion about the practical aspects of the research process: the nature and purpose of the research, the issues of confidentiality and tape recording. Respondents were also invited to ask questions at any point during the interview process. Moving on to the interview itself, each respondent was initially

asked to complete a standard form detailing demographic information, including her age, marital status and the composition of her household, other caring responsibilities, education, qualifications, and her husband or partner's employment situation. The purpose of this, as explained by Yeandle (1984) was twofold: in addition to providing important factual information, by asking uncontroversial, "easy" questions it enabled enabled respondents to relax and get used to the interview situation.

Having completed this form, the tape recorder was turned on, and the more qualitative part of the interview began. At the outset, women were asked for a "thumbnail description of their career history to date". It was intended that this sweeping picture would serve to define the "parameters" within which the move from employment to self-employment took place. In fact, it proved to be an extremely effective way to start. As suggested in section 3.4.2, respondents' career histories actually varied considerably. Therefore, while the interview guide was appropriate for the majority of respondents, for some it did not quite make sense. For example, a number of women held what I have termed "transitional jobs" between employment and self-employment. While such jobs were highly significant in these women's accounts, they were not so easily accommodated by the interview guide. Their "thumbnail" sketches served to alert me to such differences, and I was thus able to make the necessary adjustments. Having recognised the inappropriateness of the guide in these cases, I was able to refer back to my "working" questions, using these as a basis on which to proceed with the interview. The sketch also alerted me to significant events, or people, that I could return to later on in the interview. While for some respondents this initial question lasted only a minute or so, for others it provided the bulk of the data.

As suggested by Whyte (1982) my questions and responses varied, from non-directive (a nod of the head, or a comment like "that's interesting"), to directive (a probe on something said earlier on in the interview, or the introduction of a whole new topic). It included questions asking for an objective response ("What was your job title?"), as well as those requiring more subjective, reflective consideration ("What did you feel about that position?"). The mix of descriptive, evaluative, open and closed questions varied from interview to interview, depending on the respondent, the relationship established between the respondent and myself, and the interview context more generally.

On a methodological level, a number of important issues were raised in the interview process. One was the need for flexibility, given the nature and purpose of the study, and the extent to which such flexibility was afforded by the method of qualitative interviewing. Second was the realisation of contradiction as an inevitable aspect of qualitative research - far from attempting to gloss over these contradictions, I became increasingly aware of their importance and of the need to explore them, both in the context of the interview itself and in the subsequent analysis. Third was the recognition that the interview was a dynamic, sense-making process. Indeed, comments such as: "I have never thought about it this way before"; "I thought I was doing it for one reason, but I now see that it was actually for a very different reason"; and "I didn't think about it that way at the time, but I've just realised that..." were typical. Far from just reiterating well-rehearsed accounts, the stories that women told about their careers were, in some senses, constructed in the very process of being interviewed.

Third, King (1994) suggests that a disadvantage of qualitative interviewing is the sheer quantity of data it yields. I found this to be the case, in the data collection stage as well as in analysis. As regards data collection, although in general I found the "thumbnail sketches" extremely useful, they did generate an enormous amount of data. Listening to these sketches, and attempting to make sufficient sense of them - instantaneously - in order to get the most from the interview, presented a challenge. Fourth and more positively, King explains how in his experience respondents generally seem to like the process of being interviewed, and sees this as a distinct advantage of qualitative interviewing. Likewise in this study respondents were very willing to participate, and after the interview said that they had found it both interesting and enjoyable. In so far as I am uncomfortable with the notion of respondent as "research object", and take the issue of research relationships seriously, this positive feedback was important.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

As explained above, I see both data collection and data analysis as iterative, reflexive processes, mutually dependent, and enriching. However, alongside this implicit and on-going process of analysis and refinement, the qualitative researcher must adopt a formal procedure for data analysis. My approach is based on a synthesis of procedures, outlined by Fielding (1993), Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Dey (1993) and Musson (1994), including:

- making notes and memos immediately following interviews;
- transcribing the interviews and highlighting emerging themes and issues;
- creating and assigning codes;
- "splitting and splicing" of categories;
- making links in the coded material;
- examining the data in light of existing theory and constructing new theoretical frameworks for understanding.

In what follows, each of these steps will be described with reference to specific examples. It must be noted, though, that although the above list conveys a sense of linearity and clarity, the actual process of data analysis was characterised by significant ambiguity.

<u>Notes and memos</u>

Immediately following interviews, I recorded my initial impressions (on tape). In addition to notes on the *content* of the interviews, reference was made to its *context* - that is, issues concerning the respondent's work/home environment, observed relationships with colleagues and family members, and personal factors such as the extent to which the respondents appeared to be at ease/anxious, etc. The purpose of these was to highlight issues which were thought to be significant, but which would not necessarily emerge in the interview text itself. Themes and issues noted at this early stage could then be followed-up later on in the process. Such memos contributed to a set of on-

going notes on the analysis, records which proved to be useful, both in terms of managing a potentially unwieldy process, and also in terms of the development of my understanding.

Transcribing the interviews and highlighting emerging themes and issues

Because I saw the analysis as permeating each stage of the research process, I felt that it was important to transcribe all the interviews myself. Although this was extremely laborious, it was very useful analytically, in so far as it forced me to "immerse" myself in the data. In addition to transcribing the texts, I also transcribed the memos noted above so that the interviews and my observations could be considered together. Here again, notes were made on emerging themes and significant issues which served as the basis upon which analytical codes were constructed.

Creating and assigning codes

There is a considerable literature on the creation of analytical codes, or categories (see for example Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Dey, 1993). Dey suggests that:

"Creating categories is both a conceptual and empirical challenge; categories must be 'grounded' conceptually and empirically... We could say that categories must have two aspects, an internal aspect - they must be meaningful in relation to the data - and an external aspect - they must be meaningful in relation to other categories" (Dey, 1993, p. 96-97).

Consistent with Dey's approach, initial categories were constructed on the basis of the themes and issues emerging from the data thus far, together with existing theoretical perspectives. What is important, according to Dey, is the flexibility of these initial codes:

"Categorisation of the data requires a dialectic to develop between categories and ideas. Generating and developing categories is a process in which one moves backwards and forwards between the two. It is this interaction of category and data

which is crucial to the generation of a category set. To try to generate categories in the absence of both these resources would be premature" (p. 98-99).

I used NUD.IST software to facilitate the coding process and found it very useful. As suggested in the NUD.IST manual, I initially devised a skeletal list of categories, and began coding one document at a time, each time reviewing and revising my "category set" in light of the data. Here again, the notion of "progressive focusing" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 206) aptly describes the process. Whereas at the outset categories were defined very loosely, as the analysis progressed, these definitions became more specific, and more exclusive. A valuable aspect of the software is its facility for recording a project's evolution. Through the use of memos, which are always easily accessed, I was able to trace the way in which a particular category, and my thinking about that category, developed.

In section 3.2 on reliability and validity, I briefly discussed the value of collaborative research . In spite of its benefits, though, I explained how in the context of PhD research it can be problematic. While my project did not involve formal collaboration in the sense described by Reason and Rowan (1981), Fisher et. al. (1986) and King (1994), in the creation and definition of categories, and the classification of data, I found informal feedback from supervisors and colleagues invaluable.

<u>"Splitting" and "splicing" of categories</u>

Dey explains how in the process of constructing and assigning categories, we re-focus our analysis: "this shift in focus has been described as a 'recontextualisation of the data' (Tesch, 1990), as it can now be viewed in the context of our own categories rather than in its original context" (Dey, p. 129). Thus it is the categories themselves that become central to our thinking.

Dey uses the terms "splitting" to describe the process by which we sub-divide the data assigned to a particular category in order to further refine and differentiate that category. "Splicing", in contrast, refers to the joining and "interweaving" of categories so as to deepen our understanding. Thus, "we split categories in a search for greater resolution

and detail and splice them in a search for greater integration and scope" (p. 139). However, whereas Dey describes the processes of splitting and splicing as *following* the creation and assignation of categories, in my experience these processes happened simultaneously. For example, I initially created a category which I called "pre-transition job", referring, as the name suggests, to the organisations in which respondents worked prior to the move to self-employment. However, after working through several transcripts it became clear that this category was far too broad - in order to be analytically useful it needed to be split and refined. I therefore sub-divided the category and re-assigned its data at that point, and with each subsequent transcript further examined the category to make sure it still "worked". At the same time, there were times when I realised that the categories I had created were too narrow, resulting in an overly fragmented analysis. In such cases categories were spliced in order to achieve a more holistic picture.

As the "category set" became established, I was able to define each category with greater accuracy and precision. Having completed two-thirds of the transcripts my analytical framework was basically set, with only minor adjustments in the last eight documents.

Making links in the coded material

While categorisation enables us to closely examine the data and to explore similarities and differences within it, as suggested above it can result in fragmentation and a lack of integration - it can serve to shatter the "big picture". In the discussion of creating categories above, it was noted that not only must categories make sense in terms of the data, but they must also make sense in terms of each other. Thus, underpinning this approach is a view of these categories as *relational*. Dey insists that although the process of categorisation leads us deeper and deeper into each category, it is at the same time crucial that the researcher does not lose sight of these relationships, of how the categories interact. Thus he argues that "we need to link data as well as categorise it" (p. 152).

In seeking to establish such links, the "career" and "relational" models, described in section 3.4.3 as illuminating both diachronic and synchronic perspectives, are particularly

useful. It would be possible to focus the analysis on the discrete categories themselves; however, this would result in a failure to appreciate the ways in which these categories interact. Whereas such a narrow focus would have provided a limited, and very static picture of the data, these diachronic and synchronic perspectives allow for more complex, more dynamic analyses. For example, seeking to understand women's decisions to leave their organisations could simply involve a detailed examination of the data coded in the "pre-transition job" category. However, such an analysis would have been partial and insufficient. A more adequate analysis would examine the links between that category and those focusing on relationships, both at home and at work, as well as the data on women's goals and aspirations. What is essential, then, is not only an examination of the most minute details of the data, but also of the relationships embedded within these data.

Using discourse as an analytical tool

This study, like much qualitative research, is based on talk. Of primary interest to researchers working qualitatively, therefore, is to find ways of understanding this talk which is our data. In addition to the processes of coding, splitting and splicing, outlined above, the concept of discourse can be used to highlight patterns of thought and understanding which are embedded within and articulated through respondents' accounts. The definition of discourse which is being used in this study was detailed in section 2.1.4. Central to that definition is the incorporation, within discourse, of both structural and agentic dimensions of experience. Indeed, it has been suggested that it is though discourse that this dynamic relationship is played out (Bahktin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992). Also fundamental to that definition is the role that discourse plays in the construction of understanding.

The process of identifying discourses is a subject of considerable academic debate (Fairclough, 1992; Casey, 1993; Cohen and Musson, 1996;), typically involving an examination of texts on both macro and micro levels. As an analytical tool, discourses can be used in a number of ways (Cohen and Musson, 1996), depending on the focus of the particular study. One could track the way in which a single discourse is constructed within a particular account, or by diverse people and groups. For example, in her study

of women teachers Casey (1993) found that permeating the stories of a group of Catholic respondents was a religious discourse, articulated in a variety of (sometimes ambiguous) ways. Casey felt that it was this discourse which gave these stories their underlying logic, and which provided her, as a researcher, with a conceptual tool for understanding.

Conversely, the dynamic relationship *between* discourses can also be explored. For example, in her study of how general medical practitioners interpreted and acted upon reforms imposed upon them by the NHS, Musson (1994) identified two central discourses: a business discourse and a clinical discourse. A consideration of the ways in which these colliding/overlapping/competing discourses were constructed and articulated by the doctors in her study provided important insights into their perceptions of their working contexts, and of themselves as GP's. It is in this *relational* sense that the concept of discourse as an "analytical tool" is being used in this study. Thus, this process of identifying and the examining the relationship between key discourses acts as the disclosing table which reveals how the women in the study come to construct their personal and professional realities, and thus make sense of their move from employment to self-employment.

Examining the data in light of existing theory and constructing new theoretical frameworks for understanding.

The researcher's understanding of the complexity of the categories themselves, as well as their relationships with other categories, develops as the analytical process continues. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that such development is rarely characterised as pure induction: theoretical ideas, as well as common-sense understandings also contribute to the analysis. As regards the former, they suggest that:

"Where a category forms part of a typology or model developed by others, however loosely constructed, relations with other categories may be implied that can be tentatively explored in the data" (p. 212).

Existing typologies can thus be "tested" in relation to the data at hand. Hammersley and Atkinson suggest, however, that most models are not sufficiently robust to be applied in this way. In their view, "the process of testing requires considerable further development of the theory or explanation" (p. 214). This has certainly been so in the case of this study. For example, section 2.2.4 discusses the potential usefulness of a typology used to explain the move to self-employment, put forward by Stanworth and Stanworth (1995). In section 6.2, which focuses on respondents' decisions to become self-employed, this typology is "tested" in relation to the data generated in this study (by "tested" I mean that it was applied to the accounts of each of the twenty-four respondents). As reported in detail in that section, where it appeared to "fit" for a small number of women, problems emerged when applied to the majority. Questions were then asked about what those few had in common, which differentiated them from most of the other respondents. Thus a dialogue ensued between the typology and the data, and between the accounts of various groups of respondents themselves, eventually resulting in a much clearer understanding of those aspects of the typology which were useful and should be retained, and those which needed further refinement and revision.

Lofland (1970) maintains that in the development of typologies, and new theoretical frameworks for understanding, much ethnographic work suffers from "analytic interruptus"! That is, he suggests that analysts "'fail to follow through to implied logical conclusion... to reach [the] initially implied climax'" (p. 42)! Lofland's approach is systematic and painstaking, and involves:

- a thorough examination of all the data generated on a particular issue;
- the "teasing out" of variations, disconfirming and exceptional cases;
- their classification into an "articulate set of types"; and
- an orderly presentation of the resulting typology or model.

The approach to analysis and theory-development undertaken in this study broadly follows these recommendations. This constant interplay between the data and the emerging analysis is rigorous and ensures a high level of attention to detail, elucidating both the similarities and differences between different respondents' accounts, and within individual stories.

3.5 Summary of Method

This chapter has presented the methodological rationale for the study, focusing in particular on the appropriateness of a qualitative, feminist approach, and outlining the central aspects of qualitative interviewing. It then examined the research process undertaken, detailing the recruitment of respondents and describing the sample, and outlining the approach to data collection and analysis.

The final section in this chapter re-visits the central themes identified in section 2.6, and briefly outlines the structure of the four analytical chapters which follow.

3.6 The Research Questions Revisited: setting the scene for the analysis

As suggested in section 3.4, the process of identifying the research questions is iterative and reflexive, involving a dialectic between the aims of the study, the literature, the data, and my own developing understanding. Having categorised the data and having started to make sense of how it all fits together, both diachronically in terms of women's career stories moving through time, and synchronically as complex snapshots taken at any one time, those original issues are reviewed and reconstructed as research questions. They emerge as follows:

1. How does the move from employment to self-employment fit in with a woman's career pattern more generally?

2. How can a woman's decision to leave her organisation be understood theoretically

3. Why did the women in the study choose to embark on self-employment and what were their expectations in doing so?

4. What factors most influenced women's experience of self-employment?

5. To what extent did the women in the study identify themselves as entrepreneurs, and what factors impacted on this identification?

These questions are explored in subsequent chapters. Specifically, Chapter 4 focuses on questions one and five, Chapter 5 on question two, Chapters 6 and 7 on question three, and Chapter 8 on question four. However, it must be noted that despite this clear, neatly delineated structure, each of these questions is itself multi-faceted, embracing themes and issues common to the other four. Thus although I have separated them out to facilitate understanding, they should not be considered as separate entities.

Chapter 4

SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND WOMEN'S CAREERS: finding patterns in diversity

This chapter considers research questions 1 and 5:

- **How does the move from employment to self-employment fit in with a woman's career pattern more generally?**
- **To what extent did the women in the study identify themselves as entrepreneurs, and what factors impacted on this identification?**

Specifically, section 4.2 considers the processes of socialisation and career choice. Section 4.3 focuses on the issue of career planning and the extent to which respondents saw their careers as "planned". Moving on, section 4.4 focuses on Kanter's framework for understanding career forms and structures more generally, introducing the notion of "career discourse" as a way of linking structural with agentic perspectives. Finally, section 4.5 considers the ways in which the women in the study make sense of the term "entrepreneur", and the extent to which they identify themselves as such.

4.1 Introduction

In considering how to go about categorising my data and constructing an analytical framework which would account for the respondents' diverse experiences, I assumed that by focusing on the chronological steps that women went through in moving from employment to self-employment, while at the same time taking account of issues and themes which seemed to permeate their stories more generally, I would eventually achieve the kind of holistic understanding that I was aiming for.

As explained in section 3.43, originally my first research question concerned respondents' experiences of organisational life. The idea was that an understanding of this "stage" would illuminate their subsequent decision to leave and the move to self-employment. In the process of data analysis, it soon became apparent that the different ways in which women perceived of, coped with and experienced their organisations was a result of a multitude of factors, both personal and organisational, and that these factors extended

way beyond the organisational context. The move to self-employment, thus, could not be understood simply as a response to their organisational circumstances, but must be explored within the context of their unfolding careers more generally. Although a detailed analysis of certain career stages would ultimately be essential, I felt that such a micro-analysis must be preceded by a consideration of respondents' careers on a more macro level. I needed to find out whether there were any discernible patterns, whether there was an underlying '"logic" in the ways that the women thought about, planned and managed their careers, and where the move to self-employment fitted into these patterns.

This chapter begins by considering the process of sex-role socialisation, examining the ways in which respondents described such processes and their perceived impact on career choice. Moving on, it explores the issue of career planning, looking retrospectively at women's career plans at the outset of their careers, as well as projecting into the future. In the next section, the chapter examines career structures and forms more generally. In particular, the data are considered in terms of the career structures identified by Kanter (1989), introduced in section 2.37. Finally, the chapter investigates the ways in which respondents in the study make sense of the term "entrepreneur", and the extent to which they identify themselves as such.

4.2 Nursing, Teaching or Secretarial Work: sex-role socialisation and career choice

One of the themes that recurs throughout the transcripts, particularly amongst those women who did not pursue higher education, is sex-role socialisation and its relationship with career choice. Although in most cases early socialisation and subsequent career choice are not directly related to subsequent moves to self-employment, it is clear that for many respondents, such choices were significant in that they served to establish a pattern for future career development. It must be noted at the outset that because this study did not set out specifically to study patterns of early socialisation, such data exists as a "by-product" of the main study, in cases where women felt that such experiences were significant.

Sex-role socialisation, as a major aspect of career decision-making, is central to much of the literature on women's career development, as outlined in the literature review (see for example Hennig and Jardim, 1978; Astin, 1984; Gutek and Larwood, 1989; Larwood and Gutek, 1989; Marshall, 1989; Gallos, 1989; White, 1995; Rees, 1992). Astin identifies sex role socialisation as one of the four key factors in determining occupational choice, focusing, in particular, on the gendered nature of children's play, household chores and early paid work, and the subtle messages children receive about sex-appropriate behaviours. While the data contain very little about these implicit processes, they do provide some illuminating insights into the more explicit careers advice and directives that respondents were offered by parents, teachers and careers advisors.

One-quarter of the women in the sample explained how they were guided by parents, teachers and career advisors, to pursue careers in sectors that were traditionally female: secretarial work, nursing, teaching and retail.

"I went for careers advice and it was basically, 'Well, you look like a caring person, why don't you be a nurse?' 'Well I don't want to be a nurse, I don't like blood.' 'Why don't you go into teaching?' 'Don't want to stay in school.' 'So the only other option that they put forward to me was clerical, which was either local authority or civil service"(Personnel officer to training development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

For these six women, the notion of "career choice" was illusory. Rees' study of working class girls and career choice (1992) produced similar findings. She argues that for the girls in her study, careers were determined by a myriad of variables, including gender, class, race and the needs of the local labour market. The limitations of my sample are such that I can not comment on these factors, except to point out that six women who reported such constraints came from both working class and middle class backgrounds, which suggests that limited career choice can be a middle class as well as a working class phenomenon.

The accounts of the six women cited above suggest that early sex role socialisation and limited career choice appear to have impacted on their subsequent career decisions, and their perceptions of themselves as working women.

"...with that sort of background, that sort of education, what you did was you did a secretarial course or you'd just get married, really... I never thought of myself as being clever... Eventually I came up with the Masters [course] . I applied for it and I was in a real state cause I thought, 'No one's ever going to take me on to do a Masters. I don't have that kind of brain.' It was real conditioning" (Social worker to management consultant).

"I've never worked in an whole female environment, cause I've normally worked as a secretary working for a man [she was a secretary for less than half of her working life]...Assertiveness training would have stood me in good stead. I never had any problem as a secretary, because a secretary is a naturally subservient role and I think that's actually my role, to some extent" (Personal Assistant to recruitment consultant in large organisation to independent recruitment consultant).

In her conclusion, Rees maintains that "the 'fixed' point for so many working-class Valleys girls was the certainty that... they would become mothers, and would spend some years looking after their children... The sensible option was a job that allowed you to return to work part time: by definition, this would be a "woman's job" (p. 57) Likewise, when asked about career plans, a number of respondents reported that they had envisaged leaving their jobs once they married or had children. In some cases this was due to discriminatory practices on the part of employers who refused to keep married women on their staff, while in others it had to do with their expectations of themselves as women, wives and mothers. Finding this life unfulfilling, these respondents re-entered a workforce which offered limited opportunities to women who had severed links with previous employers and who now sought positions which could accommodate their domestic responsibilities. It was this transition, in terms of career expectations as well as position in the labour market, that eventually led some of them to consider self-employment.

The process of sex-role socialisation obviously extends beyond early childhood experiences and careers advisors - to professions, organisations, and to the business community at large. What is particularly significant in terms of this discussion, is how for some respondents early experiences of sex-role socialisation appeared to have impacted on early career choice and later career development.

4.3 Career Planning: using male yardsticks to measure women's lives

Having briefly considered the links which some respondents reported between sex-role socialisation and early career choice, I will now turn to the process of career planning. I was interested in examining whether or not the women in the study had had explicit *career plans,* keen to explore the extent to which self-employment was something that respondents had always aspired to, or if, indeed, it was a response to particular situations. However, reflecting on that question, particularly in light of the literature on women's career development, which I was not aware of at the time, I have serious misgivings about what, in fact, I was asking. In a critique of androcentric definitions of "career", Gallos argues that:

When women have managed their professional selves over a course of a lifetime in ways that allow for both professional accomplishment and expression of their relationship family needs, this has not been seen as a unique, women's perspective toward managing a career. Rather, these choices are still framed as women 'cutting back on career', 'dropping off the career path during child-bearing years'... and so on. The implications are clear. Career path means work outside the home, but more importantly, career means a specific path toward approaching work that more often fits men's rather than women's options and experiences." (Gallos, 1989, p. 124)

Similarly, Gowler and Legge highlight the bureaucratic (and I would argue *male*) ideology embedded in notions of career achievement, and represented in "commonsense" sayings such as: "climbing the ladder" to the "top of the tree" (Gowler and Legge, 1989, p. 445). Such language connotes notions of achievement that may be at odds with the ways in which many women organise and make sense of their working lives. As regards my question on career planning, however, I am concerned that the question itself was

ideologically loaded. In asking women about their career plans, I was unwittingly asking them to plot their stories onto a map defined by (stereotypical) men's experiences.

4.3.1 A Career Plan? Not Me!

In light of Gallos' comments, it is perhaps not surprising that twenty-three of the twenty-four women interviewed said that they had never had a career plan. Comments such as "I've just drifted through", "I didn't know where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do" and "I haven't had a career path. I've never said, 'I want to be'," were typical. One respondent did report having a plan: "I had ambitions to qualify as a top-level secretary and go on to America", but her pregnancy and subsequent marriage prevented its fulfilment. These findings confirm those of Hennig and Jardim's early study into women managers (1978). Although, their work was organisationally-oriented, it has a certain resonance with the data generated in my study. Hennig and Jardim found a marked passivity about career decisions amongst their women respondents. In addition, they report an emphasis on "individual self-improvement as the critical factor determining career advancement" (p. 12). Such an emphasis was echoed by the women in my study, and will be discussed more fully in relation to Kanter's model. Hennig and Jardim attribute women's perceptions of their careers, due in part, to early processes of socialisation. They cite in particular the different ways in which girls and boy play, and the similarities between traditional boys' team sports and the realities of organisational life. It is an intriguing argument, and although such patterns may be less rigid today, the significance of sex-role socialisation and its relationship with career decision-making, as suggested above, are widely recognised in the literature on women and career theory (see for example, Larwood and Gutek, 1989; Astin, 1984; Gallos, 1989 and Rees, 1992).

Perhaps more revealing than the fact that hardly anyone in the study reported having had a career plan, was how the respondents reacted to the question. For most, the negative response was offered as a kind of "admission", as though a career plan was something they felt they *should have had*. Several women laughed (in what to me seemed a sort of guilty way), some hesitated before answering and I felt that the tone of many responses was quite self-deprecating. In the words of one woman:

"I'm sure that I'd be much more successful if I could sit down and write out a ten-year plan and aims. 'By the end of ten years I will be Chairman of the organisation and employing two hundred people!(laughing)' I mean I'm not like that, I do drift a bit." (Assistant solicitor in firm to sole practitioner).

For the respondents in this study there was an obvious link between a career plan and career success. Here Gowler and Legge's notion of "the bureaucratisation of career" (1989) is again useful, as the concept of career planning typically suggests notions of strategic manoeuvring through organisational hierarchies in order to achieve career success, and organisational status (Marshall, 1989). Only one respondent cast the lack of a career plan in a positive light. Far from equating planning with success, she felt that the flexibility and freedom afforded by the absence of a such a plan insured her continued growth and development; she confidently assumed that as an intelligent, well-qualified, professional woman, she would make sure that things worked out.

"I never really said, 'Okay, there's a goal and I want to go for it'... But then when I went into business on my own I realised that if I just harness all the energies that I have, I can achieve far more" (Race relations officer to management consultant).

As a contrast to the kind of career planning discussed above, which she describes as "agentic", Marshall argues that there is an alternative, "communion"-oriented basis for planning

"and for judging the value of a career. Its keynotes are flexibility, openness to opportunities and right timing... Communion is essentially present oriented, concerned with the next appropriate step when choices are made rather than looking beyond. People may have 'dreams' but hold them lightly, using them as visions of possibility rather than as aspirations that have to be realised" (Marshall, 1989, pp. 287-288).

The approach of the women cited above, and that of others in the sample, seem to be best described by communion, but this respondent differs from the others in that whereas

she, like Marshall, sees openness, flexibility and orientation to the present as *positive*, for many respondents this represents a failure to take charge, and possibly to achieve.

4.3.2 Not Plans, but "Career Ideas"

Having said that the respondents did not have career plans is not to suggest, however, that they did not have ideas about how their working lives might develop. Several respondents spoke of their decisions to join certain professions. In so doing, although they had not made a strategic plan, they expected their professions to provide them with a certain career structure.

"I think that my original plan was that if you join a profession, then you just work at it, and you progress within the profession... I just thought of a secure job, a professional, secure job" (Educational psychologist to independent psychologist).

A number of women seeking jobs within large organisations anticipated that their careers would involve climbing up the hierarchy, pursuing opportunities for promotion wherever possible. One respondent who had worked as a social worker within a local authority for a number of years explained how initially she saw her career in terms of climbing the organisational ladder, thinking that progressing through the organisation would also mean developing professionally. However, after a time she realised that the two were not synonymous, that organisational advancement actually had very little to do with professional growth, and at that point she left the organisation (and organisations in general) . Interestingly, having rejected the career paths afforded by organisational structures, she continued to hold on to organisational notions of status as a sign of career success.

Finally, two respondents in particular saw their careers developing in terms of self-employment. The first, a caterer, explained how although she had not planned to set up a business in rock'n'roll catering, she had always thought of herself as an "entrepreneur", and knew that one day she would have her own business. Similarly, the other "entrepreneurially-oriented" respondent had embarked on a course in hotel management and catering aiming to eventually have her own hotel. In terms of this study, such

findings are crucial. In this study of women who moved from employment to self-employment, only two respondents had set out on their careers intending to become self-employed. In contrast, the remaining twenty-two had expected their careers to develop quite differently. Self-employment, for these respondents, seems to have been a response to circumstances, personal, professional and organisational, at a particular moment in time.

A final "career idea" is worthy of note. One woman, although categorical that she did not have a "career plan" as such, said that this was because *her family was her career*. Elaborating on that, she explained that in so far as her family was the thing around which she organised her life, she considered it to be her career. What I find interesting about this example is that although she dismissed the idea of a "career plan", which I can only assume she understood in Marshall's agentic (male, bureaucratic) sense, she then constructed another meaning of the term which she applied to her own situation. This respondent was unique. Although some other women in the study also found it difficult to plan their careers because of their family responsibilities, she stands out because she took the term "career" and redefined it in a way that made sense in terms of her own experience of working life.

4.3.3 Career Planning and Self-employment

Although respondents reported that they had definitely not made career plans at the outset of their working lives, at the time of interview many had very clear plans about where they saw their businesses going in the future - plans, indeed, that were much more "future oriented and goal dominated; [with] status on retirement as a marker of life achievement" (Marshall, 1989, p. 287).

"Now is totally different, because I've realised that if focus I all my efforts into something that I want, I can achieve it" (Sales representative to director of form distributing firm).

"It is important, now, to sit down and think, 'Right, where will we be in five or ten years time?'" (Marketing and sales manager in multi-national company to owner/manager of travel business).

"I want to move on to other things that aren't really part of the business... to look at change and strategic change in Sheffield, to make a difference... Being a successful businesswoman will enable me to do that" (Sales Representative to pyramid sales representative to owner/manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency).

"A while back someone said to me, 'What is your goal?' And I said, 'I want to be the PR name in Sheffield'... In three years I'd like to be in there" (Public relations manager to director of public relations firm).

This apparent increase in focus and control could be due to a number of factors. First, it could have been a result of the interview situation. Although past decisions were described as somewhat ad hoc, it may have been that in discussing their futures, respondents were keen to convey images of themselves as rational and in control. At the same time, the interview itself can be a sense-making process (see section 3.4.3), where ideas are developed and articulated for the first time: in the interview respondents were given the time and space to reflect on the past, and to consider the future. Next, it could have to do with "style", and the extent to which "career planning" has become a very fashionable public discourse: "Personal trainers", "motivators" and "management gurus" talk about "focus", "direction" and "getting out of comfort zones". Women could be responding to such sensitising processes, thinking about and appropriating these stylish issues. Third, there is a sense that unless one is quite certain of fulfilling a career plan, it could be humiliating to admit that such a plan exists. Whereas many respondents reported very negative feelings about their careers at the time of leaving their organisations, at the time of interview most were positive, and clearly very proud of their achievements. I wonder if their successes, and their greater certainty and control over their future, made the women feel more able to divulge their plans; in a sense, if their achievements had somehow given them the "'right" to talk about their plans for the future.

Finally, and most significantly in terms of this research, it could be that the move to self-employment and the context of self-employment that have heralded this change. On the level of the individual, in every case the move required considerable soul-searching, reflection on the past and consideration of the future; the fact that women seem to have clearer ideas of where they are heading now comes as no surprise. Equally important, at the time of transition most respondents, and particularly those whose new businesses required capital investment, made business plans and forecasts, plans which they continue to revise and develop. The small business owner, unlike some employees within large organisations, must be oriented towards the future in order to survive (Atherton and Hannon, 1995; Richardson, 1995). Finally, notable throughout the transcripts is the way in which women's businesses have become part of them. For the self-employed person, consideration of the future of the business is inextricably linked with consideration of the future of the individual. The career plan thus emerges and evolves as part of the very process of self-employment.

4.4 Career Forms and Structures: taking a macro-view

What became apparent in analysing the transcripts is a sense in which respondents' careers developed, not haphazardly, but according to certain organising principles. This is, I expect, partly a function of the research methodology. As discussed in Chapter 3, the interview was a sense-making process; schisms and ambiguities, while not disappearing altogether, became part of the narrative, contributing to its logic. Yet this issue notwithstanding, it is notable that not only does each individual story seem to have its own logic, but also that certain patterns are repeated across the sample. The question then emerges: "Are there existing theoretical models that can help us to make sense of the career patterns of women who move from employment to self-employment?"

The significance of studies into career forms and structures is reviewed in section 2.3.7. As I suggested in that section, underlying many such studies is an organisational perspective, a sense in which the organisation is the norm, in which an individual's career is evaluated by organisational standards and careers which lie outside of organisations are seen as deviant. Kanter, as noted previously, takes issue with such an orientation.

This discussion draws principally on her theoretical work on career forms, exploring its usefulness for understanding the career patterns of the women in this study. As explained in the review of the careers literature, Kanter identifies three principal forms: bureaucratic, professional and entrepreneurial (Kanter, 1989), and explains the significance of these for organisations and society more generally.

Kanter's is a macro-perspective, and thus leaves many questions unanswered. On an abstract level, she does not grapple with questions about the nature of the career concept, or how we come to understand the concept in certain ways: questions, raised by Gowler and Legge (1989) about ideology, and how individuals come to make sense of their career experiences. More specifically, Kanter does not explain how an individual comes to have a certain career structure; nor does she refer to the internal, psychological, or external, social processes that may lead one to identify with these structures. Furthermore, her definitions connote a certain uniformity within each of these career structures, a connotation which is at odds with the diverse ways in which they are experienced/constructed by the women in the study. In my view these unanswered questions do not invalidate Kanter's model, but they do warn us against applying it in an overly simplistic way.

As regards the issue of how one comes to be associated with a particular career form, taking the bureaucratic career structure as an example, twenty out of the twenty-four women in the study had worked in large, hierarchical organisations. However, the question arises: "Can one be said to have a *bureaucratic career structure* simply by virtue of working in a such an organisation?" The data suggest otherwise. For example, a nurse explained how her career had developed within the hierarchical structures of the National Health Service - according to Kanter's definition, hers was a classic bureaucratic career. Yet, such a definition is at odds with the experience of another respondent who, although she was a University employee, had no interest in advancing within that organisation and left as soon as her own catering business became viable.

Clearly there is an important time factor distinguishing these two examples: twenty years in the NHS compared to less than two years at the University. There is a related issue of identity. For many years the nurse strongly identified with the NHS and saw her career

as inextricable from that organisation. Similarly, although she only worked for her multi-national company for five years, a sales manager explained how she had immersed herself in organisational life, applying for promotion after only eighteen months. In contrast, in the case of the caterer cited above, there were no such psychological links with the University. Likewise, a local authority race relations officer suggested that although she was committed to her work, she never really identified with the organisational itself - she never sought to climb the organisational hierarchies, and indeed described her persistent feelings of being an "outsider".

This is not to suggest that a positive endorsement of a particular organisational structure is necessary for that structure to influence an individual's career development. Indeed, there are several women in the sample who were highly critical of their organisations, and of bureaucracies in general. However, the difference between such women and the race relations officer is that whereas she distanced herself psychologically from the hierarchy, other respondents, though critical, were deeply involved in and influenced by bureaucratic life, seeking promotion and generally "playing the game".

The association of a person's career with one of Kanter's "career structures" is therefore not inevitable: it does not depend simply on doing a particular job or working in a certain type of organisation. Rather, it seems to depend on the way in which that individual makes sense of their career and its development, and their (willing or unwilling) *participation* in a particular career form. Fundamental to this analysis is a notion of career, not as a fixed entity, but as a dynamic process, constructed by individuals through interaction. In section 3.2.7 I discussed Gowler and Legge's work on career, discourse and ideology, in particular on the bureaucratic ideology implicit in our understanding of careers, and the possibilities of alternative meanings. It could be argued that Kanter's professional and entrepreneurial career forms represent two such alternatives.

4.4.1 "Career Forms" or "Career Discourses"?

As suggested above, Kanter's is a macro perspective - focusing on the structural dimension of individuals' career experiences. As outlined both in the review of the

literature and in the methodology chapter, in this thesis I am interested in exploring the move from employment to self-employment in terms of both structural and agentic dimensions. That is, I want to examine the relationship between these career structures and the ways in which individuals make sense of and construct their careers. Whereas the concept of "career forms" suggests something static, fixed and external, in my view the notion of "career discourse" more aptly reflects this more dynamic, more complex process.

While it is not within the scope of this thesis to review the literature on discourse theory, it is nevertheless important to clarify the way in which the concept is being applied in this analysis. As explained in section 2.1.4, my definition of discourse is based on the work of socio-linguists Kress and Hodge (1985), whose use of the term is grounded in the work of Foucault (1976, 1980). Three central aspects of this definition are particularly worthy of note. First, discourses encompass and reflect all material practice, including talk, but also the ideas and all other forms of material practice reflected in and constituted by that talk. Thus it would be a mistake to see discourse as only concerned with language. Second, discourses are conceptualised as culturally and historically embedded, and communicated through social practice. They do not originate from the individual, but from the social practice in which the individual is engaged. Third, Kress and Hodge argue that discourses do not exist in isolation from one another, but within a larger system of sometimes opposing, contradictory, contending or simply different discourses. Thus bureaucratic, professional and entrepreneurial discourses must not be seen as separate entities, but as co-existing in a kind of dynamic tension, deriving their meaning in relation to each other. In this view, then, discourses sit at the nexus of structure and agency, and it is through discourses that individual realities and identities are played out (Cohen and Musson, 1996).

The questions then emerge: "How was participation in a particular career structure articulated by the respondents in the study?" "What evidence would lead the researcher to associate certain respondents with certain career structures?" My initial response to the data was intuitive. Here, the process of intuition is used, not as a sort of "anything goes", irrational response, but to "indicate some process of recognition which draws on embedded cultural knowledge which is difficult to describe and quantify in abstract

terms" (Cohen and Musson, 1996, p. 5). Intuitively, then, some transcripts seemed to tell the story of a professional career, for example, while others "felt" more entrepreneurial. A more detailed examination of the transcripts, focusing on such issues as career aims and objectives, and the meaning of career success, confirmed these first impressions. An early question about women's ambitions upon joining their organisations yielded particularly rich insights. Responses varied from: "I was certainly keen to be promoted... I think when I worked in plastics I wanted to get up to manager's level, and again when I moved into the textiles side I wanted my boss' job" (*bureaucratic*), to "I wanted to become a big PR person in the music industry in Toronto... I was really interested in magazine publishing and wanted to develop those skills and understanding of how magazine publishing worked" (*professional)*, and "I didn't see my future as lying with [a particular hotel company]... there was always an end in sight" (*entrepreneurial*). These threads were developed in the course of the interviews through women's responses to questions about career planning, reasons for embarking on self-employment and visions of the future, in particular. Taken together, these data reveal certain patterns in the ways that respondents made sense of their careers - patterns broadly consistent with Kanter's model, but incorporating both structural and agentic dimensions.

4.4.2 The Diversity of Career Discourses

As suggested above, in applying Kanter's (amended) model it is important to consider the issue of how a person comes to be associated with a particular career discourse. In addition, the diverse ways in which such discourses are manifest must be explored. Over half of the women in the sample described their careers in terms of a professional career discourse. However, the way in which this discourse was articulated in each of these accounts was actually very different. Whereas for one respondent a professional career discourse included twenty years in one organisation, a traumatic move to self-employment and a vision of the future based on security, stability and a commitment to certain professional values, for another it meant working for four different organisations and changing jobs every two years before setting up on her own. A third respondent explained how she had started out as a secretary, striving to be at "the top of the tree". When that position came to an end, she became a recruitment consultant, describing

recruitment as her new "vocation". Thus, the concept of the *professional career structure* is clearly not monolithic. Instead it must be seen as diverse and dynamic, encompassing a range of alternatives. Similarly, the sample encompasses a host of *bureaucratic* and *entrepreneurial* career discourses.

In addition to the three career structures articulated by Kanter, several women in the sample talked extensively about *self-development, personal fulfilment* and *empowerment*. In these cases, respondents' careers seemed to be structured, at least in part, by their quest for personal challenge and growth; indeed their career movement, between departments in a single organisation, between organisations or between employment and self-employment could be understood in terms of this quest. The race relations officer cited above, for example, explained how she felt that she was "stagnating" within the local authority, and how her desire to develop professionally led her to pursue a Masters course, and finally to set up as an independent management consultant:

"I want to see where I should go from here, what skills, what experience I am lacking at the moment... it's much more around this sort of thing".

Similarly, a social worker described how her increasing disillusionment with her organisation, and with bureaucracies in general, coincided with a growing concern about her own personal and professional growth and development, a concern which ultimately led her to self-employment:

"I think that [the organisational structure] stifles creativity... I couldn't bear it, I couldn't bear the rules and regulations. I found it a real constraint. They were stupid to me, they had no sense... Stifled very much on a day-to-day level, and I think also that working in local government there is no sense of career development. There is never a chance for individuals to be developed; it's very much about there are certain roles for you to take up, so in terms of promotion, if you want to get on in the organisation, you have to say, 'I will go for that role', not 'what is it about myself that I need to develop in order to enhance my career?'... I was very clear about where I could go. I just didn't want to go in that direction" (Social worker to management consultant).

The theme of self-development emerged as crucial in the stories of one-third of the respondents in the study, echoing Hennig and Jardim's (1978) and Mirvis and Hall's (1995) findings, mentioned above. Likewise, Goffee and Scase (1995) found the quest for personal fulfilment, autonomy, and empowerment to be powerful motivators for managers and owner/managers in their study of creative and professional small businesses. Kanter insists that her three career forms do not "simply define different types of work; they are the organising principles around which a career logic unfolds - the incentives for continuation, the nature of opportunity, the path to increased rewards" (Kanter, 1989, p. 508). In my view, the quest for self-development and empowerment fit Kanter's criteria. The centrality of this quest in the accounts of the women in this study would therefore support its inclusion as a fourth career form.

4.4.3 Career and Lifestyle Discourses: converging, intersecting and competing

The family emerged as another key factor in the way in which respondents made sense of their careers. Indeed, a number of women described their families, and in particular their roles as wives and mothers, as a sort of linchpin around which their professional lives developed. However, despite its manifest importance, the family does not have the same role in structuring a woman's career as do bureaucratic, professional, entrepreneurial and self-development career discourses. Instead, I see the family as one of a number of "lifestyle" discourses that permeated women's stories. Indeed, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, it was where these career and lifestyle discourses converged, intersected and competed, that the struggles over meaning were played out.

4.4.4 Mixed Career Patterns

As has been emphasised, each of the career discourses identified above must be seen as diverse. At the same time, it is important to note that it is not the case that one woman articulates a single discrete discourse. Instead, in seeking to apply Kanter's (amended) model, it is essential to consider the ways in which these different discourses clash/collide/intersect within an individual's account. "Mixed career patterns" can occur in two ways: on both *synchronic* and *diachronic* levels. As regards the former, a woman could be associated with two or more career forms *at the same time*. Kanter

notes the tensions and ambiguities which can arise from such mixed patterns, "as individuals and organisations attempt to marry seemingly incompatible principles" (p. 519). Such contradictions were glaring in the case of the NHS nurse cited above. She explained how the values and expectations engendered by her profession were increasingly at odds with those of her organisation. This tension between a professional discourse on one hand, and a bureaucratic one on the other, became untenable, and she decided to leave the Health Service.

Mixed career patterns were also apparent on the *diachronic* level, where the move from one career discourse to another can be seen as central to career transition: "the notion of individual career transitions can be enlarged to encompass transitions among career forms - the passage from professional to bureaucrat, from bureaucrat to entrepreneur, and so forth" (Kanter, 1989, p. 519). Thus the nurse's move from the NHS to the nursing home can be understood in terms of a transition from a bureaucratic/professional context to a professional/entrepreneurial one. Similarly, in the case of the social worker cited above, it was a change in the way that she thought about her career that served as a catalyst for change. No longer able to withstand a bureaucratic career structure, she began to focus on her own development:

"Initially my sense was about being a social worker who would advance through the ranks and become a senior, and then a principal. That's what I did. And then when I got the principal bit I thought, 'Now what am I going to do?' And then I thought, 'I am utterly stifled here, I don't want to be a senior... It was very stifling, very uncreative" (Social worker to management consultant).

For other women, however, the process was reversed. In these cases the realisation of what the move meant in terms of how they made sense of their careers came *after* their decision to set up in business; indeed in some circumstances it came well after they had actually made the move.

"[At first] I felt really lost. I felt like I'd got no anchor anymore. And it was really peculiar, for a long time really." (Office manager to Principal/owner business college).

For this respondent, her description of life within her organisation was characterised by a bureaucratic discourse: she talked at some length about her identification with her department, her movement through the ranks of the organisation, and of her extensive network of colleagues. Having left, she felt uprooted and directionless. She explained how it was not until her secretarial college was up and running that she was finally able to leave her old career identity behind, and begin to see her future in terms of her developing business.

4.5 Entrepreneurship and Identity

At the outset of this chapter, I asked how the move from employment to self-employment fitted into respondents' developing careers more generally. When I first came across Kanter's model, I assumed that when applied to my sample, I would find a shift to an entrepreneurial career form at the time of the transition from employment to self-employment. However, the above discussion emphasised its fluidity and ambiguity. As Kanter suggested, individuals do not simply move neatly from one career form to another. The reconceptualisation of Kanter's model as *career discourses* further exemplifies this more complex relationship, illustrating the diversity of a particular career discourses, as well as the dynamic relationship between discourses.

As suggested by Kress and Hodge, discourses must not be seen as idiosyncratic constructions; instead, they are inextricably linked to the social world in which they exist. Thus, in seeking to understand the ways in which women make sense of their careers, it is important to consider the wider social context in which these careers are enacted. Section 2.1 reviewed the literature on the culture of enterprise. As suggested in that section, the discourse of enterprise has been described as a "central cultural motif of the present period" (Curran and Burrows, 1991, p. 10) This discourse, in spite of its salience, has typically rendered women invisible. Similarly, women have been largely excluded from the entrepreneurship literature, where understandings are traditionally based on the experiences of (stereotypical) men. Given this context, I was therefore keen to explore the extent to which women in the study appear to have embraced entrepreneurial discourses. In particular, I felt that an analysis of their understandings of and identification with the concept of "the entrepreneur" would yield valuable insights

into their perceptions and experiences of moving from employment to self-employment, and their careers more generally.

4.5.1 The Problem of Meaning (revisited)

Respondents spoke at some length about the concept of the entrepreneur. When asked how they understood the term, what emerged most clearly was that although it was a *"very popular word at the moment"*, it was very difficult to define. While references to high profile entrepreneurs abounded (most especially to Richard Branson and Anita Roddick), articulating what it was about these individuals that made them entrepreneurs was much more problematic.

A close examination of the data reveals both consensus and difference. In general, the data can be understood in terms of four main categories: structural factors; personality traits; entrepreneurial processes and scope of activities; and entrepreneurial aims and objectives. This conceptual framework (which, unsurprisingly mirrors theoretical approaches reviewed in section 2.5) is briefly outlined below. It is important to note, however, that while such categories facilitate analysis, they should not be seen as mutually exclusive; instead, respondents frequently described a constellation of factors which, when illustrated with reference to familiar cultural icons, provided rich (though frequently ambiguous) portraits of the entrepreneur. Although in itself this analytical framework is illuminating, perhaps more revealing are the value judgements implicit in individuals' understanding of the concept. Moving on, this section considers the way in which respondents constructed "the entrepreneur" as "good" or "bad", and the implications of this polarisation.

As regards structural factors, although Anita Roddick was identified by several respondents as the quintessential entrepreneur, the data were permeated by an image of the entrepreneur as male (see also Stevenson, 1990, Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990). This image was constructed/reflected indirectly through the use of masculine pronouns, and male stereotypes: *"glamour-boy"*; *"quirky, eccentric Englishman"*; and *"boot strap man"*, for example. It was also accentuated through more direct references to the entrepreneur as a predominantly male phenomenon.

"I also see it as a rather male term, and I associate it with people who very often do things at other people's expense" (Assistant solicitor in firm to sole practitioner).

Respondents explained their view of the entrepreneur as male in a number of ways. First, for some respondents, the entrepreneur was seen in stereotypical terms, as possessing a range of negative characteristics, such as aggression, greed, and self-centredness, which they associated with masculinity. Conversely, other respondents saw the entrepreneur, not as objectionable, but as unattainable. These views, while less critical, were equally stereotypical. Central to respondents' understandings of the entrepreneur was a view of masculinity and femininity as dichotomous, and of the difference between those patterns of behaviour which were seen appropriate, acceptable, and normal for men, and those which were associated with women.

While the issue of gender permeated interview transcripts, so too did the notion of class. An image of the entrepreneur as a *"self-made man"* was central to a number of definitions. In this view, the entrepreneur comes from humble, working class beginnings, and, against all odds, creates business success. This picture of the entrepreneur as a man who, by dint of perseverance, creativity and a fair bit of *"wheeling and dealing"* manages to *"make something out of nothing"* is seen as underpinning the other three categories discussed below .

As regards the entrepreneurial personality, a number of traits that were seen as characteristic recur time again in the data. In common with traditional psychological traits approaches (see for example McClelland, 1961), respondents typically described the entrepreneur as: innovative; persevering; dynamic; autonomous; non-conformist; action-oriented; aggressive; exploitative; individualistic and risk-taking. Here again, these traits were elucidated through reference to high profile figures, and familiar stereotypes.

In addition to structural features and personality traits, several respondents defined the entrepreneur through his *(sic)* engagement with certain processes, in particular the relentless pursuit of opportunity (Stevenson, 1989), and commitment to seeing an idea

through to completion . This exploitation of opportunity was coupled with clear and focused decision-making, and involvement in a wide range of activities. In contrast to the business owner whose energy is devoted to just one product or service, the entrepreneur was seen as having *"fingers in all pots"*.

Finally, respondents defined the entrepreneur in terms of particular goals and aims: most typically, it was suggested that opportunities were pursued in order to grow the business, and maximise profits (Carland et. al., 1984). However, the notion of the entrepreneur as *"empire builder"* was not uniform. Other respondents described entrepreneurial aims as much more diverse - concerning the fulfilment of potential generally rather than simply in terms of monetary gain.

While this categorisation illustrates the difficulty of attempting to define the entrepreneur in any unitary way, in terms of critical analysis it remains fairly two-dimensional, revealing very little about the sense women make of their definitions, or the extent to which they identify with them. What is perhaps most interesting about respondents' concepts of the entrepreneur is the way in which certain traits and approaches are combined to create stereotypes, and the value judgements implicit in these stereotypical constructions. Views on the entrepreneur are clearly polarised: the entrepreneur is either "good" or "bad". For the former group, *"making something out of nothing"*, *"risk-taking"*, *"innovation"*, *"seizing opportunities"*, *"fighting your own corner"*, and *"growth"* are linked to breaking out of the shackles of a culture of restricted opportunity, of looking towards the future and aiming high. Conversely, for other respondents, these same characteristics and process are used to convey an image of the entrepreneur as "bad", associated, as suggested above, with greed, aggression, the 1980's and Thatcher's Britain. Indeed, one respondent explained how, when her boss described her as entrepreneurial, she *"was horrified"*, and thought that it was *the worst thing anyone could say"*. In spite of their obvious differences, however, what these two groups shared was that they took the term seriously. A third group of respondents simply found it silly, describing the entrepreneur alternatively as *"a quirky, eccentric Englishman"*, *a Barnsley scrap dealer"*, or as something that *"just always makes me want to laugh"*.

The contrasting ways in which the entrepreneur was judged by the women in this study reinforces Burrows and Curran's (1991) insistence on the diversity and ambiguity implicit in the enterprise discourse. However, it must be noted that notwithstanding its dynamism and diversity, the term "entrepreneur" is also highly exclusive. In their definition of "discourse" Kress and Hodge suggest that *"a discourse provides a set of possible statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution"* (1985, p.7). This reference to "possible statements" is crucial - alongside the sets of *possible* statements are sets of *impossible* ones. Although the concept of the entrepreneur incorporates a whole range of personality traits, processes, aims and objectives, and although it can at once be constructed as positive and negative, the data generated in this study suggest that the term frequently excludes people who are not working class, and usually excludes women.

This exclusivity notwithstanding, however, the data serve to illustrate the dynamism of the discourse - that not only is the term "entrepreneur" understood in a variety of (systematic) ways at any *one* time, but that these understandings also change *over time*. Indeed, the respondent cited above who a few years earlier had been so insulted by the label, now uses it with pride: *"it's brilliant stuff! I agree with it!"*.

4.5.2 Entrepreneur, or Entrepreneurial?

An analysis of respondents' understandings of "the entrepreneur" reveals, in particular, a dichotomy in the ways in which the term is evaluated. As women who have moved from employment within organisations to self-employment, the careers of the women in the study clearly have certain structural similarities. In addition, there are psychological features which recur throughout the data: in discussing their reasons for embarking on self-employment, issues to do with autonomy, control, independence and freedom permeate their stories. Having explored respondents' understandings of "the entrepreneur", the question thus emerges: "Do the women in the study identify themselves as entrepreneurs?" Here again women responded in a variety of ways. First, and most straightforward, were two women in the study who, quite unequivocally, said "yes".

"I am an entrepreneur ... I have always been entrepreneurial. I've always made things and sold them, I've always made my own money. I've never wanted to work for anybody else" (Catering manager to co-owner/manager rock'n'roll catering company).

"I think of an entrepreneur as someone who makes the most of what's available, and who manages to build a successful business... I'm a glorified market trader, really... On reflection I would say yes, I am an entrepreneur" (Sales representative to director of form distributing firm).

Examining the transcripts of these two women, notions of enterprise and entrepreneurship emerge as recurring themes. Indeed, a discourse of enterprise seems to permeate their career stories. In these cases, the move to self-employment did not herald a shift in occupational identity, but was described as a logical way of pursuing career aspirations which, particularly in the case of one respondent, were stifled within the organisation. Marshall and Wetherell (1989) suggest that there is frequently a tension between the *personal self*, which is usually described in terms of traits, and the *occupational self*, described stereotypically. For these respondents, however, the entrepreneur does not appear as a mythical, larger-than-life *man*, but as a hard-working, creative *person* committed to developing their business. Thus there was a sense of consistency where these women, instead of attempting to assess themselves against idealised forms, described "the entrepreneur" in much the same terms as they described themselves.

At the opposite end of the continuum were the majority of women who, whether they saw the entrepreneur in negative or positive terms, felt no sense of identification with the concept. Unlike the two women described above whose identification was based on a notion of the entrepreneur as a *real* man or woman, in many of these cases definitions were based on stereotypes - good or bad - and an image of the entrepreneur as larger-than-life, with little relevance to their own lives and experiences.

"You think of wheeler dealers... These people who are into big financial transactions and moving on from one thing to another. Now that is not me at all... They're the king of the business!... My daughter thinks it's wonderful. I mean when she saw the letter

[about participating in the project] *she said, 'Oh, an entrepreneur! I'm going to tell everybody!' But I don't think it's applicable to me at all" (National Health Service sister to owner/manager of nursing home).*

"It conjures up people who walk over anybody and anything just to get a lot of money. I'd hate to think anyone thought I was like that" (Office manager to Principal/owner business college).

"I suppose [an entrepreneur] *is somebody who can see an opportunity and seize it... the likes of Richard Branson... I would be flattered if anyone said* [I was an entrepreneur], *but I don't really think I'm the same sort of calibre" (Marketing and sales manager in multi-national company to owner/ manager of travel business).*

"It's the glamour-boy image. I wouldn't consider myself an entrepreneur" (Hotel manager to hotel co-owner/manager).

It is particularly interesting to examine the implications of this categorical rejection of "the entrepreneur" identity for women's participation in the enterprise culture more generally. An analysis of the account of the nurse, cited above, who left the NHS to own/manage a nursing home, reveals an emphasis on professional skills, knowledge and values, a *professional discourse* which tended to take precedence over an *entrepreneurial* one. This perspective is elucidated most clearly in reflections about her occupational identity.

"[Nursing] *is like anything now, any business. It's got to account for itself in all sorts of ways. And I don't think that the patient always gets the best out of the Health Service... Now if you spoke to my husband, then he would be the one that represents the business... I see myself really as what I always was - a nurse"*

In contrast, although they do not identify with their idealised definitions of "the entrepreneur", the other three respondents cited above appear to engage with aspects of a more general enterprise discourse. The case of the third example is particularly telling. This respondent left her job as a Sales Manager in a multinational company to set up her

own travel business. At the time of interview she had six agencies, and was preparing for a seventh. Although in terms of her working processes, the scope of her venture and her aims and objectives, she seemed to typify the many aspects of "the entrepreneur" that she herself defined, she did not make this connection, and in fact rejected the label outright. Here the notion of the exclusivity of the concept of "the entrepreneur" is particularly apt. Throughout her story this respondent describes how, because she is a woman, she feels that she has been limited, denied access to the opportunities afforded to her male counterparts. Although her image of the entrepreneur is based on many familiar features, it remains an idealised (male) form, always beyond reach. In spite of her manifest success (by her own definition), she just does not match up. Notwithstanding her lack of identification with the concept of "the entrepreneur", though, this respondent implicitly embraces many aspects of the enterprise discourse.

Respondents who rejected "the entrepreneur" label outright fall into two broad groupings. First, there are those who view the concept positively, but feel excluded from it. These women, while embracing an enterprise culture, feel that they have not got the right to claim "entrepreneur" as an occupational identity. In contrast, those respondents who see "the entrepreneur" as negative, or derisory, want nothing whatsoever to do with the concept or with an enterprise discourse more generally. It was suggested above that embracing a particular career discourse is not necessarily predicated on *liking* or *agreeing* with such a discourse. Likewise Du Gay and Salaman (1992) maintain that an ideology does not have to be loved in order to have currency. This group of respondents is a case in point. Although they explicitly reject the whole notion of entrepreneurship (that is, in relation to themselves), and although other career discourses (and occupational identities) usually take precedence, by virtue of being owner/managers of businesses in Britain in the 1990's they can not opt out of the culture of enterprise altogether. Indeed, participation is expressed, albeit implicitly, in even the most "anti-enterprise" of respondents. One woman, who defines "the entrepreneur" as *"a money-grubber, like Richard Branson, a product of the 80's"*, suggests that while this image is repellent, she sees *"entrepreneurial qualities"* very positively. She explains how:

"entrepreneurial skills, like perseverance, innovation, autonomy, creativity and decision-making are not embodied in 'the entrepreneur, and are not tied to a particular era" (Civil service trainer to management consultant).

She sees herself as possessing some of these qualities. Similarly, another respondent suggests that,

"If you just said, 'Do you see yourself as an entrepreneur?' I'd have probably said, 'No'. But having described the entrepreneur, I'd have to say that there is something in me that is entrepreneurial. But I always see entrepreneurial as something that's external - I've done what I've done for me, not because I want to be seen as an entrepreneur. To me, being an entrepreneur, it's like that's the only thing that's important. Entrepreneurial to me means that you've got certain skills, but you choose to do things as and when it suits you" (Personnel officer to training/development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

Here respondents appropriated aspects of an enterprise discourse, while simultaneously rejecting the concept of "the entrepreneur" as an occupational identity. It appears that identification with a given occupation becomes a sort of master status - to which all other identities become subordinate. Whereas "the entrepreneur" is seen as a kind of rigid totality, "entrepreneurial" is an adjective which can be used flexibly, in a whole variety of contexts. Defining themselves as *entrepreneurial* rather than *entrepreneurs* allows these respondents to tap into those aspects of the discourse which they see as useful, and to leave those which they see as offensive, or irrelevant.

As far as this study of radical career change is concerned, this flexibility is particularly important. In the stories of women who have moved from employment to self-employment, entrepreneurial discourses are mobilised within and alongside bureaucratic, professional and self-development ones. Here, the question of occupational identity becomes a site of struggle, as women seek to resolve fundamental issues concerning their careers and their lives more generally, struggles embedded within and articulated through these discourses.

A number of salient points thus emerge. First, just as understandings of "the enterprise culture" vary according to structural, ideological, situational and historical factors, so too the concept of "the entrepreneur" is polysemic, and dynamic. While on one hand women's definitions of the term can be understood in terms of key traits, processes, and goals, respondents also seem to make sense of the concept in structural terms - as a predominantly *male* phenomenon. An analysis of the data reveals a dichotomy between the minority of women whose definitions were based on ideas about *real* men and women running businesses in particular ways, and the majority whose understandings were stereotypical, based on notions of the entrepreneur as a mythical, larger-than-life *man*. While those in the former group readily identified themselves as entrepreneurs, the latter group found the concept wholly irrelevant to how they saw themselves and their careers: this lack of identification was based on either negative evaluations of the concept which women wanted to distance themselves from, or positive evaluations that women felt they could never aspire to.

Second, although the concept of " the entrepreneur" is frequently defined in stereotypical terms, and associated with particular historical periods, ideas about what it means to be "entrepreneurial" are much more flexible and relevant. It therefore follows that rejection of "the entrepreneur" as an occupational identity does not necessarily signify a rejection of the enterprise discourse. Instead, women mobilised aspects of that discourse that were most meaningful given their particular circumstances. Furthermore, even those women who expressed their disdain for the whole notion of enterprise frequently drew on an enterprise discourse in describing their businesses. "Enterprise" is thus articulated as one of a number of competing/complementary discourses which together serve to construct an individual's career story.

4.6 Conclusion

In applying Kanter's (amended) model to the data generated in this study, it becomes clear that the move from employment to self-employment involves more than a "simple" change from one career form to another. Rather, it is a much more complex, and convoluted transition, involving the precarious balancing of often incompatible career discourses. For many respondents, the decision to embark on self-employment was

motivated by an enduring vision of how they saw themselves and their careers developing. For these women, the change must be understood as a way of holding on to that vision, of maintaining that continuity. In other cases, however, the move to self-employment represents the rejection one career discourse and embracing of another. The move to self-employment, therefore, must be seen as problematic: it can be reactive or proactive - representative of a particular career discourse, or constitutive of another.

Implicit in the question, *"How does the move from employment to self-employment fit into a woman's career pattern more generally?"* is an assumption that such a transition can not be understood as discrete moment or an isolated event; rather, it must be examined within the context of the developing career. Taking this assumption as its starting point, this chapter explored the career development of the women in the study, hoping that such an analysis would yield insights into women and self-employment which could then be enriched and developed in subsequent chapters. I am confident that in focusing on issues such as sex-role socialisation and its impact on career choice, the process of career planning, and career structures more generally, such insights have emerged. I also have realised that not only does an understanding of women's careers shed light on the move from employment to self-employment, but that at the same time, a focus on the move to self-employment adds a new dimension to our understanding of women's careers. Analysing the accounts of women who have experienced major career change elucidates the inadequacy of traditional approaches based on bureaucratic career structures, and reveals the need for approaches which can accommodate more diverse patterns and ways of thinking about careers. The concept of career discourses (intersecting, overlapping, colliding) provides a valuable starting point.

Chapter 5

MAKING SENSE OF THE DECISION TO LEAVE

This chapter considers research question two:

- **How can a woman's decision to leave her organisation be understood theoretically?**

Specifically, section 5.2 focuses on respondents' decisions to leave their organisations from a personal perspective, including the "pull" to self-employment, and the need to balance the needs of partners and families with professional considerations. In contrast, section 5.3 examines this decision on an organisational level, considering such issues as "failure to thrive" professionally, clashing values and the experience of marginality. The analysis demonstrates the interconnectedness of personal and organisational factors in women's decisions to leave their organisations. Permeating this analysis is a consideration of the ideology of the family, central to which are the conflicting demands of respondents' personal and professional lives.

5.1 Introduction

From the outset, my intention was to explore women's move from employment to self-employment *holistically*. Section 3.4.3 suggests that such a perspective involves a consideration of *diachronic* and *synchronic* dimensions. Just as the conductor of an orchestra reads the score both in terms of moving from beginning to end, *and* in terms of understanding what each instrument is doing at any particular moment, and how the instruments fit together to form patterns, so too this thesis aims to gain an understanding of the *process* of moving from employment to self-employment, almost like a *narrative*, while at the same time exploring the complexity of factors which interact at *certain key stages* of this process. Chapter 4 explores women's experiences as they unfold through time, while Chapters 5 through 8 take a cross-sectional perspective, looking at particular moments, stages, or "slices" of experience. The research questions, outlined in section 3.6, focus on three stages which emerged from the data as particularly significant: the decision to leave the organisation; the decision to embark on self-employment; and the experience of self-employment . It must be noted, however, that the term "stage" should not be understood as a unitary concept. As this chapter will illustrate, while for some

women the decision to leave was made almost immediately upon joining their organisation, for others it was a much more gradual process evolving over months, and in some cases, years. Similarly, "the experience of self-employment" is described, not as a particular moment or event, but as a dynamic process involving a whole complexity of factors, and understood by respondents in terms of a number of different phases. The following chapters address each of these "stages" in turn, starting, in this chapter, with respondents' decisions to leave their organisations.

The twenty-four women in this sample described their decisions to leave their organisations as a response to a whole range of circumstances, at both personal and organisational levels. Section 5.2 explores the former, addressing such issues as: the increasing demands of a family business; a husband or partner's change of circumstances; the needs of a young family; and the desire to move cities. The organisational level is considered in section 5.3, focusing in particular on respondents' lack of opportunity; clashing values, particularly in the context of organisational change; marginalisation and lack of recognition; and the incompatibility of professional and personal life.

5.2 The Decision to Leave: personal dimensions

Over half of the women in the sample described how their decisions to leave their organisations resulted, *in part*, from personal circumstances. Such circumstances ranged from those women who had always intended to run their own business, who had always seen employment within their organisations in limited terms: as an "apprenticeship", or as a "holding pattern" while they waited for the right moment to embark on self-employment, to those women whose husbands' or partners' situations made it very difficult for them to continue in their present jobs. The analysis that follows is divided into four sections: the first deals with women whose decisions to leave were directly related to their business interests; the second focuses on those respondents who left their organisations in order to accommodate their husbands' or partners' circumstances; in the third case these decisions were described as responses to the needs of young families; and the fourth concerns respondents whose leaving was connected with decisions to move away. Apart from the specific circumstances which led to their resignations, what differentiates these respondents is the extent to which these decisions can be understood

in terms of gender, the extent to which their roles and responsibilities as women impacted on their decisions to leave their organisations.

5.2.1 The Pull of Self-employment

Over one quarter of the women in the sample explained how departure from their organisations was a direct result of outside business interests. The review of the literature on entrepreneurship highlights the importance of looking at the phenomenon of starting up in business in terms of a number of intersecting variables: social, psychological, economic, cultural and situational (Cohen and Jennings, 1995; Stanworth and Gray, 1991) While a number of women in the sample had always envisaged their future in terms of self-employment, for others starting up in business was a response to a particular situation. As regards the former group, two respondents described self-employment as a "way of life", it was something they had always done, and they saw it as an essential aspect of their identity.

"I've always made things and sold them, and made my own money. I've never really wanted to work for anybody else... I knew I was that kind of person, I knew I would never work very well in a place where somebody was telling me how to do this and how to do that. I was always very good - if I needed any money I would go out and get it. I always had that sort of attitude, I'd just think, 'Well I want to do this, so therefore I'll go and work to get the money'. And I'd do anything to get the money. So I always knew that probably I would have my own business of some sort" (Catering manager to co-owner manager rock'n'roll catering business).

For these respondents, employment within organisations was only ever perceived in very limited terms, as a sort of transitional state, a holding pattern which they "endured" while waiting for the right opportunity to strike out on their own.

It comes as little surprise that those respondents who saw their careers as eventually leading to self-employment were generally involved in business sectors which are themselves oriented in this direction. Women in sectors such as design, marketing, and

hotel and catering saw business ownership as the logical, and expected outcome of their training and experience.

"Having a business was something I definitely wanted to do. It came - a lot of people who go into catering do have, somewhere in the back of their mind, the image that they will run their own business at some point. And I think that the very fact that I never wanted to work within huge hotels... I think you get lost within the organisation. Especially in the early days, you do. I also think, as a woman, it was a disadvantage. I think, even now looking at other people, or friends in situations in junior management, women are still treated as second class" (Hotel manager to hotel co-owner/manager).

The issue of women's subordination and marginalisation in organisations is considered more fully in section 5.3. For now, though, what is important is the way in which this respondent's experiences as a woman manager within a large, male-dominated hotel chain, combined with the nature of the business sector itself, encouraged her interest in self-employment, and prompted her decision to leave. While differentiating personal from organisational factors certainly facilitates analysis, this case aptly illustrates the danger of attempting to view them as dichotomous. Thus, it is important not to use the personal/organisational framework in a reductionist way. Instead of simplifying and polarising issues, such categorisation should be used as an analytical mechanism for understanding the complex ways in which personal and organisational dimensions interact, and how together they impact on a woman's decision to leave her organisation.

Of those women who described their decisions to leave their organisations in terms of outside business interests, for the two groups cited, the decision to leave can be seen as a step towards the fulfilment of an enduring vision. For others, however, self-employment is explained as a response to situational factors. Birely's "grey to white syndrome" (1989) where people who start out "moonlighting" are later able, or are forced, to take a more active, full-time role, is particularly relevant in the cases of three respondents. All three were already working on a part-time basis in businesses they had set up with partners (in two cases with husbands, and in the third, with her father), while at the same time maintaining full-time positions within organisations. Two had planned to join the businesses as soon as such a move was financially viable:

"We bought that business... And my husband went in first and ran the company. I was still working at my company for the first ten months, and then I gave my job up and went into the business" (Marketing and sales manager to owner/manager of travel business).

For the other, however, the business was only ever intended to be a hobby - but unexpected (and in some respects unwanted) success forced her to become involved full-time:

I was still working. I was just doing this in the evening. And it really sort of rocketed... and I think the first week we sold something like one hundred and fifty [tracksuits] - they were selling like ice creams... It was incredible, [the salespeople] were selling thousands of pounds worth of goods a week between them... What happened was a large store came in and wanted to buy it, and the only way we could do it was to actually have a factory... So we seriously sat down and said, 'How do we run it?' My husband, didn't want to run the factory... The other partner, she wanted to stay in the shop... So there was only one person left that had all that experience and that was me." (Sales manager in newspaper company to co-owner manager of clothing manufacturing business to office manager of recruitment agency).

Although they may have had considerable misgivings, these women saw their decision to leave quite unambiguously, as a direct response to the needs of their fledgling businesses.

The women cited above, unlike many others in the sample, were all drawn to business ownership. Although their interest in self-employment may be described in quite different terms: as an essential aspect of their personality; the result of working in a particular business sector; or situationally, as a response to the demands of their growing business, it was the pull of running their own business that prompted these respondents to leave their organisations. The "pull of self-employment" will be explored more fully in Chapter 8, which focuses on respondents' reasons for choosing self-employment.

5.2.2 Accommodating Partners' Needs

Four women in the sample described how their decisions to leave were prompted by the needs of their husbands or partners: for one respondent, the decision was the result of her partner's redundancy and the subsequent need to move cities; the second explained how, when her husband's career as a professional gymnast came to an end, they decided to go into business together; the third was forced to leave her job when she married a man who lived and worked elsewhere, and the fourth left two jobs to accommodate her husband - the first time it was due to redundancy, while the second was to follow his religious "calling".

What was striking in these women's stories is the unproblematic way in which they were recounted:

"I built up my time nursing then, until I was full-time, and I had a Sister's post - only for six months, when the steel industry collapsed in Sheffield, and it became obvious that we would have to go elsewhere. The understanding was that you had to look for a new job, a new home and you had to see to the children so that they weren't upset by it... Then my husband had a vision that he needed to return to Sheffield to do work full-time for the Church. And I said, 'Fine', you know, 'if that's what we have to do, then we have to do that'" (Operating theatre nurse to reflexologist).

While this particular example may seem extraordinary in its explicitness and in the respondents' apparent *acceptance* of the situation, the other three transcripts, while perhaps not quite so transparent, are equally unquestioning. Of course this seeming willingness to accommodate their partners' needs could be due to a number of factors: it could be a result of "interviewer effects" - respondents may indeed have been very angry at the time, but in the interview context were possibly very keen to present themselves as "good (accommodating, flexible, unselfish) wives"; or they may have forgotten just how resentful they actually were. With only my transcripts as evidence, I am clearly not in a position to judge the "truthfulness" of my respondents' stories (as explained in Chapter 3, the important thing is that they were "true" at the time of interview). However, what is

more significant, and to my mind more interesting, is the pervasiveness of the "good, dutiful wife" discourse, constructed in the interview context: the extent to which this discourse is accepted as *normal* and *natural*, and the total absence of alternative (more radical) meanings and responses. Section 2.2.2 refers to the ubiquitousness of the ideology of the family, and its relevance to women's position in the labour market. The stories of these four women are a case in point. All four women gave up what they described as challenging, fulfilling, enjoyable jobs in order to accommodate their husband's changing needs, *all* explained how, had circumstances been different, they would never have left their organisations.

"I suppose in a way when I was with the DoE in their training, then I would have quite happily sat there for life... I would have just sat there because I was enjoying doing the job'" (Civil service trainer to independent trainer).

In the case of the woman whose marriage to a Sheffield man eventually resulted in her decision to leave her position in London, such was her commitment to her job that she actually commuted daily from Doncaster to London for over a year. When this situation became untenable, she was forced to resign.

Most poignant, though, is the story of a woman who, despite her promising career in a multi-national company, left to set up a travel business with her husband who had recently retired as a professional gymnast.

"I would have liked to carry on working for that company. I think if I had stayed single then I would have enjoyed carrying on there. I'd like to have seen how far I could have gone, and I suppose I enjoyed working for the company. I can't ever remember waking up and thinking, 'Oh dear, I don't want to go to work', whereas when I'm self-employed...I wish I had been a man. It would have been a lot easier" (Marketing and sales manager to owner/manager of travel business)

Accounts of their organisations were not uniformly glowing, however, and it certainly was not the case that these respondents' memories were all tinged with rosy nostalgia. On the contrary, all four women spoke critically about some aspects of their

organisational experiences, particularly with regard to gender, and access to promotion and opportunity. However, all were quite clear that in spite of these difficult issues, their reasons for leaving were *not* organisationally-based. Rather, they all saw this decision as a direct response to their husbands'/partners' changing needs and circumstances. As "good" wives/partners, their felt that their role was to accept and support this change.

5.2.3 Domestic Responsibilities: accommodating the needs of a young family

In contrast to popular myths about why women leave their jobs in organisations, and consistent with Rosin and Korabik's (1992) and Marshall's (1991, 1994, 1995) findings, only three women in this study cited domestic responsibilities as the main reason for leaving their organisations. However, in spite of the small number of women involved, it is important to consider the specific circumstances in which these decisions were made. It must be noted that in addition to the three respondents mentioned above, several more included the need to balance home and work roles and responsibilities in the constellation of factors that led to their decision. The stories of these women will be considered from an organisational perspective in section 7.3.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the women who left their organisations because of parental responsibilities worked in high-powered sales positions. These jobs involved a great deal of travelling - in fact all three women often found themselves away from home from Monday through to Friday. Two out of these three women, feeling that their current lifestyles were incompatible with family life, actually made the decision to leave before their children were born; for one of these, the woman married to the gymnast cited in the previous section, family life meant not only meeting the needs of future children, but more immediately, those of her retired husband. The third respondent, in contrast, attempted to "carry on as before" after her daughter was born, but found the stress resulting from these competing and conflicting responsibilities intolerable.

I was very successful for that company, in that same year that I had Rosie, and I believed that I could have it all. I thought Rosie would just do exactly as I told her, and I thought I could have a high powered selling job that took me all over the country, and I could still manage to look after the baby as well. But this was the most stupid

understatement that I've ever said in my life" (Sales representative to director of form distributing firm).

Although they initially cited parental responsibilities as their principle reason for leaving their organisations, as respondents reflected on their experiences in the course of the interviews, it emerged that the motivation was far less straight-forward, that motherhood was only one in of a web of factors that led them to this decision. This is discussed quite explicitly by one respondent who, at the time, used her family responsibilities as a justification for leaving her job:

And it was all about the family, the motivation behind that was the family. That's what I think, that's what I always say - on the surface that was the motivation. ...And although I said it had to do with home life, probably unconsciously it was to do with me wanting to be more of my own person and control more of my own life. But at the time it was an unconscious thing" (Personnel officer to training/development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

Significant here is the extent to which this respondent internalised the popular stereotype about why women leave organisations, and the ideology of the family upon which this stereotype is grounded. The family provided this respondent, and others, with a socially legitimate justification for leaving their jobs. Whereas the desire for more autonomy and control may not have been seen (by herself or others) as an acceptable reason to leave, the desire to do the best for her child "made sense". Considering the decision years later, at the time of interview, she felt that her child had probably been used as an excuse. In fact, she now sees her decision to leave more as a reflection of her attempt to resolve much more fundamental issues about employment, and life in general.

5.2.4 The Desire to Move Away

From the personal perspective, the final issue to be considered here concerns those respondents whose decisions to leave stem from their desire to move away. This was the case for two respondents. One had been transferred by her company; her decision to leave was based on her wish to return home to her family, partner and friends in

Sheffield. The other had lived abroad for years and had recently gone through a messy divorce; for her leaving was about making a new start, returning to England, and re-establishing an old relationship. While the actual circumstances surrounding both moves were fraught and difficult, in terms of this analysis, these decisions appear to be straight-forward. Once again, this is not to suggest that these respondents were complacent about their organisations, but that as far as this analysis is concerned, the circumstances which led to their resignation appear to be uncontentious and unambiguous.

5.2.5 The Ideology of the Family and the Decision to Leave

As illustrated above, personal explanations for respondents' decisions to leave their organisations were diverse and multi-faceted, ranging from the desire to pursue outside business interests, to the need to accommodate partners and children, and including both structural and situational factors. While the analytical framework used to explore these issues was based on the different reasons cited by the respondents themselves, another way to examine the phenomenon of leaving could be in terms of gender. For many of the respondents cited above, their roles and responsibilities *as women* were pivotal in their decisions to leave their organisations: in these cases, women's decisions were based, not on pursuing particular career opportunities or interests, but on accommodating others' needs, and adapting their own career aspirations to meet these needs. In fact, only a tiny minority of women justified their decisions in terms of what they actually *wanted* to do (although one women left, not to fulfil domestic responsibilities, but because she was needed by the business). As suggested by one respondent, cited above, this could be because they felt that leaving for "family reasons" was somehow more acceptable than leaving to pursue their career ambitions. This possibility notwithstanding, what is apparent is the pervasiveness of a discourse which places women firmly in the domestic arena.

Brannen (1992) suggests that central to this discourse, which is grounded in the ideology of the family, are notions about (a) men as breadwinners, the idea that men should not have breaks in their careers, and thus, are constructed as the "providers" of the household; (b) love in marriage, which tends to de-emphasise the power relations at work in family life; and (c) the primacy of the mother-child relationship which have led to

the norm of full-time motherhood during children's first years. Here women's legitimacy is derived from an acceptance of their roles as carers and nurturers. What emerges in the transcripts is a sense that the respondents are attempting to reconcile a number of discourses which appear to be fundamentally contradictory: the professional versus the parental discourse is just one example. The concept of a "hierarchy of discourses", in which certain ways of making sense are privileged, while others are rendered subordinate (Belsey, 1980) is helpful in illuminating the way in which, time and again throughout the transcripts, women's decisions are ultimately resolved in favour of their roles and responsibilities as wives and mothers.

In seeking to understand women's decisions to leave their organisations on a *personal level*, gender, and in particular, the ideology of the family, have emerged as permeating themes. The section that follows will consider how these themes are further developed within the context of the organisation.

5.3 The Decision to Leave: organisational dimensions

While the above section examines women's decisions to leave on a personal level, this section focuses on organisational factors, on the "push" to self-employment. As detailed in the review of the "corporate flight" literature, this organisational dimension was seen as central in the analyses of Rosin and Korabik (1992), and of Marshall (1991; 1994; 1995). The following analysis is divided into three broad areas: opportunities for professional development; individual and organisational values; and the conflict between home and work. It must be noted, however, that as was the case above, in most circumstances respondents decisions' to leave their organisations can not be reduced to a single conceptual category: instead, they must be seen as resulting from a number of overlapping, sometimes ambiguous factors. Although these categories were derived as an analytical tool, it is therefore crucial that they are not to be seen as monolithic or mutually exclusive. On the contrary, each must be recognised as diverse, incorporating, at times, aspects of the other two. After exploring each of these categories in relation to the respondents' stories, this chapter will consider the (related) issues of gender and organisational fit, issues which permeate the data and which are central to an

understanding of the phenomenon of women's "flight" (or desire to fly) from their organisations.

5.3.1 Opportunities for Professional Development

"Organisations stifle creativity. Bureaucratic structures stifle people, and if creative people are around, they generally become counterproductive or they leave" (Social worker to management consultant).

Marshall (1993) applies the concept of "failure to thrive", borrowed from social work, to women managers who "for no identifiable reason are failing to show satisfactory development... Their coping is directed more towards surviving than thriving, and may therefore be constraining in the long-term" (p. 90). Over half of the women in the sample explained how they felt frustrated by what they saw as limited opportunities for professional development within their organisations. For such women, work was no longer challenging - feelings of "stagnation", "wasting time" and "being stuck", set against their desire to "learn" and "grow" were cited as the triggers for change. While there was a striking similarity in the way in which women described their feelings about their situations - indeed there seemed to be a whole discourse around the notion of restricted opportunities - the actual nature of these restrictions varied widely within the sample. From the data, several different interpretations of "limited opportunities" emerge. These can be understood in terms of two broad themes which are outlined and illustrated below.

<u>Lack of access to existing opportunities</u>

First, lack of opportunity was seen by several women in the sample as a lack of access to existing opportunities. These women all worked for large, hierarchical organisations: including a health service, a social services department, a national travel company, and a large law firm. Within these organisations, professional development was inextricably linked with promotion; thus failure to obtain a promotion was interpreted as being stuck. As Kanter (1977) explains, "Stuck is a relative concept. In hierarchical systems, it has to do with how far one can go in relation to the total system, how many more perquisites

and privileges of a qualitatively different sort will be added, and how many changes in position and jumps in status are defined as objectively possible" (p. 136). She suggests that mobility can be blocked in several ways; most relevant in terms of this study are, first, those individuals who she describes as losing out in the competition (p. 137), people who start out in positions with mobility prospects, but who are passed over for promotion, or moved aside to "dead-end" jobs. Second are those employees who arrived at their current job via the "wrong path", and hence lack the necessary qualifications, experience, background or connections to progress further.

As regards those who lose out in the competition, a product manager for a large travel company, explained how, although she had been doing the job of the marketing manager, she had been repeatedly denied appropriate compensation and a change of job title. Feeling increasingly frustrated and demoralised, she resigned, at which point her job was advertised as a marketing manager's position, with a five thousand pound increase on the salary. This respondent felt that it was significant that the person they appointed was a man, that as a woman her voice was somehow less audible, and in spite of her performance, she lacked visibility:

" When I said, 'How can you justify paying somebody five thousand pounds more for doing exactly the same job?' he said, 'Well, you should have shouted louder'... I believe there was a gender issue, but I couldn't put my finger on it" (Product manager to co-owner manager of environmentally-friendly nappy business to marketing manager).

Similarly, a self-employed solicitor who had previously worked in a large, well-known firm explained how:

There were very few women who actually made it through to the higher ranks of partnership, very few... And yet they'd been recruiting women each year. So I mean there's just a natural drop-out rate. They're very happy to have women as the work-horses at the bottom of the organisation, but they do not see them in terms of having a real future , in terms of what the women themselves get out of it all. So although they set certain, very clear targets, there's also this hidden agenda. And that says, 'Well, even if you're successful and you work at the weekends and earn all the money, costs

and all, then we'll add a few more hurdles. But we won't quite tell you what they are - but we'll help some people over them, and we won't help others".

Here Kanter's suggestion that in "high mobility" jobs, lack of access to higher positions can result from organisational politics is clearly apt.

In yet another case, organisational politics impacted on a respondent's ability to secure a promotion within her Social Services Department. However, in contrast to Kanter, whose analysis focuses on organisational barriers to promotion, this respondent, a social worker, suggests that when a suitable position became available, her own lack of confidence prevented her from applying. She maintains that as an "equal opportunity employer", her department was firmly opposed to any form of mentoring - in this context, encouraging individuals in their careers was seen as providing unfair advantage. Unsupported and lacking in self-esteem, she did not apply, and the job was given to someone else.

Two women in the study fit into Kanter's "wrong path" category: "though they could get into and handle their present job, they lacked the experience, background, attitudes and knowledge, or connections that could lead them further" (p. 138). Although prospects existed for people in their positions, the particular profiles of these women, the unconventional ways in which they arrived in their present posts and the extent to which they differed from others in these posts, served as barriers to promotion.

"I applied endlessly for promotion and this was turned down continuously... My age was against me - I'd done all the courses and the work and involvement before there were any pieces of paper to show that I'd done it... So therefore nobody was going to pay for me to go on courses... The responsibility I had was that, after I had been there for four years, I could count the catheters every week and order the missing ones. There was a situation where you couldn't go into management unless you had a management course, and you couldn't get into a management course unless you had a management position" (Operating theatre nurse to reflexologist).

This nurse saw her lack of access as being linked to age (she was considerably older than many of her colleagues), the fact that she had completed her initial training years before, and with being seen as not quite "fitting in" with the organisation generally. Although she was committed to furthering her professional skills and competencies, and regularly funded herself to attend professional courses and training programmes, her background was quite different from those in the mainstream, and she felt that the opportunities available to nurses in this mainstream were simply not available to her.

Limited career paths, "dead-end" jobs and stifled performance

For the women cited above, the decisions to leave their organisations were linked to feelings of frustration at not being able to secure promotions that appeared to be available to others in their position. In contrast, six respondents suggested that there simply were no available opportunities. Here the issue was not about limited access, but about dead-end jobs. Kanter suggests that in addition to the two forms of blocked mobility introduced above, there is a third type which relates to people who never had much opportunity to begin with: "Low promotion rates, or short ladders and low ceilings in their job category, meant that few expectations were ever created for such jobs to involve movement" (Kanter, 1977, p. 136). This category typically involves traditional "women's jobs" such as clerical work and office supervision. Interestingly, although Kanter limits this category to what are conventionally considered "low-mobility, low-risk occupations", professional careers can lead to similar dead-ends. In this study, this is best illustrated by an educational psychologist whose feelings of stagnation and tedium relate in part to having reached the top of her career path, and having nowhere else to go:

"There weren't [any opportunities for promotion], you see. It was just a three-tiered - there was the principal, there were senior psychologists who were totally disempowered, and there was the basic grade. So having become a senior, this was the point at which I began to think... you know, I'd done as much as I could there, really" (Educational psychologist to independent psychologist).

Respondents' perceptions that they were stifled, that their organisations offered few challenges and limited opportunities for development, were not exclusively related to promotion prospects within their hierarchies. In contrast to those women who were unable to gain promotion, and those whose jobs offered no opportunities for promotion, the stories of three women stand out. These respondents were striking because, having surveyed what was available on the next level up, they decided that promotion was quite simply "not worth it".

This educational psychologist, along with several others in the sample, were looking for professional challenges, but not necessarily linked with progress through the hierarchy. To these women, professional development was considered, not in terms of structural movement, but in terms of learning and growth. Respondents who described themselves in these terms worked in a variety of sectors: local authority work, sales, health care, hotels and catering, psychology, and design and marketing. Although Kanter's notion of the "low ceilinged occupation" is associated with a lack of movement through an organisation's hierarchy, and although these respondents can be differentiated from Kanter's grouping in terms of their remuneration packages, levels of responsibility, freedom and risk, what is similar is that they saw their jobs as ultimately leading to a dead-end.

In spite of her success, a sales representative described her job as:

"boring, it was a grind really. It wasn't inspirational in any way, and I felt that if I could achieve all that feeling as I did, then working for myself I could achieve so much more" (Sales representative to director of form distributing firm).

Likewise a Race Relations Officer in a local authority explained how,

"I got to the point where I thought, 'I'm becoming de-skilled here, I'm not developing further and I'm not getting a sense of achievement" (Race relations officer to management consultant).

Although they report similar feelings, feelings which led, eventually, to their decisions to leave their organisations, the transcripts of these two women reveal quite different occupational contexts, different reasons for their frustrations. The former describes herself as a "glorified market trader", suggesting that, while there was nothing particularly exciting about her job per se, its inherent risks and potential rewards made it thrilling from the start. However, having achieved success, the initial thrill began to wane, and the day-to-day reality of travelling around the country, selling uninteresting products on behalf of a company that was not her own, became increasingly tedious and demoralising. Having realised that she could do this job, this respondent was looking for a new challenge.

In contrast, a number of respondents, who took on what they initially thought would be very challenging positions, described the intense frustration they experienced when they found themselves systematically undermined and prevented from realising the potential of these positions. Marshall (1995) suggests that such a feeling is a result of an unclear position within the organisation, in circumstances where one's status or power has been placed in doubt, or "their ability to act effectively has been compromised" (p. 155).

As a black woman who came from a different city to work in an authority dominated by white, local men, the race relations officer cited above described how she found herself isolated from what she perceived as the key decision-making arenas, and from the most powerful alliances. Although this did not appear to trouble her on a personal basis, she was continually frustrated by her inability to get things done. She describes the political machinations inside the local authority as being compounded by the fact that she was working in an extremely sensitive area - the field of race relations was a thorny political issue and people in her department frequently found their hands tied by politicians afraid to "rock the boat". Unlike the sales representative, this respondent found the actual substance of her job very compelling indeed, and initially felt that it offered real opportunity in terms of learning and professional growth. However, whereas in the case of the former, the occupational context provided freedom and autonomy, for this respondent it was stifling. She felt thwarted by the external political situation and its internal ramifications. In addition, her marginal position, due to her role within her department, and her lack of access to the powerful networks, made it very difficult for

her to take action, and made professional growth and development nearly impossible. Here gender, in combination with other factors, in particular ethnicity, and not being "local", served to position this respondent well "outside" of the dominant culture of her organisation, thus severely curtailing her ability to act, and to affect change.

"I went into a job where I was an outsider because I didn't have any networks there, and the networks were all pretty well established. So people were very clear about who to include and who not to include. So I didn't get on too well because it was almost like I didn't have a power base to go in with. And I realised that it would be very difficult to achieve there".

In another case, a design manager in an established mail order company explained how:

"My fellow design managers were all male, and all at least ten years older than me, and were convinced that the only reason that I'd got the job was that I had slept with the Design Director... One of the things that I was given to do in the early stage was to look, to have an overview of how the company was run... So I put together a marketing strategy. I put an awful lot of my own time into it at weekends and evenings, it was a bit of a life's work really. And it was just put on a shelf to gather dust. It was obvious that I'd been given the job to keep me quiet" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency (a)).

Still (1995) examines the complex socio-cultural barriers that keep women from attaining leadership roles. While several of the women in this study did *attain* such roles, they were prevented from developing them fully, and most importantly, from exercising the power that they assumed to be intrinsic to these roles.

Of those respondents whose decisions to leave resulted from organisational factors, over half suggested that central to this decision was a feeling that organisations were failing to provide possibilities for professional development, in terms of both promotion through the hierarchy as well as opportunities for professional learning and growth. While the specific nature of these barriers varied, as illustrated above, it appeared that respondents saw themselves as tangential to the dominant culture of their organisation emerges as a

unifying theme. Central to this theme is the issue of power, not an entity which is invested within organisational roles and structures and which is "doled out" to organisational members, but as a dynamic relationship, constructed and negotiated through organisational processes (Witz and Savage, 1992). This theme will be further developed in the sections that follow.

5.3.2 Individual and Organisational Values: a site of struggle

In the above section women's decisions to leave their organisations were related to their feelings of being let down by a lack of opportunity for professional development. On a somewhat more abstract level, a significant number of respondents explained how their decisions to opt out of organisational life were linked to an inconsistency between their own systems of values and those of their organisations.

Clashes were most vividly illustrated in the context of change, where these rifts could be read as a site of struggle between the individual and the organisation - a struggle in which the individual was ultimately subordinated. In particular, three examples of such conflicts emerge from the data: first, the clash could be seen as the result of organisational changes of which the respondent fundamentally disapproved; in contrast, the second case concerns respondents being recruited as change agents into organisations which continued to cling on to traditional values and working practices. The third example focuses on respondents who found themselves changing in directions which were at odds with their organisations. Finally, in addition to clashes in value systems emerging from contexts of change, there were several examples of women whose own values were incompatible with those of the organisation; here, respondents felt that what they were was essentially different from what the organisation expected from its employees. In such cases, the decision to leave resulted from a lack of recognition, and feelings of being undervalued.

<u>Changing organisations - clashing values</u>

A number of respondents explained how their decisions to leave were directly linked to organisational changes which they saw as in fundamental contradiction to organisations'

traditional systems of values and principles, and the introduction of ideas with which they themselves profoundly disagreed. In these cases change, either externally or internally imposed, resulted in new ways of making sense of organisational reality, in terms of everyday working practices as well as more general priorities, and long term aims and objectives.

The stories of two women are particularly revealing. One was a night sister in an NHS hospital, while the other worked as a recruitment consultant for a highly respected local agency. Both respondents described their occupations, not in operational, bureaucratic or financial terms, but in terms of values.

"I was a bit of the old-fashioned type. People used to say, 'Oh, you have a vocation for nursing', which I think was relatively true... Now when I started nursing, basic care was what nurses were for, and I think it's become very sophisticated now, and nurses are really a little bit like mini-doctors" (National Health Service sister to owner/manager of nursing home).

"Recruitment to me has always been a vocation, something I believe very strongly in" (Personal assistant to recruitment consultant in large organisation to independent recruitment consultant).

The word "vocation" is especially telling, connoting a sense of deep commitment, a profound relationship between the woman and her work. Both respondents explained how, at the start, they felt that these values were shared by their organisations, and how this identification led to a strong sense of belonging, and feelings of pride, both in themselves and in their organisations. However changes, externally imposed by the government in the case of the Health Service, and resulting from internal staffing arrangements in that of the recruitment agency, introduced radically new ways of working and making sense of the work context. These respondents described how such changes served to shatter their sense of identification with their organisation, and of shared purpose.

"Probably the main reason I left was dissatisfaction with standards of care in the Health Service. It really was changing to how it had been when I went into nursing thirty years ago... I suppose I was a bit set in my ways. I found it hard to adapt... When I went into nursing that's what it was [patient oriented]. Now it's like any other business, it's got to account for itself in all sorts of ways" (National Health Service sister to owner/manager of nursing home).

They were the leaders in the field and he [the new Managing Director] was trying to max up the recruitment, not as consultants - they were good salespeople, good at getting the business in, but not really interested in doing it properly... but I wouldn't change from doing it properly" (Personal assistant to recruitment consultant in large firm to independent recruitment consultant).

These respondents found it impossible to reconcile the new regimes and their attendant value systems, with their own perceptions of themselves as professionals, and their jobs. As suggested by Cassell and Walsh (1994), the concept of cognitive dissonance illustrated here is useful in understanding their ultimate decisions to resign.

<u>The change agent in the unchanging organisation</u>

In contrast to the respondents cited above who sought to cling on to their traditional, professional values while their organisations changed around them, two respondents, cited earlier in the section on "stifled performance" sought to initiate major change in organisations bent on staying the same. The experiences of these women echoed those of several respondents in Marshall's (1995) study. Unlike the former, who gradually recognised the growing disjuncture between themselves and their organisations, for these change agents, such recognition came almost immediately upon taking up their new posts.

"I got there and I realised that it was something out of the ark! The word "mediocrity" just kept cropping up" (Design manager to co-director of graphic design agency (a)).

These change agents, who saw themselves as dynamic and innovative, were recruited with a brief to initiate large-scale reform; however, it soon became apparent that in spite of their appointments, their organisations were frightened by what these women represented, and quickly "closed ranks" in resistance.

"This was a family-run company in Derbyshire that had been going for years, and they couldn't see any need for change... I had personal rub-ups with people who just didn't want the design studio, and who didn't want a woman there who was half their age. Cause they're all quite - near retirement really. So they all wore white coats in the factory. I'm not saying that's wrong, but there was no - give" (Design manager to co-director of graphic design agency (b)).

Not only was this clash of values professionally frustrating, as discussed above; for one respondent in particular it was also emotionally draining. Similarly, Cassell and Walsh (1994) consider the psychological and emotional consequences of "not fitting in", suggesting that exit from the organisation represents the most radical form of resistance to such marginalisation.

As women in male-dominated organisations, as change agents in organisations committed to preserving their traditional ways, these respondents saw their positions as untenable and irreconcilable - the only alternative, in their eyes, was leaving.

Growing apart

In the first example the clash between the values of the organisation and those of the individual could be understood as resulting from a particular trigger event (ie. imposed change), while in the second, this essential incompatibility existed from the outset. A third permutation involves respondents who described their differences in values as emerging as they matured and developed as professionals within their organisations. Here individuals' growing self-confidence and their increasing sense of professional competence enabled them to look critically at their organisations: from a distance the extent of the disjuncture between their values and those of the organisation became gradually clearer.

"I think that what happened to me over the years is that I became more and more involved with people. And that didn't go down very well because the company was about manufacturing... The power of money was always the argument. I could not accept that, and certainly over the last two years of being there it was a constant stress factor" (Personnel manager to chief executive of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

Faced with this dissonance this respondent, and others in similar situations, had to decide whether to capitulate to the will of the organisation, or leave. Although highly precarious, leaving was seen as the only viable option.

Values and being valued

It was not only around the process of change that such clashes emerged, however. the data also include stories of women who found themselves in organisations whose values, from the start, were perceived as "alien", and whose decisions to leave resulted, not from a recognition of difference, but from an unwillingness to tolerate the lack of recognition and value afforded to them as a result of this difference. Here Marshall's use of the concepts of "negating" (Spender, 1984) and "disconfirming" (Laing, 1961) are particularly apt. While the former carries a message of "you are wrong", the latter implies "you do not exist". In terms of identity, the threat of non-existence is clearly more precarious (Marshall, 1993, p. 97). Exit, in these cases, can be understood as a means of resisting such obliteration - a means of regaining a sense of oneself.

In the cases considered above, the dissonance between the values of the individual and those of the organisation was articulated in relation to *professional* contexts, typically concerning organisational priorities and goals. Central to such clashes are issues to do with power, legitimacy and the right to define organisational reality. On a more personal level, such issues are mobilised not in terms of *what* the organisation values, but in terms of *who* it values.

Women, both in this sample and in the academic literature more generally (see for example Marshall, 1995; Cassell and Walsh, 1992; Davidson and Cooper, 1992) speak of "not being recognised, of "being seen but not heard". Here the issue is not that one's professional values are "out of synch" with the organisation, but that the individual herself is somehow not quite acceptable.

"I sometimes felt that because I was from the North, that was a hindrance... I mean I've got quite a broad accent, and I've seen that people think you're thick if you've got an accent" (Sales representative to pyramid sales representative to owner/manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency).

"I went through a very grave stage of having all my confidence removed by a continual wearing away by the management in the hospital... They need people who fit it, and I never fit in" (Operating theatre nurse to reflexologist).

It is important to note that it is not only gender that is at issue here, that there is not a direct, causal relationship between gender and the process of marginalisation. Indeed, the literature on culture and diversity illustrates the extent to which many men are also excluded from organisations' powerful, dominant cultures (see for example Kanter, 1977). Gender, rather than being the sole explanatory variable, must therefore be seen as one in a constellation of variables, both structural and agentic, that serve to construct an individual as unacceptable.

Leaving their organisation was described by many respondents cited above as the only *moral* alternative given the fundamental disjuncture between their own system of professional values and those of the organisation, and their perceived sense of powerlessness to affect change.

"I got to the point where morally I could not have my name associated with it" (Personal assistant to recruitment consultant in large organisation to independent recruitment consultant).

However, although they may have been unwilling to countenance them, for several of these women other alternatives actually *were available*: ie. giving in to the dominant value system, or at least *pretending* to do so. In the case of not being valued, however, there are no such choices. Here the conflict is not between competing or conflicting value systems, but about the way in which certain individuals fail to be included as legitimate members of an organisation - the way the dominant culture serves to devalue people who are seen as different.

Only one woman in the sample cited this feeling of not being valued as one of her primary reasons for leaving her organisation. However, in spite of its limited representation in this study, it is important to raise this issue here, first, because of its pervasiveness throughout the literature on women in management and gender and organisations. Second, and possibly more importantly, because it very explicitly elucidates the processes by which certain individuals are constructed as acceptable, and are therefore included within dominant organisational groupings, while others, due to such factors as ethnicity, class and gender, as well as other circumstances, remain outside, excluded from the mainstream. This permeating theme emerges as central to the phenomenon of corporate flight.

Fundamental to the process of constructing certain individuals and groups as marginal is the issue of power, and the negotiation of organisational control. Here power is used in the Foucauldian sense, as a relational concept, "a set of discourses and strategies operating in particular contexts" (Witz and Savage, p. 7). In the context of organisational values, power relates to the right to define "right" and "wrong". In an article which criticises the "ideology of managerialism", Alvesson (1991) suggests that in the struggle over legitimacy, and the right to define organisational values and ideology:

"it is assumed that the cultural significance of managers in organisations is predominant and that this group supports the common good and hence occupies the correct moral position to decide upon 'desirable' values and ideals" (1991, p. 218).

Women, it seems, are not leaving their organisations simply because of a difference in values. Rather, implicit in this difference is a sense of powerlessness, a sense that in the

struggle for legitimacy, the organisation's right to define reality remains unchallenged - and women's existence remains precarious.

Scholars from a variety of theoretical perspectives have attempted to theorise the ways in which organisational "outsiders" make sense of, cope with, and resist their marginal status (Cassell and Walsh, 1994; Pringle, 1989; Marshall, 1993). This study focuses on exit from the organisation as the most powerful form of resistance.

5.3.3 Conflict Between Home and Work

As was illustrated above, for several women in the sample, the decision to leave was linked to a desire to start a family, or to devote more time to family life. Whereas the issue of home/work conflict was examined in section 5.2.3 on a *personal* level, it is equally important to explore the problem from an *organisational* perspective. In addition to the sales representatives whose stories were cited previously, a number of women explained how within their male-defined, male-dominated organisations, there was no attempt to accommodate the needs of women with domestic responsibilities. Women who wanted to achieve within these organisations simply had to conform. Such organisations, it seems, were designed around (stereotypical images of) men's lives; that women employees might have different sorts of lives was never acknowledged - or if it was acknowledged, it was expected that it was the women themselves, rather than their organisations, who would have to adjust.

"I think it was, it is a lot easier for a man to play by those rules because they are rules which make certain assumptions about your lifestyle, and young women without any family commitments, and other family responsibilities can perhaps survive, go by those rules and succeed. But I think somebody with any other responsibilities, and without the sort of support system we need - I mean all of those men would go back at nine o'clock at night, have their meals waiting for them, and everything else organised. The wives had organised everything, had bought the food, had organised the painter and decorator to come in... it was very much a world in which the men worked all the hours under the sun, the women didn't work, their wives didn't work, and brought up the

children, looked after the home, and looked after their man" (Assistant solicitor in firm to sole practitioner).

The conflict between home and work was manifest both structurally and ideologically. As regards the former, the very structure of the working day caused problems for working mothers, where children's needs often had to be accommodated around breakfast meetings and after work drinks. As for the latter, the question emerges: "Were such organisations simply ignoring the needs of women with children, or were they consciously trying to exclude people whose lifestyles did not fit in with the norm?" In the eyes of one respondent in particular, this inflexibility was no accident - and for her, the resulting conflict had significant psychological consequences:

"They always used to call board meetings at half-past-four so they could keep you there. By the time I was coming home I'd have perhaps an hour with [the children], stressed out of my head cause they'd not seen me. And it was all, 'Mummy, where've you been, blah, blah, blah', and my husband would be, 'blah, blah, blah, and I had all this crap that I'd left behind at work. And I'd take deep breaths, and then sort it out... So it was like a vicious circle" (Personnel officer to training development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

Implicit within these exclusive organisational structures are discourses about what it means to belong to an organisation, discourses about career, loyalty and commitment. Exploring the influence of senior men on organisational cultures, French (1995) illustrates the way in which the men in her study competed to see who could get to the office the earliest, stay the latest, and work the most weekends. She describes the strong sense of camaraderie and identity resulting from such patterns; indeed, within that organisation, being a fully accepted organisational member, and being perceived as *committed*, were based on an employee's apparent willingness to embrace these unspoken rules. Similarly, several women in this study described how within their organisations the concept of commitment was based on long hours at work and an apparent ability to detach oneself totally from the domestic arena. Thus, the training and development manager cited above reported that:

"The expectations, the perceptions of management that you're there at seven in the morning, and you're there until nine o'clock at night. And if you weren't doing that, you weren't putting commitment in".

Similarly, the solicitor explained how in her former firm:

"[Promotion] is partly about people in the department saying, 'Well, do we like this person?... Is this somebody we see as one of us, as a partner who can promote our image?' I mean, you've got to have a certain front, that you are prepared to work from six in the morning til nine at night, that you can work through the night. You've got to be able to show the clients that you've got commitment".

Whereas the respondents cited in section 5.2.3 above explained how their decisions to leave were based on their desire to spend more time at home, and a recognition that their particular position was incompatible with the needs of young children, here the problem is not limited to a particular occupational sector, but to organisations whose structures and cultures serve to exclude from full membership those employees who are perceived as different, who, due to outside commitments and responsibilities, are unable to conform. In this study, not a single respondent cited the conflict between the demands of home and work as the sole reason for leaving the organisation. However, it emerged, as a particularly poignant theme, in the stories of many of the mothers in the sample. For these women, the stakes were high: central to this conflict were the happiness and well-being of the children, and of the family generally; the success of the organisation; and the respondents' own career growth and development. For them the decision to leave was, in part, based on a realisation of the essential incompatibility of these roles, their organisations' stubborn intransigence, and the desire to "regain control" of their lives.

5.3.4 Corporate Flight: the ultimate resistance to being an "organisational outsider"

"[In the agency] my word was taken with a lot of credence. It was a two-way street, and there was a lot of personal growth for me. I was learning every day. And that stopped [when I moved to the larger, more hierarchical organisation]. I found that I was constantly defending my own abilities, and it got to the stage where I was actually

beginning to question them, you know, 'Am I doing this right? Cause it doesn't feel right, it doesn't feel comfortable. And therefore I can't be very good, because if I was good, I would feel comfortable and would just relax... Maybe if I'd been a man it would've been different. Maybe if I'd been a man I'd have hung around a bit in the evenings, and gone for a drink after work..." (Design manager to co-director of graphic design agency).

The theme of not quite fitting in, of being somehow tangential to the dominant culture, permeated women's organisational realities and were central to their decisions to leave. Stories, examined above, of women's "failure to thrive", and those of clashing values, serve as vivid illustrations of the various ways in which this sense of "otherness" is experienced.

Marshall (1993) explores the issue of fit between women managers and their organisations' cultures, and the cultural strategies that women adopt in order to cope with their marginal status, in order to survive. Marshall suggests that within male-dominated organisational cultures, women serve as symbols of "the other" (p. 90). While acknowledging the potential pitfalls of dichotomising organisational values as male" or "female", she argues that:

"the male-female model offers a view of what is dominant and valued in organisations, and in our theory-making about them, and of what is excluded, suppressed and marginalised" (p. 92).

Marshall emphasises the persistence of women's marginal status. In spite of the introduction of equal opportunities policies and other positive action initiatives, she argues that at a deep level, organisations remain largely unchanged. Fundamental assumptions, systems of values and patterns of behaviour are highly stable, and resistant to change, constructed and articulated through both high profile (official, formal, public) and low profile (unofficial, informal, everyday) symbols (Marshall and McClean, 1988).

As "organisational outsiders", part of women's work is about learning to negotiate with the dominant culture. Exploring women's reasons for leaving their organisations

provides illuminating insights into what such negotiation involves, and the costs - professional and personal - of marginality.

5.4 Conclusion

In seeking to understand respondents' decisions to leave their organisations, it is necessary to examine both personal and organisational levels. While the accounts of some women privileged organisational factors, others focused more explicitly on personal circumstances. Having identified these two dimensions, though, it is essential not to reduce them to a simple dichotomy. That is, it is not enough explain a woman's reasons for leaving her organisation as *either* an individual phenomenon *or* an organisational one. Indeed, central to this analysis is the extent to which personal and organisational dimensions must be seen as inextricably linked, and mutually reinforcing. For example, the tension between respondents' personal and professional lives is identified as a personal factor, while at the same time influencing their organisational experiences, and the extent to which they feel that they "fit" within the dominant culture of their organisations. In this chapter, gender emerges as significantly impacting women's decisions to leave their organisations - from both personal and organisational perspectives. Indeed, the ideology of the family, and its implications for women's perceived roles and responsibilities, as wives and mothers as well as professionals, permeates the analysis.

In leaving their organisations, respondents thus rejected a context in which many found themselves merely "surviving" instead of "thriving", in which "reality" was defined by others, and which for a number of women was fundamentally at odds with their personal and domestic circumstances. Given women's precarious position within organisations, as elucidated in this chapter, Marlow and Strange (1994) suggest that:

"It is a coherent conclusion that the position and role of women in society [and, on a more micro-level, within organisations] currently and historically predisposes them to a set of reasons for pursuing self-employment which is unique to their sex" (p. 179).

The question then arises: "to what extent can self-employment 'provide an alternative set of life chances for people disadvantaged by the rigid sets of structures and processes that determine the allocation of opportunities and rewards in the traditional labour market?'" (Allen and Truman, 1992, p. 179). Having examined women's decisions to leave their organisations, the analysis now turns to their reasons for embarking on self-employment, and the extent to which self-employment lives up to their expectations.

Chapter 6

OPTING FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT

This chapter considers research question 3:

- **Why did the women in the study choose to embark on self-employment, and what were their expectations in doing so?**

Specifically, section 6.2 explores the usefulness of existing theoretical models, and suggests an alternative framework which is more relevant to this study. Section 6.3 focuses on those respondents who experienced the move from employment to self-employment as a single decision, while section 6.4 considers the move in terms of two separate, though related, decisions. Finally, section 6.5 identifies themes which permeate this analysis: in particular the importance of family background and the significance of gender in respondents' decisions to become self-employed. The issue of expectations is considered in the following chapter.

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported on the findings into respondents' decisions to leave their organisations. The analysis that follows explores their move to self-employment. The first section examines the difficulties of attempting to apply existing theoretical models to the data generated in this study. Moving on, the section (from 6.3 onwards) provides an analysis of the data on, and introduces a framework which is potentially more relevant to them, thereby affording a deeper understanding of women's decisions to become self-employed.

6.2 The Relevance of Existing Models

Section 2.2 above reviewed the literature on self-employment from a labour market perspective. In particular, the analysis introduced by Granger et. al. (1995), which categorised the respondents in their study as "refugees"; "missionaries"; "trade-offs" and "converts" seemed promising. This theoretical model sought to develop more traditional push/pull analyses, incorporating both structural and agentic levels of analysis, and

considering the move to self-employment in terms of personal as well as professional factors. At the same time, the study highlighted the role of ideology in respondents' decisions. Although questions were raised about this analysis, specifically in relation to its particular approach to ideology, and the lack of explicit attention to gender issues, I felt that the model offered a great deal of potential. However, my attempt to apply Granger et. al.'s model to the data generated in this study proved difficult. In particular, four significant issues emerged. These are considered below.

The first problem concerns the topic of study. The respondents (both male and female) in the study reported by Granger all had very similar career profiles: they had all worked as professionals within publishing houses, and upon leaving those organisations had become self-employed. In contrast, the sample in this study was far more diverse, women came from a wide variety of sectors, each with its own particular characteristics and career structure. As regards categorisation, the majority of the respondents in the Granger et. al. study are reported as falling into the "refugee" grouping: having entered the labour market as employees, their move to self-employment was directly influenced by economic recession, subsequent redundancy and the associated threat of unemployment. Although, as explained in the literature review, their model takes account of agentic factors, its emphasis is on structural considerations, concerning the labour market generally, and the publishing industry in particular. Indeed, permeating their article is a sense that respondents had only very limited choices about the direction of their careers.

In contrast to the study conducted by Granger et. al. which focused on self-employment as a response to imposed change, in this study the majority of respondents themselves initiated the move from employment to self-employment. Although, as mentioned above, categorisation of respondents into the framework constructed by Granger et. al. has proven very difficult, were I to attempt such a classification, three-quarters would be identified as "missionaries". The appropriateness of this label will be considered elsewhere. What is more significant in this context, though, is the difference that such a classification makes to subsequent analysis. Whereas the Granger et. al. model privileged *structural* factors, here it is the ways in which respondents make sense of (and indeed constitute) these structures which is of primary importance. An understanding of

respondents' decisions to become self-employed will thus be based on such issues as their perceptions of their business sectors and their options within the labour market, their experiences as employees, their occupational identity, and how they see their careers developing in the future.

My second question about the model introduced by Granger et. al. concerns the *process* of moving from employment to self-employment; more specifically, the relationship between a respondent's decision to leave her organisation, and the decision to become self-employed. Reflecting on this project at the outset, I expected to find a direct, causal relationship between these two decisions - I envisaged a single decision that incorporated both "phases" of the move. Indeed, my view was reinforced by the literature. Although, as illustrated in Chapter 2, there are discrete literatures that deal *either* with the phenomenon of "corporate flight" *or* "the entrepreneurial decision", those few studies which do consider the move from organisational employment to self-employment (see for example Hakim, 1989; and Granger et. al., 1995; and Bogenhold and Staber, 1991) seem to look at this move as a single process. For example, Granger et. al. include as "missionaries" those individuals whose move to self-employment is "'motivated mainly by a desire for self-direction in the labour process'... [whose] expectations of autonomy can no longer be maintained in a 'stifling or otherwise unsatisfactory work situation'" (Bogenhold and Staber, 1991, p. 226). In this study, the majority of respondents would fall into this category. However, there is a world of difference between the disabled Personnel Manager who, because of her illness, sees self-employment as her only option; and the NHS Sister who, disillusioned with the changes in the NHS, decides to set up a nursing home as "one way of getting back to real nursing". While in both cases respondents' decisions to leave were motivated by their unsatisfactory organisational experiences, their decisions to become self-employed were based on very different issues. As it stands, the analysis offered by Granger et. al. does not accommodate these differences. Whereas in some cases respondents resigned from their organisations *in order to* set up their own businesses, in others these decisions were quite separate. An analytical framework which aims to facilitate understanding of the move from employment to self-employment must therefore take account of the possibilities of a more indirect relationship between these two decisions.

The third problem concerns the relationship between personal and professional life, and what I see as the inextricability of these two contexts. In my review of the literature, I noted that one of the most promising elements in the Granger et. al. model was the way in which, in contrast to earlier, more two-dimensional frameworks, it considered the importance of personal factors in an individual's move to self-employment. Included in their "trade-off" category are individuals who take "a break from direct employment in order to accommodate the constraints of some non-work priority which may or may not be permanent (for example, to bring up a family, look after a dependent or cope with personal ill health)" (p. 509). However, in my attempt to classify respondents into these categories, I became aware of the limitations of this analysis. It soon became apparent that for the women in this study, the significance of personal factors in the decision to become self-employed extended way beyond the "trade-off" category and its rather limited applications. In fact, only three of the women in the study described their decisions in terms of accommodating the demands of home and work, and even in such cases these reasons were combined with issues to do with their organisations, personal and professional development. At the same time, the majority of respondents, who are most easily identified as "missionaries", and whose "primary life expectations relate[d] through some form of economic activity" (p. 508) throughout the change process, were not in any way immune from the impact of their personal lives. Rather, even (in the majority of cases) when the move to self-employment did not involve changes in an individual's "attachment to work [as a result of] some non-work factor" (p. 509), personal issues frequently permeated their stories, and emerged as important considerations in their move to self-employment.

An important gender issue emerges here. The respondents in the Granger et. al. study were predominantly female, yet gender was only considered significant in relation to the "trade-off" category, where women respondents were reported as over-represented. The restriction of personal factors to this category, and the implicit link between women and these factors, result in the absence of a gender dimension in the other categories. In the move to self-employment, gender seems to be a factor *only* in those cases where respondents are using self-employment as a way of accommodating domestic and personal needs: it therefore appears that it is *not* a salient factor for "refugees", "missionaries" or "converts". The analysis of respondents' decisions to *leave* their

organisations, in Chapter 7, illustrated the significance of gender on these decisions. It is possible that it is also an issue in the move to self-employment. A theoretical framework for understanding the decision to become self-employed must take into account the gender dimension of this decision.

Just as the decision to leave the organisation was seen, in the previous chapter, as a result of both professional (organisational) and personal factors, so too the move to self-employment must be explored within this (dynamic) context. The importance of personal factors must therefore not be restricted to one conceptual category; rather it must be taken into account by the analysis as a whole.

The three considerations discussed above leads to my fourth question about the model put forward by Granger et. al. Quite simply, in terms of this study, it does not seem to work. While the conceptual categories at first appeared to be discrete, boundaries became blurred, and ambiguities emerged as I tried to position my data into the framework. While some respondents slipped neatly into all four categories, others fit into none. For example, the fact that three-quarters of the women in my sample could be broadly described as "missionaries" means that, apart from illuminating certain key structural features in these respondents' stories, it provides few insights into the diversity of this grouping, and thus as a conceptual category is not particularly helpful. Notably, many of these "missionaries" could be also be considered "converts", and if the definition was extended slightly, they could be included as "trade-offs". Conversely, there is a number of respondents who simply do not fit anywhere. To cite just two cases, the respondent who reluctantly left her position as a manager within a local newspaper company because she was needed to run the family business, can not neatly be classified anywhere. Similarly, the sales manager who travelled extensively left her position to set up a business with her husband, in order for the couple to spend more time together, has elements of both "trade-off" and "missionary" categories, yet does not fit squarely into either.

There is a related problem of language and labelling. For a number of respondents, the names of the categories identified by Granger et. al. do not seem to be appropriate. For example, in the case of the individual whose career has been organised around an

eventual move to self-employment; the "missionary" label makes sense. But for the woman who, having never considered the possibility of running her own business, became so frustrated with her organisation that she moved to self-employment as an "only option", the label seems wholly inappropriate. Although the "facts" would place such a respondent neatly in the "missionary" group, I question the value of such a categorisation.

In light of the points raised above, and using the previous chapter, which focused on respondents' decisions to leave their organisations, as a sort of conceptual "backcloth", this section considers how we might understand the decision to become self-employed. From the above discussion, it can be seen that a framework for understanding this move must incorporate a number of (interrelated) factors, including: a variety of employment sectors; the need to look problematically at the relationship between the decision to leave the organisation and the decision to become self-employed; the inextricability of personal and professional life, and the significance of personal life issues for decisions about employment; and the salience of gender as a factor in an individual's decision to become self-employed. Finally, there must be a recognition that conceptual models must be used, not to mask diversity, but to better understand it.

It appears, then, that these data are just not going to be squeezed, moulded, persuaded or cajoled into any of the models introduced thus far. I must therefore take a step back from the literature and ask: "What is it that makes some stories so similar, while others are so strikingly different? How do the respondents *themselves* make sense of their decision to become self-employed? What are the key issues *for them*?" The following analysis draws on the contributions of Hakim (1989), Bogenhold and Staber (1991), and Granger et. al. (1995) and Stanworth and Stanworth (1995), but seeks to develop a theoretical framework which is more applicable to this study. Broadly speaking, respondents fall into two groups. In the first group are those who described departure from the organisation and the move to self-employment as part of the same decision-making process. These women, for a variety of reasons which are discussed below, left their organisations *in order to* become self-employed. This is not to suggest that organisational factors did not impact on this decision, quite the contrary, but in these cases it was self-employment that was described as the motivating force. In contrast, in

the second group are those respondents for whom the move was explained in terms of two separate, though related, decisions. For these individuals, the decision to become self-employed was based on a combination of two key factors: first, an assessment of the local labour market and opportunities for them within that market; second, a vision of how they saw their careers and their personal lives unfolding and developing.

6.3 The Move from Employment to Self-employment: a single decision

Approximately one-third of the women in the sample explained how they had left their organisations *in order to* run their own businesses; because in these cases the decision to leave was inextricably linked to the move to self-employment, analytically they need to be explored as a single process. Hakim's analysis (1989) of the move to self-employment is based on a push/pull model: as regards the "pull of self-employment", she takes a unitary approach, focusing primarily on ideological factors, what she terms "the ideology of self-employment" (p. 289). As suggested in the literature review such approaches have been criticised for being overly simplistic, and reductionist. Considering respondents' reasons for leaving their organisation from a personal perspective, section 5.2.1 likewise refers to those respondents who described themselves as being *pulled* to self-employment: that analysis focuses on ideological, professional, personal and situational factors. The section that follows seeks to further develop our understanding of the notion of "self-employment pull", highlighting in particular the inadequacy of unitary approaches and the need to recognise the diversity of factors that can contribute to this "pull".

6.3.1 The Ideological "Missionary"

Three women in the sample illustrate precisely Hakim's (1989) notion of "self-employment pull". Permeating their career stories is a persistent "discourse of enterprise", based, as suggested in chapter 5, on notions of "being your own boss"; "autonomy"; "independence and individualism"; "control" and "flexibility" (in this study, these features relate *both* to the scope of the work itself (professional aspects) as well as the structure of the working day (personal/lifestyle aspects)). Such individuals, it was

argued in section 5.2.1, only ever saw employment within organisations as a means to an end: an "apprenticeship" leading ultimately to business ownership. As such, they seem to typify the first interpretation of the "missionary" identified by Granger et. al. (1995). For these three respondents, then, the question was not *if* they would become self-employed, but *when*. Here again, Birley's (1989) "self-employment triggers" provide a useful way of thinking about the situational factors which lead to self-employment. The caterer who left her management job to join her husband in their "rock'n roll" catering business, and the marketing manager who resigned from her post in order to take on a directorship within the engineering firm that she owned jointly with her father, aptly illustrate Birley's "grey-to-white syndrome", where full-time involvement in a fledgling business becomes financially viable. In contrast the third case, where the opportunity to purchase a suitable site on which to build a hotel became available, is an example of Birley's "friendly push syndrome", where the path is suddenly made clear for a would-be entrepreneur to realise her aspirations.

Significantly, all three women in this grouping came from entrepreneurial backgrounds, and their move to self-employment was strongly encouraged and supported by their families. Self-employment, for these respondents, was nothing extraordinary or fantastic - it was absolutely normal. The importance of such a background was touched upon in section 4.5.2, which considered the extent to which women in the study identified with their image of the "entrepreneur", and will be discussed more fully in the concluding section of this chapter.

6.3.2 Rejection of Organisational Employment and the Promise of Greater Flexibility

In contrast to the women cited above who made sense of their careers in terms of self-employment, for several respondents the move to self-employment was directly influenced, not by a kind of entrepreneurial identity, but by their specific organisational experiences and, in particular, what they perceived as an irresolvable conflict between their professional and personal lives. It was found in section 5.3 that organisational reasons for deciding to leave included both reasons to do with professional growth and development, and feelings of marginality, and of being "out-of-synch" with what the organisation required and expected of its employees. Central to these reasons were

issues related to being women in what were perceived as male-dominated organisations. In deciding to leave these organisations, two of these respondents opted out of organisations altogether.

I started to have these fantasies about self-employment... I didn't particularly want to work for people anymore, because I had some very clear ideas about the sort of work that I could do, and I didn't want somebody else telling me how to do it. I was by then becoming quite focused. Umm, so I think that if I had left one organisation, sick of the whole sort of political business in a large firm, I thought that it wouldn't be very different in a small one. It's still going to be very hierarchical. Women I know who are partners say there are still all sorts of problems. So having all that energy at that point, it was to reject the lot, thinking, 'If I can't do it on my own, I don't think I want to be a solicitor anymore" (Assistant solicitor in firm to sole practitioner).

In their rejection of organisations and their desire for greater control and independence (in relation to the nature and direction of the work itself), these respondents typify Granger et. al.'s second definition of "the missionary", based on Bogenhold and Staber's concept of the "logic of autonomy": in this case, "[the] decision to become [self-employed] is motivated mainly by a desire for self-direction in the labour process" (1991, p. 226). Likewise, in their study Scase and Goffee (1980) found that for many of their respondents the reason for starting a business was "not out of a desire to ultimately become a successful entrepreneur, but as a rejection of working for somebody else" (p. 33).

At the same time, these respondents had young children, were the principle breadwinners in their households, and both described considerable conflict between the roles as professional women, and their roles as mothers; a conflict that recurs throughout this analysis. In so far as their decision to become self-employed was linked to a need to strike a balance between the demands of their personal and professional lives, at first glance the respondents in this group seem characteristic of Granger et. al.'s "trade-offs". However, closer examination reveals the inadequacy of this categorisation. Whereas "trade-offs" were described as "tak[ing] a break from direct employment in order to accommodate the constraints of some non-work priority", as principal breadwinners,

these respondents were still attached to work in a very central way. For these women, the pull to self-employment resulted from three principle factors: first, a rejection of organisational employment; second, a desire to find an employment context which offered both the opportunity for professional growth, and the flexibility they needed to fulfil their dual roles as mothers and as professionals; and third, situational factors which provided the immediate impetus to make the change. For the solicitor, organisational restructuring led to the possibility of arranging a sizeable redundancy package, a package which thus supported her move to self-employment. For the race relations officer, the impetus was acceptance on to a Masters course in organisational development, a course which would enable her to make the transition to management consultancy. In the case of the personnel manager, it was the prospect of setting up a business alongside a long-time colleague, and the possibilities that such a collaboration would offer, in terms of personal and professional development, that served as the trigger for change.

Significantly, both the race relations officer and the solicitor explained how, for several years, self-employment had been a "fantasy". Unlike those respondents in the section cited above, who had organised their careers around an eventual move to self-employment, for these women self-employment was not the logical outcome of their chosen career path. Rather, it was something they had only dreamed about - until organisational and personal factors intervened, and these dreams were slowly transformed into reality. For the personnel manager, the situation was slightly different. Here, self-employment was seen, not as a fantasy, but instrumentally, as a way of getting her life back in order. In contrast to the "ideological entrepreneurs" above, whose careers seemed to be organised around a discourse of enterprise, in these cases it was notions of professional and personal development, alongside a permeating ideology of the family, that provided the underlying logic to their accounts of their careers. Here, as discussed in section 4.5.2, *aspects* of the discourse of enterprise were appropriated and grafted on to existing career and lifestyle discourses, so that the stories, as a whole, made sense. For example, the quotation cited above illustrates the way in which notions of autonomy and control were inextricably linked to how the solicitor saw herself as a professional woman, and became central to her ideas about her career development.

It could be argued that in view of their rejection of organisations and their gradual appropriation of an ideology of enterprise, these respondents aptly illustrate "the convert" identified by Granger et. al. However, in my view these respondents have *not* been "converted" to self-employment, in the direct and straightforward sense of the word. Rather, they have assimilated this ideology into their own (systematic) ways of thinking about their careers and their lives more generally; they have used this ideology in such a way that it makes sense, and is relevant, to their particular circumstances.

6.3.3 Transitional Jobs: springboards to self-employment

The respondents in the next group likewise describe the move from the organisation to self-employment as a single decision; what differentiates these cases are the mechanics of the move. Three respondents in the study, for both personal and professional reasons, left organisations for whom they had worked for many years, and took on what I have termed "transitional" jobs. For example, a sales representative who left her job at the birth of her first child became involved in a clothing firm doing "pyramid sales"; a civil servant in the Department of Employment was seconded to a local Enterprise Agency; and a Civil Service trainer who left as a result of her partner's job change, took a position as a fixed term, contract trainer.

None of the three considered these positions to be in any way permanent: for the sales representative it was a way back into the workforce; the civil servant described her secondment as professional development; and the trainer saw the fixed-term contract as a way to move back to Sheffield. Significantly, although these three respondents had never seriously considered self-employment, and certainly had not planned their careers around it, they all found themselves in jobs which seemed to lead them in that direction. Each of these "transitional" jobs involved considerable time working alone, often at home; they required initiative, provided autonomy and considerable control, and were very flexible, in terms of both the work itself and the structure of the working day. All three respondents described how quickly they became used to these new circumstances, and spoke of their growing reluctance to return to more conventional, organisational employment. At the same time, they recognised that their current work could be

successfully developed on a self-employed basis. Although they had not expected to use these jobs as a springboard to self-employment, that is, in fact, what happened.

"I'd adapted to working from home, I was enjoying the freedom, so I thought, "Well, give it a go, have a go and see what happens doing it from home" (Civil service trainer to independent trainer).

"I never really thought of having my own business... I just felt that I could do it better [than my employers]. I felt as if I could do the buying bit better, I felt as if I could do the recruiting of new people better... I felt I could organise the delivery side better... So I decided to set up, in competition really" (Sales representative to pyramid sales representative to owner manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency)"

On an ideological level, two of these respondents were very similar to the respondents discussed in the previous section, incorporating aspects of a discourse of enterprise into their own career and lifestyle discourses. However for the sales representative, this discourse itself became central and explicit.

"I like being in control. I like being in charge of other people. I like other people reporting to me. I like the flexibility, not just the flexibility of hours, as someone working on flexi-time, it's deciding totally where I want to go" ((Sales representative to pyramid sales representative to owner manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency).

Looking back through her transcript, it is notable that whereas many of the other respondents in the sample saw themselves as professionals, with the appropriate qualifications and experience, this respondent had no such professional identity. While she saw herself as highly competent, she did not have a commitment to a particular profession or career structure. Instead, her account is characterised by a highly individualistic approach, drive and determination, and a will to succeed (financially, hierarchically - depending on how that is defined within the particular employment context). Although self-employment did not feature in her career plan, she describes

herself and her approach to work in entrepreneurial terms. In the pyramid sales job, this underlying discourse began to surface.

6.3.4 Change but not "Conversion"

Two respondents in the sample decided to become self-employed, not out of any particular desire to be self-employed, but as a result of personal factors. In one case, it was an attempt to more effectively integrate her personal and professional lives; more specifically, she wanted to work together with her husband. In the other, it was because the family business suddenly required her full-time involvement. Both women, unlike many others in the sample, discussed their feelings of attachment to their organisations; whereas others found their organisations' bureaucratic structures stifling and stressful, as sales managers, one in a multi-national company and the other in a local newspaper firm, they appeared to thrive. The former respondent talked at some length about her enjoyment of life in her department:

"We [the sales team] used to travel quite a bit together, and the camaraderie, the banter, we used to have a lot of fun together. We had a director who used to make sure that we kept well in with, sort of the hierarchy, but that didn't used to disturb me at all - it was all part of the fun. You sort of played all your cards and made sure that you sort of appeared in a better light than, perhaps, your colleagues, or whatever..."(Marketing and sales manager in multi-national company to owner/manager of travel business).

Her sales job involved extensive travelling. Likewise her husband, an Olympic gymnast, was away from home for long periods. In the early days of their married life, the couple thus spent very little time together. As his career in sport was coming to an end, they decided to change tack completely; starting a business, they felt, would be a way of doing something together. For this respondent, the decision to leave her organisation was thus inextricably linked to this new business venture. It should be mentioned that her father was extremely influential and encouraging throughout the process, supporting the idea in principle, and more specifically in terms of finding an appropriate business, and providing practical and financial assistance. As mentioned above, the significance of

such support is apparent right through the sample, and will be discussed more explicitly towards the end of this chapter.

What emerges very vividly from this account is a persistent conflict between personal and professional discourses. As mentioned above, this respondent appeared to be strongly attached to her organisation, and had a clear sense of herself as a very successful sales manager within that company. The move to self-employment, while "making sense" in terms of her personal life, represented a real rupture with the "bureaucratic discourse" which had defined her career story thus far. Although she, like other respondents mentioned above, has appropriated aspects of a more entrepreneurial discourse, and although she has a great deal of esteem for what she sees as "real entrepreneurs", she does not identify herself as such. Indeed, there are many aspects of business ownership which she finds painful and lonely, and there is much that she misses about her life as a sales manager in the multi-national company.

Although she realised that there was much that she would miss about organisational life, and in spite of her later misgivings, this respondent described her excitement at the prospect of self-employment. In contrast, for the woman who left her management position in the newspaper company to work in her family business, the move was seen as much less positive. Instead, she explained how she simply had no alternative. She, her husband and a friend had started a clothing manufacturing business; the plan was for her husband to be involved on a full-time basis, while she would carry on with her newspaper job and help with the business in the evenings. The business grew beyond their expectations, and they soon felt that they were running out of control. As the only one with the appropriate skills and experience, she was forced to quit her job and become a full-time manager. After three years, the business failed, and they were forced into liquidation. Unlike the women in the first three sections cited above who, having had a taste of self-employment became, in some senses, "converted", this respondent vowed never to work on that basis again.

"At the stage when we finished it was such a relief. We went to bed the next night and said, 'We got rid of it, you know, it's finished. Let's start again now.' It was such a relief, and I'd never put myself in that position again" (Sales manager in newspaper

company to co-owner/manager manufacturing business to office manager of recruitment agency).

At the time of interview, this respondent was working as office manager in a recruitment agency. She was one of two women in the study who had moved from employment to self-employment, and back again.

It is notable that most of the women in this study were very positive about the idea of self-employment. In some cases, women's accounts of their careers were constructed around a discourse of enterprise, while others became entrepreneurial as they evolved. A third group of women, whose careers were described in terms of other discourses, most typically a professional discourse, appropriated into their stories aspects of an enterprise discourse which seemed most relevant to their particular situations. However, for this respondent, the move back into employment signified a rejection of this discourse. Of course this rejection could be understood in a variety of ways: as a way of coping with the reality of business failure; or as a way of justifying the move back into employment. Nevertheless, it stands in sharp contrast to the majority of women in the study whose stories embrace aspects of the enterprise culture, and who described the future in terms of self-employment. This respondent was indeed "pulled" to self-employment, but she went with considerable reluctance, and serious misgivings. In so far as this analysis is concerned, this account is important because it elucidates the ambiguity implicit in the concept of "self-employment pull".

The examples cited in this section vividly illustrate the diversity of the "self-employment pull". Whereas in earlier studies this "pull" was described in terms of a (monolithic) ideology of self-employment (Hakim, 1989), these data elucidate a more complex, and more process. Here, the "pull" to self-employment is not reflected through the appropriation and articulation of a unitary discourse. Instead, the findings illustrate, first, the diverse ways in which respondents construct the discourse of enterprise. Second, they illustrate that this discourse must not be examined in isolation; rather, it exists in a dynamic tension with other discourses of career and personal life, and is inextricably linked to situational and contextual factors.

6.4 The Move from Employment to Self-employment: two steps, two decisions

In the first section of this chapter I questioned the usefulness of the model put forward by Granger et. al. which looks at the move from employment to self-employment as the result of a single decision. In that section, I suggested that many of the respondents in this study spoke of two separate (though related) decisions: the decision to leave the organisation, and the decision to embark on self-employment. In these cases respondents, for reasons explored in the previous chapter, decided to resign from their organisations. Having thus departed (or with departure imminent), they were faced with questions about what to do next. These questions are the basis of the analysis which follows.

Just over half of the women in the study described their move from employment to self-employment in terms of two separate (though connected) stages. Here, two factors emerged as central to respondents' decision to become self-employed: first, an assessment of the local employment context; and second, ideas about how they saw their personal and professional lives developing in the future - in particular, how self-employment could contribute to this vision. These factors are the basis of the analysis which follows. The first section considers those respondents who saw self-employment as their *only option*. Moving on, the analysis focuses on those cases where self-employment was seen, not as the *only* choice, but as the *best choice* in the particular circumstances.

6.4.1 Self-employment: the only option

Just over a third of the women in the sample explained how, having left their organisations, their only employment option seemed to be self-employment.

"Self-employment was not a choice or a decision - it was a necessity" (Sales representative to director of form distributing firm).

"There weren't any jobs available, I knew I'd have to do something on my own" (Computer operator to owner/manager of bakery).

"Everything sort of happened by necessity, really. I thought, 'Yeah, I'm going to have to be self-employed'" (Design manager to co -director graphic design firm).

At first glance, such explanations seem relatively straight-forward: these respondents became self-employed because there were no other employment possibilities. However, closer examination of the transcripts reveals that the concept of "the only option" is itself problematic; in fact, a whole range of circumstances led women to make this assessment. These circumstances are best examined in terms of four factors: structural; sectoral; organisational; and lifestyle.

Structural factors

Assessing the local labour market and their options within it, several women in the sample concluded that, for structural reasons which were beyond their control, they had little chance of organisational employment. As far as they were concerned, self-employment was indeed their only option. One of these respondents had developed a serious health problem and was certain that, having resigned from her position as a personnel manager, she would never again be eligible for traditional employment.

"I never considered a job in another organisation. The reason for that is because I have a health problem, and I knew that I would not jet a job for the simple reason that, you know, if you don't pass the medical, that kind of thing" (Personnel manager to chief executive of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

Here, self-employment was seen as the only chance of continuing in paid work. In the case of the other respondent, the problem was not disability, but age. Having recently remarried, she had left her position as an office manager in London Transport to move to Sheffield, where her husband lived and worked. At forty-eight years old, she was doubtful of ever finding a position within an organisation. She too saw self-employment as her only available option.

Although these women recognised their limited employment possibilities, it should not be assumed that their move to self-employment was wholly negative. On the contrary, in both cases self-employment was viewed as an exciting option. For the personnel manager it was seen as providing autonomy, control, and a real opportunity for professional growth; in the self-employed context, she would no longer have to fight for recognition, or for the chance to develop her work as she saw fit.

"I knew I wanted to go further, but you very quickly realise that there is this wall, barrier, that there's no way that you're going to go further... I had a mental brainstorm and decided to set up the company. It's all about promoting people with disabilities, and working with employers. So what I realised was I could use the knowledge that I'd gained from over ten or twelve years, from a personnel point of view and also as an individual; I could actually utilise those experiences more".

For the London Transport manager, the move to self-employment represented a more radical change of tack. An enthusiastic cook, she had always dreamed of setting up her own coffee shop in the countryside; the move from London Transport, with the redundancy package she had arranged, provided the perfect opportunity. In the event, this dream did not materialise. However, what is important here again is that notwithstanding the structural constraints faced by respondents, the decision to become self-employed must be not be seen simply as a kind of "subordination response" (Stanworth et. al., 1989), but as a response to particular circumstances within the labour market, *in combination with* agentic factors, including the respondents' own experiences, skills, interests and career aspirations.

Sectoral factors

In contrast to the kind of structural factors which were seen as constraining respondents' choices in the cases cited above, for several women the limitations resulted more particularly from sectoral considerations. It appeared that opportunities for development within certain employment sectors, such as design, marketing and public relations, were limited, especially in Sheffield, which is not a major commercial centre. Two respondents in particular, a recruitment consultant and a design manager, felt that they

had few opportunities within traditional organisational contexts. These two did not leave their organisations *in order to* set up their own businesses. However, assessing their options after having decided to leave, they were faced with few alternatives. Having already achieved senior positions in prestigious firms, they felt that other local agencies had very little to offer, in terms of status, remuneration, or opportunities for development.

"There was no physical option really... I went for a couple [interviews], but it was just bloody crazy, you know. An agency in Sheffield heard I was looking, and they got me in, and there's this bottle of Liebfraumilch on the table, you know, and they said with a lot of gravitas, "You know, you have just an amazing portfolio, your work is amazing. We really seriously want to offer you a job - thirteen thousand pound a year. How do you feel about that?' So I said, I'll think about it'. There was no option" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency).

In a third case, a respondent had left her public relations job in Canada after her divorce, and come to live in Sheffield with her new partner. Although she had always dreamed of having her own business, in Canada this was never a realistic possibility. In Sheffield, however, she soon realised that employment *within* a public relations agency was highly unlikely.

"When I got here I started looking around, talking to the other agencies in the city and saying, you know, 'Do you need someone like me?' And they all said, 'Well yes, but not on a full-time basis, have you considered free-lancing?' So I had nothing to lose" (Public relations manager to director of public relations agency)

The importance of family background and experience of entrepreneurship in the decision to become self-employed has already been noted. Such was the case for this respondent; indeed, a discourse of enterprise seems to permeate her story. In Canada she did not see self-employment as a real possibility, because of the competition in the world of public relations; however, in the Sheffield context (which was, ironically, much more depressed economically) she felt able to pursue these aspirations.

Here again, the decision to embark on self-employment was a response to limited opportunities within a particular employment sector, but was at the same time consistent with the respondent's career and lifestyle narratives more generally. Although none of these three respondents had envisaged their careers in terms of self-employment, having made the decision to leave (or indeed having already left) their organisations, they were faced with few real options. At the same time, it seemed that in terms of their careers, self-employment was a logical next step. All three were keen to develop and grow as professionals within sectors which, as suggested in section 5.2.1, seemed to lend themselves to self-employment. Self-employment, for these respondents, *made sense*.

The case of a fourth respondent, a social worker who subsequently became a management consultant, poses a contrast to those examined above. For this respondent, the move from employment to self-employment was less clear-cut, involving a return to education to pursue a Masters course, and a radical change of professional sector. At the time of leaving her local authority, this respondent had few ideas about the direction of her career, and certainly had never considered self-employment. For a variety of reasons concerning primarily geography and course structure, she enrolled on a Masters programme in Organisational Development, which unbeknownst to her, was a course in management consultancy.

"I just wanted a Masters. It never occurred to me that I could do consultancy. You see, I didn't even know really, or I didn't take on the fact that it was a course which was aimed for consultants" (Social worker to management consultant).

Although she had taken a leave of absence from her job, it quickly became apparent that she would not be returning to social work; nor would she be seeking any kind of organisational employment. Motivated by her own personal and professional development, the desire for an employment context in which she would be more autonomous (both in terms of the nature and direction of the work itself, and its structure), and the sector in which she had unwittingly found herself, she realised that she was moving in the direction of self-employment. Traditional organisational employment had thus lost its relevance; implicit in becoming a management consultant was the decision to become self-employed.

Organisational factors

In contrast to the respondents cited above, all of whom were constrained by the limitations of their employment sectors, in other cases the problem was not so much about sector, but about organisation. Here, respondents' professions were closely linked to their organisations; and opportunities outside of these organisations were seen as very scarce. The story of one respondent, an educational psychologist working for a local authority, serves to illustrate this point. This psychologist, having reached a position of authority within her department, chose to resign. Although she had not consciously turned her back on organisational employment, assessing her situation, self-employment seemed the only real possibility. She, like other respondents discussed above, was committed to continued learning and professional growth, and was frustrated by the persistent political in-fighting in her department, and the general direction in which the department was moving. Self-employment, she felt, would provide her with freedom and autonomy to develop her work, which she felt was missing from the organisational context.

Significantly whereas, as suggested above, certain sectors seem to lead to self-employment, this was not the case for the educational psychologist. On the contrary, she explained how within her department, the whole idea of self-employment was very much maligned. On one level, then, self-employment can be seen as quite a radical departure from her intended career path. However, central to this respondent's career story were examples of innovation, and "path breaking":

"[innovation] is not anything I've ever done deliberately, for the sake of doing it. But I mean, I was married when I was a student. Nobody got married when they were students. We actually had a mortgage that was on my income. In those days nobody got a mortgage on a woman's income. But I didn't do it to be the first... it's not an image I live up to, but an image I look back on" (Educational psychologist to independent psychologist).

While not part of any explicit "career plan", such examples permeate her account. Although the move to self-employment does not *make sense* in sectoral terms, in the way that it did for the respondents above, in the case of this educational psychologist, it does fit into a well-established pattern of innovation, and a persistent desire for independence and autonomy, for control over the scope and direction of her work.

Lifestyle factors

Finally, one respondent explained how, although within the conventional labour market there were plenty of options which would have been suitable on a *professional* level, none of these would have been appropriate on a *personal* level, in terms of her domestic responsibilities and the kind of lifestyle she aspired to. This successful sales representative, left her job "on the road" because of its essential incompatibility with the needs of her baby daughter. Her aim was to make "lots and lots of money", and she sought a position that brought with it status and prestige. Given the constraints of her domestic situation, this respondent felt that self-employment was the *only* way in which she could fulfil her role as mother, and at the same time satisfy her desire for money and status. Although she had not explicitly set out to start up her own business, like the respondent who set up a "pyramid sales" clothing firm, discussed in section 6.3.3, a certain entrepreneurial discourse seems to run, like a thread, through her career story, a discourse characterised by autonomy (relating, at different times, to both the content and structure of her work), determination, and a will to succeed.

Self-employment and attachment to the "career concept"

As suggested above, one-third of the women in the study described self-employment as their *only employment option*. What this analysis demonstrates, however, is the diversity of factors and circumstances leading to this assessment: factors both structural and agentic. On one level, echoing Granger et. al.'s (1995) "refugee" category and "the logic of necessity" described by Bogenhold and Staber, (1991) the suggestion that an individual's *only* chance of employment is self-employment is very bleak. What to my mind is most compelling about these data, however, is the way in which these severe constraints, and the inevitability of self-employment are constructed by respondents. Far

from looking at self-employment with a kind of fatalistic resignation - the move is described in terms consistent with their career stories more generally. There is but one exception to this pattern.

This respondent resigned from her job as a computer operator for a large communications company in London in order to move back to Sheffield, where her family and partner lived. With the local economy in recession, she found that she could simply not get a job. For this respondent, the move to self-employment thus typifies Bogenhold and Staber's (1991) "logic of necessity", which describes individuals whose "decision to become self-employed is driven mainly by economic necessity". Here, "lack of education, and skills... limit their opportunity to succeed in the mainstream economy, forcing them to consider other options". Although skilled in her particular job, this respondent lacked the education and qualifications of many of the other women in the study. Returning to Sheffield, she found herself unemployable. Faced with the inevitability of self-employment, whereas other respondents described the move as an *opportunity*, a chance to fulfil career aspirations, this respondent had no such vision:

"I have not got any real ambitions... as long as I'm earning a decent amount of money, and I'm not working too many hours, that's fine" (Computer operator to owner/manager of bakery).

This perspective poses a stark contrast to the views of others in the study. For the most part, respondents appear to have a very clear sense of their careers, even if they maintain that they do not have explicit career plans. Thus work emerges as central to respondents' sense of themselves; their professional identities are inextricably bound up with their identities as individuals, as women more generally. What differentiates this respondent is her apparent lack of psychological attachment to work. Although she explains that she works very hard, and to the best of her ability, she describes a relationship with work that is basically instrumental. Compared with others in the study, she appears to be less invested, psychologically, in her career:

"With my qualifications there weren't any jobs for me. I didn't really know what I wanted to do anyway. I never really did - I just seemed to swan through life. No plans".

At the outset of the interview, respondents were routinely asked for a "thumbnail description of their career so far", as a way of getting into the data, and defining its parameters. It is notable that whereas for most respondents this resulted in anywhere from two to five pages of text, in this case it took three-and-a-half lines. This respondent, unlike the others, does not seem to have a sense of "her career"; she does not tell a "career story". It is perhaps for this reason that she does not appear to have *made sense* of the move to self-employment in the way that others have done.

In spite of their perception of self-employment as their *only* option, the majority of respondents discussed in this section described the move to self-employment as *making sense*, fitting in with their visions of the future, and as a logical outcome of past experiences. For some women the move to self-employment makes explicit an entrepreneurial career discourse which up to this point had remained just beneath the surface. For others, however, it is incorporated into existing career discourses to do with professional practice and development, and personal growth and development, constructed as a way of making possible the realisation of their aims and aspirations.

6.4.2 Self-employment: not the <u>only</u> option, but the <u>best</u> one

The above section focused on just over a third of the respondents in the study, who seemed to have little choice about their move to self-employment, describing it as their *only* employment option. The section that follows, in contrast, explores the cases of three respondents who chose self-employment as the *best alternative* in their particular circumstances.

The three women who fall into this category decided to leave their jobs largely as a result of organisational factors. As discussed in Chapter 5, these included: feelings of professional "stagnation" and a perceived lack of opportunities for professional development; organisational change which respondents found untenable; and feelings of

marginalisation and exclusion from dominant organisational cultures, often resulting from their exposed positions as women in male-dominated environments. The first two respondents to be considered moved swiftly from one employment context to the other, whereas for the third the process involved an interim period of travel.

The cases of the two respondents who moved directly from employment to self-employment provide an illuminating point of comparison. One, a night Sister in the NHS, strongly disapproved of the direction in which the Health Service was moving, and sought to "get back to real nursing". Having made the decision to leave, she considered her alternatives. In so far as her motivation was a return to one-to-one, patient-oriented care, she identified two appropriate options: one was Macmillan nursing (caring for patients who are terminally ill), and the other was to take over a nursing home. She felt that both contexts would be consistent with her own deeply held professional values and notions of what "good nursing practice" was all about.

It was for a combination of situational and ideological reasons (and serendipity) that this respondent eventually opted for the nursing home:

"A friend of ours had this nursing home in Torquay. My husband and I had gone down once or twice to help out. I liked it, and I liked the idea of being my own boss, if you want to use that terminology. I did get to the point where you think, well, you're working away and you're beavering away and in the end, what have you got? So I was very fortunate that this little home came along".

Like those respondents noted above whose move to self-employment was influenced by their families' involvement in their own small businesses, the experience of working in her friend's residential home was influential in her decision to follow suit. At the same time, her desire to "be her own boss" seems to typify the "ideology of self-employment" central to Granger et. al.'s (1995) "missionary". It is important to note, however, that in spite of this said desire, the ideology of self-employment does not permeate this nurse's story in the same way that it did others' accounts of their careers. Instead, it was a professional discourse around which her career seemed to be constructed, and made sense of. The control issue, then, instead of signifying a sort of ideological shift, is

subsumed within this professional discourse; in other words, in order to practice the best quality nursing, she had to be her own boss, she had to be in control of the scope and the direction of her work.

In contrast to the nurse whose interest in self-employment was triggered by an unsatisfactory situation within her organisation, the second respondent in this category had always intended to run her own business. A design manager who came from a family background of self-employment, she had only ever considered organisational employment as a sort of "training ground". Her plan was to use organisations to learn as much as she possibly could about her profession, in order to eventually strike out on her own. In this sense, she was similar to those described as "ideological missionaries" in section 6.3.1 above. What is distinct about this case, though, is that she never intended to make the move to self-employment at that particular time. However here, as in the case of the nurse cited above, situational factors intervened which made the change possible.

Having decided to leave her position as design manager in a firm where she felt that, in spite of her position as a change agent, she had little power to affect any change at all, she was reviewing her options, and interviewing with appropriate organisations. She was put in contact with a design manager who had recently left one of the positions that she was applying for, and who was now working on a self-employed basis (this woman also became a respondent in this study - the design manager cited above). At that meeting, the two designers discussed their sector, its possibilities, and the future; and decided to form a partnership. The case aptly illustrates Birley's "friendly push syndrome", where "an individual has constantly talked about an idea, and suddenly the path is made clear" (1989, p. 13).

For the other respondent in this group, the move to self-employment was not so straightforward. Here the decision to leave her position as product manager in a large travel firm was a result of organisational and personal considerations, in particular, the desire to travel. The subsequent decision to become self-employed was influenced by this interim experience. At the time this respondent left her organisation, her plan was to

travel around the world with her husband. In the course of their travels, they would consider their options for the future.

Setting out, the couple had vague plans to start up a business on their return; both had been working in organisations which they felt were badly managed, and were confident that as small business owner/managers, they could do better. During their year away, a number of factors - personal, situational and sectoral - coincided which led them to conclude that self-employment was indeed the best option. First, they decided that they would like to start a family at some point in the future; self-employment, they felt, would provide them with the flexibility necessary for them to participate equally in paid work and childcare. The second factor was that while neither this respondent nor her husband were adverse to organisational employment, their greatest opportunities were in London, and neither of them was keen to return to the capital. Most significantly, whilst in America they came across a business idea (an environmentally friendly, non-disposable nappy service) which they thought could be successful in the British context. It was this idea that served as the real trigger to self-employment.

It is significant that unlike some other respondents who, in leaving their present organisations were, in effect, leaving *all* organisations (see section 6.3.2), there was no such sense of finality in this particular story. Rather, she "admitted" to positively enjoying organisational politicking, and still dreamed of one day being appointed marketing manager of a large company:

"I enjoy sitting at meetings, I enjoy it when people give their very strong points of view and you don't agree with it... I've always wanted to be a marketing manager. I don't know why - it's a funny desire!"

And in contrast to respondents in the previous section who saw self-employment as their *only* option, this woman saw herself as eminently employable. It therefore came as little surprise when during the course of the interview she told me that she had been offered another job and that she would soon be leaving her business to take up the post of marketing manager at a large mail-order clothing firm.

"I don't know if this [nappy business] could sustain me... I've got it now [my marketing manager's job] - at long last!"

What I felt was most intriguing about this case was that, unlike the majority of other respondents who expressed their relief in being "free" from what they described as the "shackles" of their organisations, this woman made a positive decision to return to such a context. At the time of leaving her organisation she was attracted to many aspects of self-employment, and indeed there were certain features which she continued to enjoy. However, taking her career as a whole, it is a bureaucratic discourse, implicit within which is a strong desire to progress within a prescribed, hierarchical structure, which predominates.

Unlike the section above, which examined the cases of respondents for whom self-employment was perceived as the *only option*, here women described their move to self-employment as a *choice*. In setting out to explore this category, I expected to find that in these cases, the decision to become self-employed would be based on ideological factors, that women would opt for self-employment because of the "autonomy" and "freedom" that it seemed to represent. I expected them to describe how they were, in effect, "pulled to self-employment", like the "missionary" identified by Granger et. al. (1995). Examining the data, I was surprised to find that, on the contrary, the decision was based far more on situational factors, and on good luck. Weighing up her options, the NHS Sister happened to spend some time working at her friends' nursing home, and the opportunity to buy such a home in Sheffield became available; the design manager, preparing for a job interview, met a woman who was to become her future business partner; and the product manager, considering her next move, happened upon a good business idea. In these cases the decision to become self-employed was described, not in crusading, "missionary" terms, but as the best option in the particular circumstances. Here again, the ideology of self-employment is incorporated within existing discourses about career and lifestyle, so that the decision to become self-employed was described, not as a radical departure from established directions, but as a way of fulfilling existing professional and personal aspirations.

6.5 Permeating Themes: the significance of family background and gender in the move to self-employment

Thus far this analysis has focused on professional, personal and situational factors impacting on respondents' decisions to become self-employed. Interspersed within this analysis have been passing references to the significance of two further factors: family background and gender. Family background emerges as important, not only to the specific circumstances which lead to self-employment, but also on a cultural level, in contributing to how an individual makes sense of employment, and the extent to which self-employment is understood as a *real* option. As far as gender is concerned, as discussed in both the literature review and the chapter on methodology, from the outset one of the aims of this thesis was to examine the significance of gender in a woman's move from employment to self-employment. In Chapter 5 gender was seen as central to respondents' decisions to leave their organisations, on both personal and organisational levels. The next step, then, is to explore the extent to which it is also a factor in their decisions to become self-employed.

6.5.1 Family Background and the Move to Self-employment

As noted in the review of the entrepreneurship literature, considerable academic attention has been devoted to entrepreneurs' socio-economic backgrounds (see for example Stanworth and Gray, 1991; Goss, 1991); this literature emphasises in particular the importance of family experience of small business ownership/management in an individual's decision to become self-employed. In this study, just under half of the respondents came from families in which there was experience of the small business sector. Examining the data, it becomes apparent that such a background was important in two key ways. First, regarding the actual decision to become self-employed, many of the women who came from small business backgrounds explained how supportive their families were of this decision:

"My parents have never pushed me into anything, but they were totally supportive of the decision... They have never worked for anybody else" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency).

"My parents are incredibly supportive... Interestingly enough, my brother is self-employed, he's a photographer, and he started off as a geology graduate, and my father is now self-employed. He became self-employed after my brother and me... My grandfather had his own dress-making business. It's interesting now that I think about it, my other grandfather ran his own business too, a chocolate factory, which my uncle then took over" (Public relations manager to director of public relations agency).

Respondents who came from self-employed families were thus encouraged in their decisions to become self-employed themselves.

However, it was not only in so far as the specific decision was concerned that this background was important. Perhaps more significant was the cultural dimension - the influence of such a background on respondents' understandings of work generally, and in particular the way in which it contributed to their perception of self-employment as *normal*, as a *real* employment option.

"My parents knew that I would make it work because, well, I think they thought it was normal. They have never worked for anybody, either of them, and neither have their parents" (Design Manager to Co-Director Graphic Design Agency).

"Interestingly my father was self-employed and it was a disaster. And I was thinking about this the other day... I was thinking, okay, it was disastrous. But at least I learned it was possible" (Educational psychologist to independent psychologist).

The cultural effects of family experience of self-employment are briefly noted in section 4.5.2, in the context of respondents' entrepreneurial identities. In this chapter, what is important is the extent to which the experience of self-employment served to somehow demystify the concept, to make it quite ordinary, and possible. Unlike other respondents who maintained that up to the point of leaving their organisation they had never even considered the possibility of self-employment, those women from entrepreneurial backgrounds always recognised it as an option. Indeed, it is notable that in relation to

the sample as a whole, more of these respondents chose to work in economic sectors which frequently led to self-employment.

6.5.2 The Decision to Become Self-employed: the significance of gender

The centrality of gender in women's decisions to leave their organisations is well-documented in the literature on the subject (see for example Rosin and Korabik, 1992; and Marshall, 1991, 1994, and 1995), and was explored in relation to this study in Chapter 5, at both organisational and personal levels of analysis. However, its significance for the decision to become self-employed has received less attention. As suggested in the literature review, one of the strengths of the study conducted by Granger et. al. (1995) was its recognition of "the gender dimension"; however, the limitations of this analysis, in particular, the restriction of this dimension to the "trade off" category, were noted above, in section 6.2 The section that follows considers the extent to which gender appeared to impact on respondents' decisions to become self-employed in relation to two key areas: the rejection of organisational employment; and the need for greater flexibility at work

First, as found in Chapter 5, for a number of women the move to self-employment resulted from their rejection of organisations: this was particularly the case for those respondents included in section 6.3.2 ("rejection of organisational employment and the move to greater flexibility") and for several women who, having left their organisations, described self-employment as their "only option" (section 6.3.1). Here, the decision to become self-employed was a direct outcome of negative organisational experiences, central to which were issues of gender, at both personal and organisational levels.

The second way in which gender appeared to impact on respondents' decisions to become self-employed is slightly less straightforward, and concerns the ideology of the family that permeates some women's stories: their perceived roles and responsibilities as wives, mothers and partners. Throughout the analysis, I have made reference to women's expressed need for greater flexibility at work, and the extent to which they felt that self-employment would allow them to more easily accommodate the conflicting dimensions of their lives. Women spoke frequently about their desire for autonomy,

flexibility and control: although on an ideological level these concepts are generally interpreted as relating to the nature, scope and direction of the work itself, the data generated in this study demonstrates that they are also important in relation to the structure of the working day. Indeed for many respondents, part of the attraction of self-employment was that they felt it would give them control over when, where and how they worked, thus enabling them to more effectively accommodate the diverse (and frequently conflicting) facets of their lives.

Here two salient points emerge. First, in recognising the need for flexibility, it should not be assumed that employment is not a central aspect of respondents' lives. On the contrary, as has been discussed, the majority of women in the sample describe an attachment to work which is fundamental, at both instrumental and psychological levels. Second, it is important to note that it is not only mothers of young children who look to self-employment as a way of managing the competing elements in their lives. In this sample women with no children explain how they too have organised and constructed their careers around husbands and partners. Indeed, their stories show how they too participate in and serve to construct and re-construct a discourse of the family, central to which is a notion of women as carers and nurturers, accommodating the needs of others.

In so far as this analysis has focused on the way in which the move to self-employment is constructed as *making sense* (Weick, 1995) in terms of respondents professional *and* personal aspirations, a recognition of this permeating discourse of the family, and the extent to which it serves to shape women's perceptions of themselves, is fundamental.

6.6 Conclusion

This analysis looks critically at the assumption, made by earlier studies, that the move from employment to self-employment is the result of a single decision. While some respondents in the study suggested that they had indeed left their organisations *in order to* become self-employed, others described the shift in employment contexts as the outcome of two separate, though integrally related decisions. Taking as its starting point these two conceptual categories, the chapter examines first those respondents who describe themselves as having been "pulled" to self-employment. Unlike earlier, more

unitary approaches, this analysis illustrates the diversity of factors: organisational, personal, situational, and ideological factors, which together create respondents' sense of being "pulled" to self-employment. While some respondents always knew that their careers would ultimately lead in that direction, for others the move was a result of factors which they saw as being beyond their control, and in these cases, it was tinged with a sense of loss and regret. Moving on, the analysis considered those respondents who described their move to self-employment in terms of two separate decisions. These were examined in two groups: those who saw self-employment as their *only* option (for structural, sectoral, organisational and lifestyle reasons); and those who chose self-employment as the *best option* in their particular circumstances. In both cases, respondents described their decision as a result of their assessment of their options within the local labour market, together with their visions for the future - and the role of self-employment within this vision. Permeating this analysis the issues of family background and gender emerge as having a significant impact on respondents' decisions to embark on self-employment.

Applying this framework to the data generated in this study was an illuminating process in its own right, providing a structure for thinking about women's decisions to become self-employed, and elucidating important similarities and differences in their accounts. Significantly, a close examination of respondents' decisions to become self-employed also provides insights into women's career stories more generally.

Embarking on this study, I expected to find that a radical change in respondents' employment context would be accompanied by an equally radical change in the way in which they thought about their careers. In fact, the above analysis of women's decisions to become self-employed demonstrates just the opposite; indeed, what is most striking about their stories is their apparent continuity - and a sense that the move is not about ruptures, endings and beginnings, but about learning, growth and development. Of course it could be argued that this positive gloss is obvious, given the vantage point of the study. Reviewing their move to self-employment, constructing a narrative in the interview context, of course respondents will smooth over rough edges, as if to make a seamless whole. But this reflection is precisely what this project is all about - exploring the ways in which women look back at the circumstances surrounding their move from

employment to self-employment, and make sense. Given these parameters, what is important is just how that sense is made: what are the threads that hold each respondent's story together? Are there places where the threads are broken? And how are the loose ends picked up and woven back into the fabric of the story? These questions are considered in chapter 9.

In moving to self-employment, it appears that for a number of respondents, rather than simply *replacing* old bureaucratic and professional discourses with new entrepreneurial ones, *relevant aspects* of these new discourses are appropriated and incorporated into existing patterns of thinking and sense-making. Thus, as owner/manager of a nursing home, the former NHS sister is able to practice the kind of "real nursing" which she sees as her vocation; and an independent psychologist, previously employed by a local education department, is able to develop her skills and knowledge in a way that would have been impossible within the organisational context. At the same time, for other respondents the decision to become self-employed can be seen as the logical outcome of an entrepreneurial discourse which permeated their career stories throughout (either explicitly, as in the case of the hotel owner/manager; or implicitly, as in that of the sales representative who started up her own clothing business). It is important, however, that this emphasis on continuity, on the endurance of these career discourses does not suggest that they are exclusive, nor does it preclude the possibility of movement and change. On the contrary, each of these discourses must be seen as dynamic. In so far as they are constructed within a dynamic and ever-changing social/political/economic/cultural world, co-existing with, competing with, and appropriating aspects of other discourses, they continue to develop and evolve.

In addition to these career discourses, what emerges in the above analysis is the significance of personal and lifestyle factors in respondents' decisions to become self-employed. So, it is not the case that women construct their careers around, or within, or in spite of their personal circumstances, but that in constructing their professional lives, they also construct their personal ones. The significance of the ideology of the family has been highlighted throughout this analysis. However this, like the discourse of self-employment, for example, must not be understood as monolithic or unchanging. On the

contrary, just as discourses around career must be seen as dynamic and changing, so too are ideas about lifestyle described by respondents as a site of struggle. What emerges through this analysis of women's decisions to become self-employed is the dialectical relationship between women's career and personal lives, and the centrality of these "lifestyle" discourses in respondents' stories of moving from employment to self-employment.

Chapter 7

THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT: FEARS, EXPECTATIONS AND THE REALIT(IES) OF BEING IN BUSINESS

This chapter continues the discussion of research question 3, commenced in the previous chapter.

- **Why did the women in the study choose to embark on self-employment, and what were their expectations in doing so?**

In particular, it addresses the second part of this question. Specifically, section 7.2 explores the risks women perceived upon embarking on self-employment: financial, social, psychological and professional. Section 7.3 focuses on their expectations, emphasising in particular the issues of freedom and control, and the extent to which these expectations were realised in practice.

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on respondents' reasons for becoming self-employed; central to that discussion were women's perceptions of their options within the labour market, and their ideas about how self-employment would contribute to their visions of the future - personally as well as professionally. Moving on, this chapter looks more specifically at the *experience* of self-employment. The first section explores the fears and risks perceived by respondents at the time of their transition from employment to self-employment, and how these perceptions changed and developed as they became established in their new contexts. Notwithstanding their apprehension, women in the sample generally had very high expectations of what self-employment would offer them. The section that follows considers these expectations, and in particular the extent to which respondents felt that they had been fulfilled - whether, indeed, self-employment lived up to its promise.

7.2 The Risks of Self-employment

In spite of their considered decisions to leave their organisations and become self-employed, most of the respondents in the sample saw the move as risky: financially, socially, psychologically, and professionally. While these risks were certainly not seen as

insurmountable - indeed in some cases they were described as highly motivating - they were nevertheless a source of real fear and apprehension at the time of the transition and in the early days of business start-up. These perceptions are considered below.

7.2.1 Financial Risks

As outlined in the review of the entrepreneurship literature, central to a number of definitions of the entrepreneur is the notion of (financial) risk-taking (see for example: McClelland, 1961) In this study, respondents were routinely asked whether, having made the decision to become self-employed, they remembered whether there was anything that particularly worried or concerned them at the time of the move. Over half of the women in the sample explained how financial issues, in particular the prospect of no longer having a guaranteed salary, was their greatest fear. For some, the fear was simply about survival - paying the mortgage, buying food, and basically "making ends meet".

"You worry about your own security, and your home, because you know if the company closes down and goes bust, then you haven't got a job, and if you haven't got a job, and you have a mortgage to pay, how are you going to do it?" (Marketing manager to managing director of tool distributing firm).

For other respondents, particularly those whose husbands and partners were also earning, the fear was not so much about *survival*, in the sense described above, but about the prospect of a reduction in the standard of living they had worked very hard to achieve, and that they had come to expect.

"The money side worried me. Yes, because we really did need two wages... you get to the point where you have two wages and your expenditure is two wages. It's not like you can save fifty percent. So it's like we've got two cars because we needed two cars. You need twice as many clothes because you don't wash as regularly. You need stuff in the freezer cause you can't get around to making things in the evening. So our whole life revolved around two incomes" (Personnel officer to training/development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

In addition to these quite instrumental considerations, several respondents spoke of the psychological effects of financial insecurity, and of what they saw as the relationship between financial independence and self-esteem. One woman in particular spoke of how, upon leaving her secure local authority job, she found the prospect of unemployment very frightening indeed. As a social worker, she was well aware of the damaging effects of unemployment, and as she left London to embark on her Masters course, the threat loomed large. Her concerns were not so much around money per se, but about the ramifications of finding herself jobless.

"I thought that the biggest risk was being unemployed, and I suppose because I was coming from a social work background and working with inner city depriyation, being unemployed was to me a very powerful negative message. That sense of alienation around not having a chance to work. All right, I was working around some very deprived people, bui I began to see the world as being deprived, you see, and so for me the thought that I might take a risk and leave my job, which at that point was still very much... it was almost like a job for life" (Social worker to management consultant).

Small business owners in Scase and Goffee's (1980) study described clear relationship between their domestic and business finances. Likewise, as regards this study it is notable that until respondents were actually running their own businesses, many had conceived of a very indirect link between the work they did, the money they earned and the bills they had to pay. In the context of self-employment, though, they soon realised that their work had a direct impact on the amount of money they had to spend.

"You know, thinking: 'God, VAT and invoices, and they're all real and they're all mine and they're all directly related to what I can spend in Sainsbury's at the weekend" (Design manager to co-director of graphic design firm).

At issue here are concepts like freedom, control and responsibility, and the way in which their meanings differ in the organisational and the self-employed contexts. This will be considered in greater depth in section 7.3 which follows. The central point here, though, is that whereas within their organisations many respondents felt that had been sheltered

from financial risk and responsibility, running their *own* businesses, they felt financially vulnerable, and exposed.

As regards the question of finance generally, a few points are worthy of note. First, the issue of start-up finance. As noted in the review of the entrepreneurship literature, a number of studies found that access to start-up finance proved one of the greatest obstacles to women starting up in business (Watkins and Watkins, 1984; Hisrich, 1986; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990). In this study, this problem was not particularly relevant. Over half of the respondents in the sample, in moving to self-employment, were basically carrying on their professional work in a new context. In general, these women needed very limited start-up finance: their work was largely knowledge and skill-based; and at the outset they had neither business premises nor employees. As such, they tended to fund themselves: through savings, their partner's income, or through redundancy packages which they had arranged when they resigned from their organisations. As for those women who were actually setting up employee-based businesses, and businesses requiring premises (such as the bakery owner/manager, the hotel owner/manager and the owner/manager of the residential home), sources of funding varied. To my knowledge two sought funding from banks, several were financially supported by their families, and like those professional women cited above, a number funded their new venture through redundancy packages from their former employers.

Second, as suggested in the previous chapter, for only *one* woman in the study was the issue of money central to the decision to become self-employed. For the others, while not unimportant, money was never identified as a significant incentive in the move from employment to self-employment, nor did it factor into respondents' professional aspirations more generally. The overwhelming majority of women in the sample (some of whom had been running their own businesses for up to ten years at the time of interview) described themselves as "worse off" financially than they would have been had they stayed in their organisations. This was not identified as a serious problem, nor was it seen as an incentive to move back into organisational employment; instead, to me it served to underscore the limited importance of money in women's career stories generally. Although it emerged as a major source of anxiety and fear at the time of *transition*, and again at critical periods when the very survival of the business was at

stake, profit was certainly not described as a motivating factor generally, and did not feature in most respondents' visions for the future. This is particularly significant in so far as half of the women in the study described themselves as the main breadwinner. Thus in contrast to definitions of entrepreneurship which privilege the profit motive (see for example Carland, 1994), this study confirms other research into women entrepreneurs which questioned traditional emphases on profit, highlighting, instead, the notion of "business success" as polysemic, and the "growing number of businesses that are small and stay small" (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990), and are oriented around owner/managers' personal and professional needs and aspirations.

7.2.2 Social Risks

While the threat of financial insecurity was the risk most frequently cited by respondents in their move to self-employment, a number of women were also very concerned about the loss of colleagues, and the possibility of isolation and loneliness in their new work contexts. This was described in terms of both professional and personal dimensions.

As regards the former, several respondents described their misgivings about working alone, after years of close collaboration with colleagues, years of belonging to a department.

"One of my worries was that I would be professionally isolated...I was aware that I would miss the psychological banter, I mean it was a sparkling department. I know I've painted a very black side of it... but I was aware of a lot of professional stimulation, that would be a loss" (Educational psychologist to independent psychologist).

These respondents saw their departments as providing both professional stimulation and support, and thus feared the isolation of self-employment.

On a more personal level, a number of respondents described themselves as "people people", explaining how they had enjoyed the social life provided by their organisation, and how concerned they were about the prospect of long days spent all alone.

"The thing I dreaded was leaving all my friends. And I think that is probably my main regret, that you haven't got the camaraderie" (Marketing and sales manager in multi-national company to owner/manager of travel business).

In the absence of the social networks provided by their departments and organisations, respondents looked elsewhere for their support and professional stimulation: to professional associations, women's networks, and voluntary groups within the community. Where no such opportunities existed, respondents sought to construct them. The contribution of these (diverse) networks will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter.

It is notable that in contrast to the respondents cited above who greatly valued their relationships with colleagues within their organisations, and who were frightened by the prospect of losing them, it was these very relationships which other women found so detrimental, and which eventually contributed to their decisions to resign. In these cases, respondents typically sought professional stimulation, encouragement and friendship outside of their organisational contexts: from other professional associations and social networks.

"I went through a very grave stage of having all my confidence removed by a continual wearing away by the management in the hospital. Luckily it had been boosted by the Women's Institute who had appointed me as their president and supported me, and got me through that stage" (Operating theatre nurse to reflexologist).

Unlike the women cited previously, who once self-employed were faced with the challenge of discovering new sources of support and professional stimulation, for these respondents the transition from employment to self-employment represented no such rupture, no such risk. In their new contexts, the networks which they had established while still working for their organisations continued to provide them with support and sustenance. The significance of these enduring relationships will be further considered in Chapter 8.

7.2.3 Professional Risks

Having worked as competent professionals within organisations for years, faced with the prospect of self-employment, a number of women spoke of their limited understanding of business generally, and of their feelings of acute incompetence in dealing with financial issues in particular. There appeared to be a difference in the sample between one half of the respondents who, in making the move from employment to self-employment were consciously seeking career change - most specifically seeking to set up their own businesses, and the other half who were essentially aiming to continue doing their professional work in a different context. Whilst respondents in the former group spoke with far greater confidence and enthusiasm about the challenges which their new businesses presented, for the latter group the "business" side of self-employment was frequently described as a kind of unwelcome distraction, and as potentially very risky.

"Even on a day-to-day basis we were going to be involved in doing things that we'd never done. I mean, we'd never talked to banks about finance, or we'd never had to sort out an insurance policy for a hotel" (Hotel manager to hotel co-owner/manager).

The whole non-professional psychological side was unknown to me... marketing, self-promotion, publicity, advertising, looking for work" (Educational psychologist to independent psychologist).

Such data are consistent with other research into women entrepreneurs (Carter and Cannon, 1988 and 1992). Amongst their respondents, Carter and Cannon found a particularly high level of attendance at specialist small business management training courses. They argue that in embarking on business ownership, the women in their study encountered gender-related obstacles which they then attempted to overcome by adopting certain strategies. In particular, women developed strategies to "combat a generally perceived lack of credibility, to gain confidence, and to prove capability" (1992, p. 89). Training, in this context, can be understood not simply as a means of increasing one's knowledge about a particular topic, but as part of a longer-term vision of how these women saw their businesses developing in the future. Carter and Cannon

argue that in addition to their emphasis on formal training, successful respondents were aware of the importance of learning from others.

In contrast to Carter and Cannon's research, faced with feelings of insecurity and incompetence in relation to business issues, very few of the respondents in this study actually sought formal advice and training. However, this appeared to be due, not to a lack of strategic vision, but to a widespread scepticism about training possibilities available within the public sector, and the prohibitive cost of private training. Instead, respondents dealt with their lack of skills and knowledge in a variety of ways, including seeking informal advice and support from friends (here again, the importance of social networks becomes apparent); and delegating those aspects of the business to someone else - in three cases, husbands took over the financial management of their wives' ventures.

Many of the women in this study recognised the skills and knowledge required in their move to self-employment, and sought informal training and advice where necessary. On the contrary, others explained how they had simply not anticipated what the move would involve and had not questioned whether there were indeed any gaps in their own understanding of the job. Having taken over a nursing home, an ex-nurse spoke very emotively about how little she actually knew about this business.

"It was your worst nightmare... I didn't have a clue how to run the place... I mean, I didn't know what the daily routine was, how they got people out of bed, who did what. I'd met these people once, for an hour on the Sunday, and then on the Monday morning at eight o'clock it was mine... Everything was new. I think I went into it quite blinkered really. I just felt out of depth, totally and utterly out-of-control!"

As an experienced and highly competent nurse, she had never been in any doubt about her ability to run the home - the reality thus came as a terrible shock, and resulted in seriously undermining her confidence and her sense of herself as a professional woman. As mentioned in the literature review, the issue of occupational identity emerged as central in Nicholson and West's noteworthy research into career transition (1988; 1989; for a critique see Ashforth and Saks, 1995). Likewise in this study it is a significant

factor in women's experience of moving from employment to self-employment. This issue will be further developed in the following chapter, and in the final discussion.

In general, those who had considered the professional risks involved in the move from employment to self-employment, and had sought to redress the gaps in their own skills and knowledge, appeared to be less traumatised, professionally, by the transition. Consequently, these respondents appeared to cope more effectively with the demands placed upon them by their fledgling businesses.

7.2.4 Psychological Risks

Having reviewed the literature on entrepreneurship, I had anticipated women's perceptions of the *financial* risks in moving from one employment context to another; considering the structural changes implicit in such a move, the *social* and *professional* risks that women also identified came as little surprise. What I was not prepared for, however, were the *psychological* risks involved in the transition from employment to self-employment. Although these were raised less frequently than the risks outlined above, their significance for the women concerned was such that they merit consideration.

As noted above, there is a number of respondents who, as professionals moving to self-employment, are basically trying doing the same work but in a different employment context (the recruitment consultant who left her organisation to set up independently, for example); for others, however, the move was not simply a change of context, but a change in the nature of the work itself (such as the sales manager who set up a travel company). For those women in the first group, although self-employment presented a whole range of challenges, their sense of themselves as professional women, their *occupational identities*, appeared to remain constant: thus the designer continued to see herself as a designer, and the solicitor was still a solicitor. However, for the social worker who became a management consultant, and others like her, there was no such continuity. For them, the move to self-employment meant relinquishing one occupational identity, and finding something to put in its place.

"I remember being interviewed [for a course in Organisational Development] and being asked: 'What's the most important thing about coming on this course?' And I said: 'The loss of my role, that is what is going to be most difficult. The loss of my role as a competent professional manager'" (Social worker to management consultant).

This respondent describes the transition period, during which she gave up the security of "being" a social worker in favour of a very uncertain and precarious future, as very risky, and very frightening. Exploring the data generated in this study, the issue of occupational identity is seen as central to the way in which women in the sample make sense of their changing careers.

In addition to the risk of losing one's occupational identity, the sense of one's *professional* self, for several respondents the move to self-employment was described as psychologically risky on a more general, more *personal* level. Section 7.2.1 above discussed the way in which as employees, respondents perceived the relationship between work, earning an income, and paying domestic bills as (comfortably) distant and abstract. In contrast, running their own businesses these relationships suddenly became direct, and glaringly obvious. Similarly, women explained that while as employees their organisation protected them, to a certain extent, from criticism and complaint, in the self-employed context they were directly responsible, and took failure much more personally.

"There are times when we are feeling in despair. When you go to somebody's for them to try the nappies and they don't want to carry on. In fact, sixty percent of those who try them do want to carry on, which is a very high level, but actually coping with that other forty percent is bloody hard. It nearly destroyed us. You know, you feel emotionally drained if someone tells you. Coping with rejection - because running your own business you're selling yourself, you're selling your own product. That's been the hardest bit of it. More than coping with not having the holidays, you know, the money we used to have. The hardest bit has been the emotional drain of rejection. At work you go to sell to a client and they don't want your ideas, well sod it, you know, you just go and think of another one, or you just go to another customer. But when it's your own business..." (Product manager to co-owner/manager of environmentally friendly nappy firm to marketing manager).

What is significant about this story is the extent to which this psychological risk was totally unexpected. While aware of the financial insecurity that self-employment would create, the risk of rejection took this respondent by surprise; she had not prepared herself for it and was shocked by the intensity of its effects. Although continuing to struggle with the close and inextricable relationship between their personal lives and their businesses, this respondent, and others, explained how this sense of psychological vulnerability waned as they became more established, and more confident in their business ventures.

The above discussion focuses on respondents' perceptions of the move to self-employment as a very risky business. As such, it appears to be consistent with traditional academic perspectives which identify risk-taking as central to the very definition of the entrepreneur. These definitions, however, tend to interpret the notion of "risk" in a unitary way - pertaining in particular to financial risk. The data generated in this study pose a challenge to such unitary perspectives: highlighting not only financial risks, but also the social, professional and psychological risks perceived by women as they embark on their new business ventures. Indeed, the data illustrate how the concept of financial risk must itself be seen as diverse and polysemic. What is essential, then, is that the notion of risk be explored holistically - not simply in relation to the business *per se* and not simply in relation to financial survival, but in terms of people's lives more generally.

What I found particularly significant in analysing these data was the way in which respondents' experience of risk changed as they became more established in their businesses. While certain risks were most closely connected with the period of transition from employment to self-employment, with the *prospect* of self-employment (the risk of professional isolation, for example), others emerged with the *actual experience* of business start-up (such as the psychological risk of rejection). Just as the data demonstrate the extent to which the concept of "risk" must be seen as diverse and multi-faceted, they also illustrate its inherent dynamism.

7.3 Understanding Women's Expectations of Self-employment

In their research into managerial job change, Nicholson and West (1988) found that during the first stage of the "transition cycle" respondents "anticipated and prepared" for their move. This typically involved finding out as much as possible about the new post, and attending to gaps in professional skills and competencies. For the women in this study who were moving from employment to self-employment, however, this "fact-finding" was often impossible - as the businesses did not yet exist. Instead of slotting into existing positions within organisations that were up and running, in most cases respondents were setting up from scratch - there were no organisations, and no positions. Apart from those with previous experience of self-employment, or who came from small business backgrounds, women in this study therefore had very little concrete "evidence" about their new employment context. On what basis, then, were their expectations of self-employment constructed, and how can they be understood?

7.3.1 Expectations of Self-employment and the Rejection of Bureaucratic Ideologies

First, respondents' expectations of self-employment must be examined in terms of their organisational experiences. Far from tidy endings and new beginnings, as chapters in a book make sense *in relation to one another*, so too the transition from employment to self-employment must be seen as an evolving process. While Nicholson and West's analysis tends to look *forward*, in my view it is equally important to *look back*. Significantly, women's expectations of self-employment seemed to be grounded in their rejection of their organisation in particular, and in many cases, organisations in general.

Semiologist and linguist de Saussure (1966) argued that meaning is constructed *relationally*, that we make sense not only in terms of what things *are*, but also in terms of what they *are not*. Women's expectations of self-employment are a case in point. In the absence of empirical evidence about their new businesses, women's expectations are thus based, in part, on their rejection of bureaucracies. Self-employment, then, can be seen as representing whatever is perceived to be the opposite of organisational

employment. Where organisations are seen as stifling their employees, both professionally and personally, self-employment is expected to provide professional freedom and the opportunity to learn and develop. Where organisations are experienced as rigid and inflexible, self-employment is expected to accommodate individuals' varied needs and circumstances. And where organisations are described as controlling and highly exclusive, within the context of self-employment women expect that they will be in charge, that they themselves will make the rules, and take the decisions.

Notwithstanding respondents' fears of embarking on a work context which they saw as potentially risky, in which they felt exposed and vulnerable, they anticipated that self-employment would offer them a number of real advantages, particularly in terms of their professional development, their relationship with work and the nature of their involvement in the work process. Typically, women described their expectations of self-employment in terms of such concepts as: "autonomy"; "freedom"; "independence"; and "being their own boss". These ideas are examined in greater detail in the section below. Moving on, the chapter considers the extent to which self-employment lived up to these expectations.

7.3.2 The Promise of Self-employment

As explored in the previous chapter, the respondents' decisions to become self-employed were multi-faceted, based on a combination of personal, professional, structural and situational factors. However, notwithstanding this diversity, there was a certain consensus in women's expectations of what self-employment would offer them. Discussing these expectations, notions of "flexibility"; "autonomy"; "individualism"; "freedom", "independence" and "control" came up time again - notions which, as has been seen, permeate academic debates on the ideology of self-employment and the culture of enterprise (Hakim, 1989; Granger et. al., 1995; Burrows and Curran, 1991).

"It was the independence [that appealed to me], and answering to no one except myself" (Public relations manager to director of a public relations agency).

"I certainly didn't want somebody else telling me what to do. I wanted the freedom to do it myself, and to create something" (Assistant solicitor to sole practitioner).

"I could do what I wanted to, I could do the things that I was good at... You know, not having an endless staff meeting which was going nowhere, that took three hours and everything stayed the same. And just about choosing. Do I want to do this? Do I not want to do that?" (Educational psychologist to independent psychologist).

"I thought that it would give me more flexibility. I'd be able to manage my time, and my work flow, and to manage both work and the baby" (Sales rep to Director of form distributing firm).

Respondents' expectations of self-employment can be understood in terms of two broad (and closely related) themes: control and freedom. The concept of control is used *relationally*, in terms of who is in charge of the decision-making process and whose version of reality is seen as legitimate. Freedom is seen as a manifestation of those relationships; thus a respondent's (personal/professional) freedom (or lack of it) depends on the extent to which she feels that she is in control.

As regards the issue of control, many respondents explained how when they became self-employed, they expected to be in charge - in charge of the business itself, in charge of how and when it operated, in charge of staff, and in charge of how the business was to develop in the future. Implicit in this control was the power to make important decisions, and a sense of not being accountable to anyone but themselves. Such expectations represent a stark contrast to the organisational experiences of a number of women in the study, experiences frequently characterised by lack of control, disempowerment, and marginalisation. Here gender is a particularly salient issue. As explored in Chapter 5 on "corporate flight", within their organisations many respondents found themselves constrained by "rules" (formal as well as informal) which were largely defined by men, and which were essentially at odds with their own (professional and personal) needs and aspirations. In spite of their formal status, they had very little decision-making power, and were thus felt that they had little choice but to conform, and

to find strategies to cope. In contrast, respondents expected that in the self-employed context *they* would be central and in charge, that the business would be constructed around *their* interests and values. Significantly, the issue of control can thus be understood on two levels: the first is material and relates to the actual, day-to-day running of the business; and the second is ideological, and concerns the extent to which one's values, attitudes, beliefs, etc. are seen as legitimate and central - the power to define business reality.

The desire for control is obviously very closely linked with the issue of freedom. In the transcripts, women talk about freedom in two ways. On one hand they talk about *freedom from*... (bosses, departments, and organisations more generally); on the other they talk about self-employment giving them the *freedom to*... (create, develop, manage). While the former relates to perceptions about who is in charge, the latter is more specifically concerned with the extent to which a respondent feels able to work in the way she sees fit. In this sense, respondents talked about how self-employment would give them the freedom to "create", "develop" and "innovate" in ways which would have been impossible within their organisations, and how at the same time they would be free to manage their work so that it was more compatible with the other aspects of their lives. Respondents thus anticipated that self-employment would offer them far greater freedom, *in everyday, practical terms*, than that afforded by their organisations. At the same time, they felt that it also offered the possibility of greater *ideological freedom*. In sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.4 I discussed the extent to which several women in the study described how they felt unrecognised, not altogether acceptable within their organisations. They therefore experienced a real disjuncture between how they saw themselves, and what their organisations expected them to be. Self-employment, in contrast, would allow them to "be themselves". Far from having to suppress their interests, beliefs and values, in the self-employed context these patterns of thought and feeling could flourish.

7.3.3 The Ideology - and the Realities - of Self-employment

In spite of the fear described above, having left their organisations some respondents described the tremendous sense of freedom they experienced in the early days of self-employment.

"I just liked the idea that no one was going to tell me what to do. When I left, I felt like I'd been released" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency).

The "prison" metaphor is particularly revealing. Although she was not "incarcerated" against her will, and in spite of her senior position, this respondent felt a real lack of freedom within her organisation - resulting from both a lack of decision-making power and (informal) status, and the reality of having to answer to a director who she did not respect. To her the move to self-employment meant freedom *from* an incompetent boss and from a culture in which she felt that she did not belong, and freedom *to* develop professionally and personally in a way which was consistent with her own beliefs and values.

This respondent's expectations of self-employment, and indeed her early experience of it are thus consistent with the ideology of self-employment described by Hakim (1989). However, despite the initial thrill of being on her own, she soon realised that self-employment also had intrinsic constraints and restrictions.

"But now I'm more tied, obviously, cause I can't just think, well, when I was employed if I got fed up I could just move on. You could say, 'Well, I'm going abroad', you could do whatever you liked. You've got your six weeks holiday, you've got your BUPA".

And she was not alone. Indeed the data are permeated by stories of women whose expectations were challenged by the reality of self-employment, a reality which imposes its own forms of control, and restricts individuals' freedom in its own particular ways. What has been especially interesting to me, as far as this issue is concerned, is the extent to which respondents, and I, were surprised by this reality. This surprise, I think,

illustrates the extent to which we had all internalised a certain ideology of self-employment. Because their expectations "made sense" to me, and fitted in with my own ideas about self-employment, I did not read them as problematic. To me, the implicit linking of self-employment with notions of control and freedom was "normal", *not* ideological. However, hearing about how respondents' experiences of self-employment differed from these expectations made me aware of the ideological "lens" through which I was looking, and alerted me to my own *ideological* assumptions.

Thus, contrary to their expectations, respondents found that self-employment imposed its own restrictions and its own forms of control, relating in particular to issues to do with job security; finance; holidays, time off and the structure of the working week; and relationships at work. These are explored in the sections which follow.

Job security

Having made the move to self-employment, several respondents described how they suddenly became aware of the vulnerability of their new context, and conversely, of the degree of security they had had within their organisations. Although they had not appreciated it at the time, a job for life, a salary that came every month, a company car, long holidays and private health insurance, for example, were aspects of employment which provided them with an enormous sense of stability that simply did not exist in the self-employed context. And with that stability came a sense of freedom, and a feeling of being in control of one's life. The graphic designer cited above is a case in point. Although she had felt trapped by her organisation and experienced a great sense of release when she finally "got out", having embarked on self-employment she soon realised that in some ways she had had more freedom before: freedom from worry, freedom from responsibility, freedom to leave.

It is important to note that whereas in this study the majority of women enjoyed job security within their organisations, this is clearly not always the case. Indeed, implicit in the widespread organisational restructuring which has been so prevalent in recent years is increased insecurity, stress, and anxiety. However, in the case of this research, the job

security experienced by respondents within their organisations was described as having provided a sense of freedom, and control.

Finance

Section 7.2.1 above explores the financial risk implicit in the move from employment to self-employment. In terms of this discussion of freedom, control and the reality of self-employment, the issue of finance is particularly relevant. Some respondents were attracted to self-employment by the prospect of being *in charge* of business budgets, and by the direct relationship between business and personal finance:

"[as a Sales Manager] I had had a reasonable amount of freedom in the way I spent the budget, but it appealed to me that I would actually be doing that for myself. And if I managed to get a deal for fifty pounds instead of a hundred pounds, then that was going to be money in my pocket" (Marketing and sales manager in multi-national company to owner manager of travel business).

Others, however, were daunted by the scale of responsibility in their new contexts, and explained how, in retrospect, they felt they had experienced a greater sense of financial freedom within their organisations.

"In nursing you were paid whether you did anything or not" (Operating theatre nurse to reflexologist).

"Even though I had control of really big budgets and things, it hadn't been my money. That probably sounds like I hadn't looked after them carefully. I'd been very careful, but there was a subtle difference" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency (partner of respondent quoted above)).

In addition, because the majority of women had earned more money as employees, it was in that context that they had experienced greater financial freedom, and enjoyed a higher standard of living. For most respondents the move to self-employment brought with it an increased financial burden, and greater financial insecurity.

Holidays, time off and the structure of the working week

Consistent with Scase and Goffee's (1980) findings, what emerged very strongly from the data was the extent to which many respondents felt tied to their business on an everyday, operational level. Whereas within their organisations they were generally expected to work five days a week, and were entitled to holidays (which they took) and sick pay, in the self-employed context such conditions no longer applied, such "entitlements" ceased to exist. Because their fledgling businesses seemed to be totally dependent on their presence and involvement, women found it difficult to "switch off", and the inability to organise holidays, and to take time off for sickness, became a particular source of strain.

"I had an idea that the choices were going to be mine. And in the end it didn't turn out to be the case. I mean what proved to be the case was quite the opposite really. When I worked at London Transport if I wanted a day off, or a week off, then it was easy. I'd just say to my boss, "I want to go on holiday', and there was always someone to cover. And when you run your own business, especially in the early days, you can't. And that's a worry, really, cause what if you were really sick? You wonder what you would do" (Office manager to principal/owner of business college).

Whereas many respondents expected self-employment to offer them greater flexibility, the reality was that they often found themselves working seven days a week.

"We didn't consider that it would be a twenty-four hour job, or a twenty-four hour worry, every day of the year" (Catering manager to co-owner/manager rock'n'roll catering company).

Looking back on their years of employment during the course of the interviews, a number of respondents described the ability to delineate life and work, to plan holidays, to leave the office on Friday afternoon and not return until Monday morning, as a source of freedom which was no longer available to them, particularly in the early days of self-employment.

In contrast, other respondents experienced this absence of bureaucratic structures as a source of freedom.

"I like the fact that I can organise my own time, and if I want to take Friday off, I can... After being so stressed out in my job with the magazine company, I've said, 'Well, life is not meant to be this way'... But being self-employed is a way to explore other perspectives. I can say to myself, 'Hey, it's okay to take a day off', you know, 'that's fine. And if you want to spend that day sat on a sofa with a book, then do it. You know, you're your own boss, it's up to you. There's no one telling you that you can't. That's the sort of freedom I value" (Public relations manager to director of public relations agency).

At issue, here again, is the extent to which one feels in control of the *process* of work, and the structure of one's working life; implicit in this issue are notions of flexibility, and freedom. As employees, work structures were typically imposed externally, by the department or organisation itself. Having moved to self-employment, however, respondents described how they had to create their own structures. What is significant are the ways in which respondents made sense of this very different context. Some women, such as those noted above, experienced the lack of external structure as oppressive, in the sense that they could simply not stop working, and could not stop work from encroaching on all other aspects of their life. However others, like the public relations director, felt that constructing their own work structures, free from bureaucratic rules and rituals, was extremely liberating. As I see it, this difference in perception is, in part, a result of respondents' motivations and expectations upon embarking on self-employment. I have already discussed how, consistent with "commonsense" ideas about self-employment, the majority of respondents expected the new context to bring them greater freedom and control. However, it appears that many women did not consider what the reality of not having a boss, and not having an organisation, would mean in practice. They did not consider the implications of losing these externally imposed structures, or the impact of this loss on the rest of their life. On the other hand, the public relations director, and others like her, saw this greater internal control as integral

to their understanding of self-employment. It was central to their motivation in becoming self-employed ,to their choice of business sector, and to their vision of how self-employment would unfold in practice.

Relationships at work

As suggested in the section on expectations above, what many respondents looked forward to about self-employment was the prospect of being in charge, of not having to answer to a boss, of not being constrained by organisational rules and rituals, of not being accountable to anyone but oneself. Likewise, Goffee and Scase argue that:

"Many men and women choose to start their own businesses to escape from the controls, rules and regulations which are found in any employment relationship. They resent being told what to do by immediate bosses and object to their work patterns being regulated by organisational procedures" (Goffee and Scase, 1995; p. 3).

Indeed, the expectation of *"being my own boss"* came up time again when respondents were asked about how they thought self-employment would differ from life within their organisations. For some women, this expectation was (at least partly) realised.

"[Friends in the hotel in which she previously worked] are all still controlled by organisations. It's the organisation that has the final say in all aspects of the job. If they make a decision and the boss doesn't like it, then the decision's taken out of their hands. That doesn't happen here. The end of the line is us" (Hotel manager to hotel co-owner manager).

However, what surprised many respondents was that although they were *nominally* in charge, they suddenly found themselves responsible to a whole web of stakeholders whose needs and demands had to be accommodated. Most significantly these included customers and employees.

As regards the former, respondents explained how, in the context of self-employment, they became much "closer" to their customers - closer in the sense that they were much

more dependent on each and every one, and in the sense that they no longer had the organisation to act as a buffer between them and their clients.

"When you are self-employed for all intents and purposes you should be able to do what you want to do. But it doesn't work out like that because when you used to have a boss, you've now got customers, you know, you can't afford to live without your customers, so you've got to be polite to them. And you know the kind of people you get - almost everywhere you go! (Office manager to principal/owner of business college).

And it was not only the case that respondents were dependent on their customers *financially*; as considered in section 7.2.4, in the absence of their organisations, departments and colleagues, they also depended on them *psychologically*, in terms of their sense of professional identity, and self-esteem. This potentially intense relationship with clients was experienced by a number of respondents as quite a heavy burden, and contrasted starkly with their expectations.

Two-thirds of the women in the study had at least one employee. Dependence on and responsibility to staff was another aspect of self-employment that the majority of women in employee-based businesses had not considered. Here again, respondents were surprised by the gulf between their expectations of self-employment and its reality. Implicit in the notion of "being your own boss" is being able to "tell other people what to do". However, respondents quickly became aware of the complex relationships between employers and their staff, and the extent to which the survival of their new businesses depended on their employees. As the business college principal cited above explained:

"You've also got to fall in with the people who work for you because you rely so much on them, you know you can't run without them. So there's no question that you can always make the decisions to suit yourself, you just can't. And I think that was the biggest surprise in all this".

Not only did respondents depend on their employees, they also felt responsible to them: financially as well as in terms of their professional development. This was a heavy

burden for many women who, particularly during the start-up phase, struggled to keep their businesses alive.

"I've got someone working for me now, and I feel very responsible to her, to set her a good example and motivate her, and to be supportive to her... She's definitely my right hand, she's very good, and I'd be lost if she left. I really would" (Public relations manager to director of public relations agency).

Thus it was not the case that respondents could simply make decisions at their discretion, or act on a whim; rather, they were acutely aware of the impact of their decisions, and their behaviour, on employees.

7.3.4 Freedom and Control in Context

In spite of their expectations, most respondents felt restricted and constrained by some aspects of self-employment - in particular by day-to-day operational issues, the "nitty-gritty" of small business ownership. However, there were at the same time aspects of self-employment which women found liberating. For those respondents mentioned above who explicitly set out to construct flexible businesses, business which fulfilled their needs in terms of balancing professional and personal life, self-employment fulfilled its promise. On a somewhat more abstract level, in spite of the constraints outlined above, women described how self-employment made them "feel more free". Notwithstanding the need to accommodate the interests of their stakeholders, as owner/managers and directors they felt that they were "in charge", and they enjoyed that feeling.

"[Self-employment] is more intense, but it's also more satisfying because I am guiding it" (Operating theatre nurse to reflexologist).

"You are more tied, but you're more free at the same time" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency).

"I like being in charge of other people. I like other people reporting to me. I like the flexibility - and it's not just the flexibility of hours, as someone working on flexi-time, it's deciding totally where I want to go.. It's my own, and I can set my own values." (Sales representative to pyramid sales representative to owner/manager pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency).

A product manager who left her company to set up an environmentally-friendly nappy business described what she saw as the essential difference between employment and self-employment. While acknowledging the constraints of self-employment: financial, structural and relational, and its inherent risks, she found that the real freedom of self-employment was ideological - the freedom to define the reality of one's professional life (in terms of values and attitudes) in a way which is consistent with one's life more generally. Thus, she found that whereas the organisation required that she exchange her *personal self* for her *organisational self* upon arriving at work in the morning, in her own business there was no such exchange, and no such demarcation.

"When we first started up I used to think about how everything you thought about in a day was geared toward yourself. It used to be that when I got to work my time stopped when I got to the door, and that it belonged to someone else, and at the end of the day you click off and go back to owning your own brain again. Whereas now, it's mentally all yours... I used to think of this as a very positive thing, the idea that half my life wasn't for someone else."

Notably, this respondent became increasingly frustrated by this "freedom", this lack of delineation between her personal and professional life. Shortly after this interview, she left her business to take up a position as marketing manager within a large organisation. However, this is in stark contrast to the majority of women in the study who described this integration, and the ability to be "in control" *ideologically* as a great benefit of self-employment.

As noted in the review of the literature on self-employment and the labour market, it has been suggested that in view of the very real constraints on the self-employed,

identification with the ideology of self-employment, with its implicit connotations of freedom and control, is problematic:

"The responses show that the freelancers felt more autonomous than in-house employees, but in reality their independence of action was very limited... It would appear that they had adopted the 'ideology of enterprise' in the absence of most of its accepted trappings" (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995, p. 224).

Consistent with criticisms raised in section 2.2.4, I take issue with this interpretation. Self-employment may have created a whole new set of restrictions and constraints. However, if respondents *say* that in this context they feel freer and more in control, then in my opinion these feelings need to be taken seriously. As a researcher I see my role not as casting doubt on the "veracity" of the data, but as trying to understand it. Thus if I am surprised by the extent to which women hold on to an ideology of enterprise in spite of the manifest limitations of self-employment, it is not my job to say that these women are being "duped", but to explore what it is about this ideology that continues to make sense.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored respondents' perceptions of the risks of self-employment, their expectations of their new context, and the extent to which the reality of self-employment lived up to these expectations. The analysis demonstrates that, in contrast to traditional approaches to entrepreneurship which emphasise above all *financial risk*, also significant are individuals' perceptions of the social, professional and psychological consequences of self-employment. Not only must the concept of risk be understood as polysemic, at the same time its implications must be seen as extending beyond the business context *per se*, to the context of entrepreneurs' lives more generally. Similarly, on a diachronic level, respondents' perceptions of the risks of self-employment change as the business grows and develops. Here again, the importance of a holistic perspective becomes apparent.

Embarking on self-employment, women's expectations of their new context seemed to be based on both their rejection of bureaucracy, and at the same time their appropriation of

a discourse of self-employment. Respondents conceptualised these two contexts as dichotomous: whereas organisational employment was described in terms of constraints and restrictions - but safe, women expected self-employment to offer freedom and control - and considerable risk.

It is not the case, however, that upon encountering self-employment, with its constraints, limitations and ambiguities, women jettisoned their understandings of the context in any sort of categorical way. Instead, faced with the reality of self-employment, and in the process of telling their stories, what seemed to happen is that these binary opposites began to converge. Understandings of self-employment were not abandoned, but were modified and refined in light of experience, re-constructed in a way that is consistent with other discourses about professional and personal life.

Chapter 8

SIGNIFICANT FACTORS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT

This chapter considers research question 4:

- **What factors most influenced respondents' experiences of self-employment?**

Specifically, section 8.1 focuses on the importance of respondents' prior organisational experiences in their move to self-employment. Sections 8.3 and 8.4 considers the significance of respondents' social networks: 8.3 looks in particular at professional relationships: relationships carried over from their organisations, newly established professional networks, and the importance of business partners, while section 8.4 explores the role of respondents' husbands and partners in their experience of self-employment. Moving on, section 8.5 considers the issue of business premises. Finally, section 8.6 examines respondents' thoughts about the future. The issue of occupational identity emerges as a permeating theme in this analysis, and is discussed in section 8.7, the conclusion of the chapter.

8.1 Introduction

The section above explored women's fears and expectations as they embarked on self-employment, and the extent to which these were realised in practice. What follows looks more specifically at the experience of self-employment itself, and those factors which women identified as having had a significant impact on this experience. Reflecting on this study at the outset I expected to be able to analyse women's stories in terms of a number of discrete stages: the experience of the organisation; the transition; the experience of self-employment; and the future. I anticipated, therefore, that a discussion of the experience of self-employment would focus on issues *emerging in that context*. As has been illustrated throughout this analysis, such fragmentation is impossible: a particular career "stage" can not be studied in isolation; and just as the move from employment to self-employment is about change and development, so too it is about continuity and enduring patterns.

In light of this essentially hermeneutic process, it therefore comes as little surprise that one of the most significant factors in respondents' experiences of self-employment seems to be their earlier experiences of organisational employment. The impact of these

experiences on self-employment is explored in the first section below. Moving on, the next section examines the importance of social networks, considering the significance of family, friends, professional colleagues, and business partners, and the salience of such networks for the development of professional/occupational identity. The section that follows considers the issue of business premises: the experience of working from home, the decision to set up outside the home, and the relationship between business premises and professional identity. Respondents' ideas about the future were touched on in Chapters 4 and 6; in Chapter 4 it was discussed in the context of career planning, while Chapter 6 examined the way in which women incorporated self-employment into their ideas about personal and professional development. The final section of this chapter re-visits these issues, exploring them in greater detail and considering them in terms of women's evolving occupational identities.

8.2 The Centrality of the Organisational Experience in the Experience of Self-employment

In spite of their disillusionment with their organisations and their rejection of organisational employment, what emerges very strongly from the data is the extent to which women feel that their experiences within their organisations prepared them for self-employment. They emphasise in particular the skills and professional competencies they acquired, as well as the social and professional networks established in those contexts. On a somewhat more abstract level, implicit in women's stories is a sense that their organisational experiences gave them a certain self-confidence which enabled them to meet the challenges posed by self-employment.

8.2.1 Applying Skills and Competencies Acquired within the Organisation

As suggested in Chapter 6, a number of respondents explained their move to self-employment as a way of continuing their professional growth and development. At the time of transition, many women felt that it was their *professional* skills that would be most applicable to their new contexts, that on an *operational* level, self-employment would closely resemble organisational employment.

"I thought I'd be able to apply my design skills, definitely. I knew that was a very saleable commodity. And I knew that it was sort of the brainpower with that - that's what was unique. So I was very confident about that" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency).

"I've sort of realised that I've been an internal consultant. And also I've realised that I've got the skills for actually going and talking to people... it's exactly those skills you need as a consultant" (Race relations officer to management consultant).

However, faced with the reality of self-employment respondents were often surprised to find that on a professional level their new context was actually very different from their expectations. Instead, it was their experience and knowledge of other aspects of organisational life that were particularly relevant. Such findings are consistent with Cooper's (1981) emphasis on the significance of the "incubator organisation" in the experience of business start-up. Thus, as respondents became more established in their new businesses they realised that the salience of their organisational experiences extended way beyond the professional arena - to business, administration and management more generally.

"When I first started I thought, you know, 'It'll be different products, but it'll be much the same'. But it's not because it's much smaller... But there are other things that I've realised that I'm using now that I didn't use so much when I first started, and really, my training at [my company] stood me in good stead" (Marketing manager to co-owner manager tool distributing firm).

Although unrecognised at the outset, respondents' years of organising meetings, writing reports, negotiating contracts, running budgets and managing staff proved invaluable in the context of self-employment. As women became more established in their businesses, they became increasingly aware of the importance of these past experiences. A solicitor explained how, upon setting up as a sole practitioner she expected to apply her years of experience in a large law firm. Running her new business, however, she unwittingly found herself drawing on the skills and competencies acquired in a previous administrative position.

"My work before I went into the law actually helped me a lot... I mean I was aware that I'd be able to set up and not need a secretary... The marketing side, I mean, it all came back to me as I started to do it. I thought, 'I can do this, I've done it before'. I'd forgotten I could, but I could".

In the course of establishing her business, this respondent became aware of the need to think more holistically about both the small business sector, and the inextricability of professional and "business" dimensions; and about her role as a sole practitioner. In this process she realised the significance of her previous career experience.

Whereas for many respondents there was a certain tension between *professional* and *business* skills, for respondents working in sectors like marketing, public relations and sales, this tension was far less apparent: their professional skills were, in essence, business skills. In these cases, the continuity between organisational and self-employed contexts was even more explicit.

"I've done media buying, and I've written leaflets, and I've worked in print organisations... I always got into the habit of writing contact reports from meetings - from my first days with the [x] Group... And I just learned what I had to. Like bookkeeping. I'd never done bookkeeping, but I just went to our accountant and said, 'How do you do it?'. So, like negotiating at the bank. I'd been taught negotiating skills throughout my career because every organisation that I've worked for - I've been very lucky - I've always been sent on these super courses. Obviously we couldn't afford to do that now" (Design manager to co-director graphic design agency).

Several important point emerge here. First, it appears that it is not only the skills themselves that this respondent was able to apply to her new business. Equally important is her holistic understanding of the small business context, an understanding which, it appears, was acquired through her extensive experience in a very diverse sector. At the same time, her sense of herself as a design professional is equally varied and dynamic - she has the ability to accommodate a range of responsibilities, roles and work situations. This respondent thus stands in sharp contrast to others in the study who

appeared to have a much more rigid idea of both themselves as professional women, and of their new business contexts. Linked to this is the issue of self-esteem. Confident of her strengths and competencies as a design professional, she is able to adapt to the challenges of her new context. This issue is discussed more fully towards the end of this section.

Finally, the quotation above raises the issue of training. As suggested in section 7.2.3, many women explained how, as small business owner/managers, they could simply not afford high quality training. In the absence of training opportunities, they therefore found themselves referring back to courses they had participated in while still working for their organisations. Respondents explained how, although they may not have appreciated the relevance of such courses at the time, in the context of their new businesses ventures, they proved invaluable.

8.2.2 Applying Organisational Roles and Responsibilities

The section above explored women's application of professional, business and management skills acquired within their organisations to their new business ventures. In addition to these specific skills, the roles and responsibilities they undertook within their organisations were seen by some women as having a significant impact on their experience of self-employment. This was particularly the case for those respondents who were given considerable autonomy and decision-making power as employees.

"Nothing is really very different now... at [former organisation] you were working very independently, you made all your own decisions. Providing you were sending in your invoices or your notes to head office, who would invoice out the fees, you made all your own decisions. You were left very much on your own" (Personal assistant to recruitment consultant large organisation to independent recruitment consultant).

"At [the enterprise agency] I worked very autonomously. I was given a tremendous amount of responsibility, which stood me in good stead for running my own business" (Civil Service trainer to management consultant).

As employees, very few of the women in this study experienced this level of autonomy and control. However, those who did appeared to be particularly well-prepared for that aspect of self-employment. Section 7.3 considered the majority of respondents whose expectations of the new context were based, not on experience, but on a rejection of organisations, and the embracing of an "ideology of enterprise". In contrast, for the women cited above, self-employment represented no such rupture. Having undertaken considerable decision-making responsibility and worked independently within their organisations, they experienced far greater continuity between the two contexts.

8.2.3 The Value of Organisational Relationships

In addition to the skills which women were able to translate to their new business contexts, for many women relationships established within their organisations, with colleagues as well as clients, greatly facilitated and enhanced their experiences of self-employment.

As mentioned in section 7.2, a number of women explained how, having made the decision to become self-employed, they were apprehensive about the prospect of professional, as well as social isolation, and also about the absence of an externally imposed structure - they worried about the level of self-discipline required by self-employment. In the event, notwithstanding their greater physical isolation, in many cases the strong relationships with colleagues established during their years as employees continued to sustain and support them in their new context.

"There's probably three or four from [my old organisation] that I keep in touch with the most: one who's self-employed and works in Sheffield, and we have given each other work at various times. He's coming to see me tomorrow and we'll toss some ideas about because neither of us have a lot of work at the moment and we decided it's time we sat and had a brainstorming about how we're going to get more... Another friend who now works in Scotland was on the phone to me yesterday saying she's found a company to do some freelance work and do I want the address. Another friend who I worked with there is still at the Department, but not doing training anymore. But we've developed a really

good rapport in terms of exchanging ideas" (Civil Service trainer to independent trainer).

This trainer, and others, relied on the strong relationships they had established within their organisations for support, professional development, and structure. Furthermore, these long-standing relationships provided them with continuity which was extremely beneficial during this period of change.

In addition to the importance of relationships with former *colleagues*, during their early years in business, relationships with former *clients* were the main source of work for a number of respondents, contributing to their very survival.

"Obviously I've got a lot of contacts in social work. So what I did at the end of the course was I got on the telephone to everyone I knew and told them, 'Here I am, anyone got any work for me?' And one of those people... had a whole management training course which he couldn't deliver, and he said would I do it. So I was very lucky, because I'm convinced that in the world that I occupy it's not what you know, but who you know... [Those contacts] were absolutely crucial. For the first three years all my work was in local government... and it's only within the past six months or so that I've begun to broaden out" (Social worker to management consultant).

Such contacts were particularly important for those who were setting up businesses in professional service sectors, such as training, consultancy, public relations and marketing. For such respondents, reputations and relationships established within their organisations were central to the success of their ventures, most particularly at the start. In this respect, this sample can be differentiated from much of the literature on women entrepreneurs, most specifically from those studies which focus on women who have had limited experience of the labour market (see for example Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993; Kaur and Hayden, 1993; Truman, 1993). First, while many of the respondents in this study had extensive professional networks, by virtue of their experience within organisations, in other studies such networks were largely unavailable. Furthermore, exploiting such networks presupposes a level of confidence which, while apparent in this study, does not seem to be general amongst women would-be entrepreneurs (Richardson

and Hartshorn, 1993; Kaur and Hayden, 1993; Truman, 1993). This issue is discussed in the next section.

8.2.4 Organisational Experience and the Issue of Confidence

Research on women in business frequently highlights women's lack of confidence as a significant obstacle in their experience of self-employment (see for example Carter and Cannon, 1992, Truman, 1993 and Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993); indeed, studies into small business training and support emphasise the importance of assertiveness and confidence-building in designing start-up courses for women, many of whom have been out of the formal labour market and/or education for some time.

"It has been argued that training may be seen to be successful if it provides an individual with the confidence to undertake a task about which they had previously not felt confident. Training practitioners have identified a strong need to include confidence-building in training courses for women" (Truman, 1993, p. 129).

What differentiates the respondents in this study from much of this work is their prior organisational experience (combined, for the majority of women in the sample, with their professional status). As explained elsewhere, upon embarking on self-employment some respondents, due, for example, to their family background or business sector, were already familiar with the small business context. In the absence of such familiarity, however, what other respondents brought to their new ventures was an understanding of the *working world* generally, and a sense of self-confidence about their position within it. Although they may have felt inadequate in terms of particular business or financial skills, or in terms of their new business sector, their sense of themselves as *working women* enabled them to translate their organisational experiences to the context of self-employment, and thus to meet the challenges presented by this new context with greater assurance.

8.3 Professional Relationships: old friends, new networks and business partners

There is a rapidly developing literature on the importance of social networks in the small business sector (see for example: Granovetter, 1992; Aldrich et. al. 1989; Axelsson and Easton, 1992). While a thorough examination of this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, in so far as such networks and relationships featured quite prominently in women's accounts, they merit consideration here. Consistent with other research into women entrepreneurs (Carter and Cannon, 1992, Cannon et. al. 1988; Allen and Truman, 1993), the centrality of social relationships in the experience of self-employment is a theme which permeates respondents' stories. This section thus examines the significance of professional networks, while section 8.4 considers the importance of personal relationships, specifically focusing on respondents' husbands and families.

9.3.1 Professional networks

Section 7.2.2 above highlighted the importance of relationships established during respondents' years within their organisations in providing emotional support and encouragement, professional stimulation, a sense of discipline and control; and on a more concrete level, in providing work. What follows extends this discussion, considering in particular the role of sector-specific and professional women's networks. Just over half of the women in the study set up their businesses in partnership with others; the next section thus explores the significance of business partners in women's experiences of self-employment.

As noted above, in embarking on self-employment many respondents worried about the prospect of isolation. While for some, particularly those who maintained strong relationships with former colleagues, this did not prove to be the case. Others, however, found self-employment very lonely indeed. In particular what several women found difficult was the absence of colleagues who worked at their level, colleagues with whom they could identify, personally as well as professionally.

"I really did miss, and no disrespect to the people, but working in a factory, the mentality of the people is just, well, they are a different breed of people. They may be really nice and down-to-earth and that kind of thing, but I missed the actual conversation, the adult conversation. You know, all they were bothered about was that when they got home on a Friday they went to the pub. And I wanted more for myself...[at the newspaper] we had a very good social life with colleagues and friends, and also we were on the same wave-length" (Sales manager in newspaper company to co-owner/manager of clothing manufacturing company to office manager of recruitment agency).

In the absence of such colleagues, many women sought professional support from outside their businesses: informally from friends and acquaintances working in related sectors; as well as through more formal networks. The majority of women in the sample were local to the area, which many saw as a distinct advantage; their knowledge of the area and access to both formal and informal networks which proved very valuable, particularly in the early days of self-employment (for more on local networks see, for example, Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986; and Granovetter, 1992). As regards informal networks, many of these were based on relationships established during women's organisational experiences. These, as suggested earlier, proved to be invaluable sources of support and stimulation for a number of women in the sample. On a more formal basis, respondents participated in (and in some cases started up) sector-specific, as well as more generic and gender-related networks.

For several respondents, involvement in sector-specific groups provided them, not only with information, but also with an opportunity to share ideas about key business issues.

"I had to go out and look for people to exchange business ideas with... I got together with a group of other travel agents... We hire a room in a hotel about once every two months. And we sit down for about three hours, we have a proper agenda and we go through it as a business meeting, and exchange ideas, compare notes on the state of the market, how we're doing, give each other quite a lot of confidential information now. And I find that's good. Like we just had a new tax for insurance. It was such a miss how they introduced it... So we sat and had about an hour thrashing it out. It was the

best way - if I had to do it on my own I probably never would have got there" (Marketing and sales manager in multi-national to owner/manager of travel business).

Significantly, in addition to providing this sort of *operational* support, a nursing home owner/manager sees her local care homes association as a lobbying group, and also as a means of insuring quality and standards in a sector which, this respondent suggested, had acquired a very dubious reputation in that respect. In contrast, more generic small business networks, such as those organised by the Chamber of Commerce, were seen as a source of personal support, providing individuals working on their own with an opportunity to socialise and share experiences with others in similar circumstances. A small number of respondents also felt that such contacts could potentially bring them new business. It is notable, however, that although a number of women in the study participated in such groups (and indeed it was through these networks that they became involved in this study) they were, in general, quite ambivalent about their value, and about the calibre of many of the other members.

"When I first started we said, 'We must join the Chamber of Commerce', and 'We must join the Small Business Club', and 'We must join this, and we must join that'. And we went out and everybody was very small business minded. And very much the one-man-band type companies, and that's all they're ever going to be... Umm, and I just felt as though I wasn't getting anything out of those meetings" (Sales representative to pyramid sales representative to owner/manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency).

And a respondent who participated intermittently in a women's professional network was particularly sceptical.

"The women's [network] is generally lunches, about people who own knitting shops, and I'm probably being disrespectful, but they're not people who have been, I've been to two of them and they're not people who have been in business a long time, do you know what I mean? That's not working in, not communicating with business people in the same way that I do. You know, you just can't have a major discussion on how to - how to reinvent the wheel in manufacturing, if you like, cause it's not a deep conversation"

(Personal assistant to recruitment consultant in large organisation to independent recruitment consultant).

This woman was one in a (sizeable) minority of respondents whose business contexts were almost exclusively male. As a recruitment consultant in Sheffield, her work tended to be in manufacturing and engineering sectors, and she described how she was frequently marginalised from male professional (and social) networks. Although she maintained close relationships with women in secretarial and administrative positions, she distanced herself from, and was quite scathing about, other women consultants. Her dismissal of women's networks appears to be consistent with her attitude towards professional women more generally.

In contrast, other respondents found women's networks to be an valuable source of encouragement and support, and professionally developmental.

"I just found that I started to grow this network. I started to meet other women, self-employed women, or employed women, who were like me, and I seem to have automatically grown this network that I find provides me with that group of people to identify with. And I really thrive on that, I enjoy the fact that I can name a dozen other self-employed women, you know, who are running their own small businesses" (Public relations manager to director of public relations agency).

In the context of this discussion, the issue of professional identity is particularly important. In the absence of a department or an organisation to *identify with*, the move to self-employment could result in real feelings of loss. A number of respondents, as suggested above, were able to maintain existing relationships with colleagues, and derived some sense of their professional identity through such networks. However, for this public relations manager who had moved to Sheffield from Canada after leaving her job, these long-standing relationships simply did not exist. For her, participation in this women's network enabled her to re-establish her sense of herself as a professional woman, her sense of professional identity. This issue will be considered in the concluding section of this chapter.

8.3.2 The Experience of Partnership

Over half of the women in the sample worked in partnership with others: seven respondents set up businesses with their husbands; five with other professional colleagues; one with her father; and one with her husband and his family. For all of these fourteen women, such relationships were described as absolutely central to the experience of self-employment. In what follows the nature of these arrangements, and their advantages and disadvantages as perceived by respondents, are considered, with reference to the two largest groupings identified above. In particular, the first section focuses on those women who went into partnership with their husbands, while the second explores the experience of working in partnership with other professional colleagues.

Husbands as partners

Women formed business partnerships with their husbands in a variety of areas, including manufacturing, hotel and catering, business services, caring, and other service sectors. Of the seven women working in partnership with their husbands, six described their husbands' involvement as integral: for these men the business was their principal form of employment, and their main source of income. The seventh, however, worked elsewhere, and thus participated much more tangentially - taking a certain responsibility for financial aspects of the business, but rarely getting involved in its day-to-day running.

One of the central themes to emerge in this thesis is the impossibility of trying to understand women's experiences of *business* without looking at their experiences *more generally*, of trying to isolate their careers from other aspects of their lives. The issue of husbands as business partners aptly illustrates the inextricability of these different dimensions. Five respondents explained how their decisions to go into partnership with their husbands were based on their desire to spend more time with their husbands. Given the earlier discussion of how women's expectations of self-employment were based on a kind of employment/self-employment dichotomy, this seems to make sense. Whereas in the organisational context women found that their professional and personal lives were strictly compartmentalised, and that they often hardly saw their husbands, the prospect of

going into business with their husbands offered an opportunity of greater integration and the possibility of greater fulfilment.

"We wanted to go into business together, ourselves. It just seemed silly that you choose someone to stay with you for the rest of your life and then you never see them again because they're working in totally different parts of the country" (Sales representative to pyramid sales representative to owner/manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency).

While on one level respondents seemed to enjoy this level of integration between professional and personal life, on another they found it both constraining, and extremely intense. As discussed in section 7.3.2, in the absence of an external structure, some respondents found it impossible to *stop working*; whereas within their organisations their working day had visible boundaries, no such boundaries existed in the context of self-employment, particularly for those women working from home. For husband/wife partnerships, this problem was compounded: indeed, women described how they never stopped talking about the business, how work increasingly encroached on all other aspects of their lives.

"We used to say, 'Let's not talk business tonight. Let's just go out and enjoy ourselves'. And I found that was the most tiring part, having to really sit back and not talk about work. I mean you know, normally you get home in the evening and you both talk about what you've been doing during the day. And you couldn't, you know, and I found that very hard. And when you're on holiday, you never stop, even when you're just sitting relaxing, you talked about work. And really it tends to overtake your life" (Sales manager in newspaper company to co-owner/manager clothing manufacturing company to office manager of recruitment agency).

In fact, this woman returned to organisational employment and although she misses her husband, she feels that she has "reclaimed" aspects of her life that were increasingly eclipsed by her business. Similarly, a respondent who went into partnership with her husband *and* his parents explained how this business relationship was essentially at odds

with "normal family life". Given this conflict, and the incessant demands of the business, it was family life that inevitably lost out.

Husband/wife partnerships appeared to work most successfully in cases where roles and responsibilities were clearly demarcated, and where each partner was aware of the other's contribution. Several women described a complementary and reciprocal arrangement whereby they "played to their strengths", supported one another - an arrangement which was beneficial both to them as individuals, and to the business.

"I had an office and he had an office - on purpose we situated them on opposite sides, but we used to sit and have coffee together, or lunch, and have a chat about things... You know, we didn't travel to work together, we went separately, and some people got on better with him, and some with me." (Sales manager in newspaper company to co-owner/manager clothing manufacturing company to office manager of recruitment agency).

"I'm a total optimist and Harry's a total pessimist. And we work really well together, in our marriage, and in our business" (Catering manager to co-owner/manager rock'n'roll catering company).

What emerges here, particularly in the second quote, is the difficulty of separating the marriage from the business partnership. Where the marriage was described as a strong and positive influence in the respondent's life, so too was the business partnership. In contrast, in one sad and telling case resentment and bitterness at work were inseparable from an increasingly unhappy marriage. Far from feeling vulnerable or isolated, this respondent described the sense of liberation she experienced when the partnership was finally dissolved.

Professional colleagues as partners

Five women in the sample set up businesses in partnership with a professional colleagues: four with other women, and one with a man. I interviewed both members of two of these female partnerships and found it intriguing that in both cases, although the partners'

circumstances and reasons for embarking on self-employment differed quite considerably, the stories they told about their experiences of partnership were very, very similar.

"I think the relationship I have with Laura is second to none. And we're willing to give each other positive strokes, but also to sit down and say, 'Look, we made a big mess of that, didn't we'. And so that's one thing - it hasn't been lonely. Also it's things like decision-making. And if you're not feeling good about yourself, for whatever reason, you might have had a knock on a training course, you need to check that out with someone... I wouldn't like to be self-employed on my own" (Personnel officer to training/development manager of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities)

As we were talking, this woman's partner (who I also interviewed) came into the room and joined in the conversation. The discussion that ensued, all about the benefits (and the pleasures) of working with a "like-minded" partner closely mirrored what each of them told me in private. Central to this successful relationship seemed to be mutual respect, which included an acknowledgement of one's own strengths and weaknesses, shared ideas and values, and a sense of humour.

Intuitively, I felt that their compatibility was, in part, based on the fact that they were both women, a "hunch" that seemed to be confirmed when I interviewed the women in the other partnership. However, it was also consistent with what the fifth respondent, who set up a management consultancy with a male colleague, described. This respondent was adamant that the success of this partnership was partly attributable to the fact that her partner was a man; as a team, she felt that they were complementary. At the same time, she explained how working with a man gave her a certain credibility in the business world, a credibility that would not have existed if she had been in partnership with another woman. The extent to which one feels "legitimate" as a self-employed person could be based on a number of factors, including business sector and one's relationship with that sector, occupational identity and gender. It is a key issue which will be considered further in the concluding section of this chapter, and again in the discussion which follows.

8.4 The Importance of Husbands, Partners and Families

The significance of women's social networks extends beyond their professional colleagues, associations and partners, to their personal relationships. The importance of extended families, and in particular the experience of coming from a small business background, was discussed in section 6.5. As regards the issue of friends, in considering the importance of such networks at the outset, I had envisaged that in addition to family networks, personal friends would emerge as a key source of support. This was certainly the case for some respondents - in particular those women who were not in long-term relationships explained how their friends provided them with security, love and encouragement, during the transition from employment to self-employment and beyond. These friendships are significant in their own right, and at the same time it is important, in attempting to explore working women's experiences *holistically*, to acknowledge their value. However, given the limitations of this thesis, I have decided to restrict the following discussion to the immediate family.

8.4.1 The Role of Husbands in the Experience of Self-employment: supportive or supported?

At the time of interview, nineteen of the twenty-four women in this sample were married, or involved in long-term relationships. In seventeen of these cases, these relationships dated back to respondents' organisational days and beyond. Three respondents were divorced at the time of the transition from employment to self-employment, and one woman got divorced after starting up the business in partnership with her husband (see table 3.5). As illustrated in table 3.8, three respondents had one or more pre-school aged children, and six had children in school at the time of interview.

The literature on entrepreneurs suggests that male business owners greatly benefit from, and rely on their wives' support, in terms of assuming the bulk of domestic responsibilities and providing emotional support, as well as getting involved in the business on a practical level (Scase and Goffee, 1980). In contrast, it has been argued that women entrepreneurs enjoy no such support (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Carter and Cannon, 1992). This study both confirms and disconfirms these findings. On one hand,

there were a number of respondents whose husbands provided very little practical or emotional support.

"I don't get support from home either... One of the reasons I didn't go into business sooner on my own was that I would've had somebody that would've just been negative. I wouldn't have had anyone pulling with me, you know. You know how we say behind every successful man there's a woman, well behind this successful woman there's nobody" (Personal assistant to recruitment consultant in large organisation to independent recruitment consultant)

In contrast, several respondents described their husbands as supportive and encouraging, and seemed to have established domestic arrangements which were based on equality and the sharing of responsibility.

"I've got an excellent marriage. I've got a husband who will automatically do the cleaning, the hoovering, things like that! Amazing! So I've kept him, you see! We never had to argue about whose turn it was to do anything... He also feels that if you're both working, then you both have to do the same things. So we child-minded, we worked between us... I've had support along the way. Anything I wanted to do, then my husband would say, 'Look, if you want to do it, then do it and I'll support you... but to do it without the support of your partner must be nigh impossible" (Personnel manager to chief executive of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

Respondents spoke about "support" on a number of different levels. Most typically they talked about the extent to which their husbands or partners supported them *emotionally*, as illustrated by the first quote above, and as suggested by the second, whether they supported them *practically* (this could be in terms of household tasks and responsibilities, finance, or in providing business expertise). It is significant that in most cases these different levels of support appear to be interrelated. For example, women who saw themselves as taking on the bulk of domestic commitments frequently received limited emotional support for their new business ventures; in these cases, women sought to accommodate their new businesses within their existing domestic responsibilities - just as they had done when they were employed. On the other hand, those who had

established less traditional patterns and arrangements, such as the second woman cited above, also received the greatest levels of emotional support - again, just as they had received when they were employed. At issue here seems to be the extent to which couples adhere to a traditional ideology of the family, in which women's domestic labour is *both physical and emotional*, and in which women's employment must be organised around their roles as wives and mothers.

"He felt that [when I was employed] I devoted my life and attentions to my job, and not to him and the family... He's always wanted me to go away and earn lots of money, but to make sure I'm here to cook the tea (laughing). He moves in circles where, you know, it's not cool, but actually that would make him very happy. Provide me with all the support you can, make lots of money, be a nice wife, look after my children for me... So I didn't get a lot of support, but I did get the green light for it if I wanted it, to give up and do it, as long as I'd just shut up about it" (Assistant solicitor in firm to sole practitioner).

What emerges, then, is that while the support from husbands and partners seemed to have a significant impact on women's experience of self-employment, the move to self-employment itself actually made very little difference to the level of support that they received. In other words, women who had always been well supported continued to be so and found it very beneficial; and women whose husbands provided them with little support when they were employed were similarly unsupported as business owners. Thus it appears that the extent to which couples feel able to give and receive support and encouragement are not just random or idiosyncratic responses, but reflecting (and constituting) particular relationship patterns, and ideological positions.

It is notable that even in cases where children were not an issue, these conventional patterns of support-giving and receiving were often still upheld. This was clearly elucidated in the stories of two women whose husbands had recently retired. Here respondents' involvement in their businesses caused some tension in their marriages - possibly resulting from a feeling that traditional, sex roles had been reversed, or from a certain degree of jealousy on the part of their husbands, who may have felt somewhat neglected and starved of attention and support themselves. It is not within the scope of

this study to explore in detail the relationship between life stage and the domestic division of labour; however, the central point in the context of husbands' support for their wives in their business ventures is that in this study traditional family discourses were appropriated not only by those with heavy childcare responsibilities, but by women at a variety of life stages, in a variety of circumstances.

This chapter set out to explore those factors which women suggested had significantly impacted on their experiences of self-employment. However, the relationship between personal and professional life is clearly not one-way. Just as women's husbands and families impacted, often quite centrally, on how they experienced self-employment, so too is it important to consider the ramifications of self-employment for family life. In their study, Carter and Cannon (1992) were surprised to find that in spite of the lack of support women business owners received from their husbands, most of their respondents reported that their marital relationships had improved since embarking on their business ventures. Similarly, several women in this study explained how positive the move to self-employment had been, not just *professionally*, but also in terms of their *domestic arrangements*, and *relationships*.

"[My relationship with my husband] became better. And I think that had a lot to do with stress. I'm not half as stressed as I used to be. I'm much more relaxed about life, I take it as it comes... It must be because I'm not under stress so much at work, cause it falls into your private life, doesn't it" (Personnel manager to chief executive of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

For this respondent the stress of being employed resulted from a sense that her own values were at odds with those of the organisation, and feelings of being stifled - stresses which she carried over into her private relationships. She described how freedom from these particular sources of anxiety has resulted in a happier private life as well.

In the case cited above, the impact of self-employment was described in terms of the respondent's feelings about her professional situation, and their effect on her partner and family. Other women, however, explained how the key issue was not how *they themselves* felt about their work, but how *their husbands* felt about it. For example, a

solicitor described how life in her firm was untenable, partly because of the difficulty of balancing its demands with those of her young family, and partly because her husband felt neglected, even jealous of her commitment to the firm. For her, self-employment has allowed her to manage more effectively her competing roles and responsibilities, and to pay more attention to her relationship with her husband. As a result, at the time of interview she described the relationship "*beginning to improve*". In contrast, others explained how, far from enhancing their relationships, the move to self-employment had actually caused problems precisely because their husbands felt thwarted, supplanted by the needs of their wives' fledgling businesses.

The data generated in this study are thus diverse. While some women described how self-employment had enhanced their relationships with their husbands, in others' experiences the move proved to be detrimental. For the majority of women in this study, though, on an emotional level the move from employment to self-employment seemed to have little impact on their marital (or long-term) relationships. It appeared that women who had positive and supportive relationships continued to benefit from such relationships after they became self-employed. In contrast, those whose marriages or relationships were difficult continued to have problems. However, on a more practical level, for several women self-employment was experienced as making a real difference because it gave them greater flexibility to manage their professional and personal lives, and to more effectively juggle their conflicting roles and responsibilities.

8.5 Self-employment and the Issue of Premises

Scase and Goffee (1980), in discussing the close relationship between their respondents' business and personal lives, suggested that this was partly attributable to the lack of physical space between the two contexts, particularly at the start-up phase of the business. Likewise, the importance of premises emerges in the developing literature on homeworking (Huws, 1984; Allen et. al., 1991; Stanworth and Stanworth, 1996). In the accounts of several women in this study, the issue of business premises appeared to have a significant impact on the experience of self-employment, in particular on respondents' sense of occupational identity and the extent to which they saw themselves and their businesses as credible and legitimate.

Upon embarking on self-employment, ten women in the sample had business premises. For most of these, this was inevitable, as they worked, for example, in hotels, nursing homes, travel agencies and laundries. The remaining fourteen respondents, working in sectors like employment services, training and consultancy, and counselling and therapy, started their businesses from their (or their partner's) homes. At the time of interview, eight were still at home, while the remaining six had moved to premises elsewhere. In the following section, the implications of such decisions are examined, focusing first on the experience of working from home and its advantages and disadvantages, and then moving on to explore the apparent link between business premises and the issue of occupational identity.

8.5.1 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Working from Home

Having left their organisations, fourteen women in the study set up their new businesses from their (or their partner's) homes. While recognising that at the outset this was inevitable, several felt that there were distinct advantages to such an arrangement. Most typically, respondents, particularly those with young families, found that after years of working outside the home, sometimes commuting, sometimes travelling on a regular basis, this greater "integration" of life and work came as a welcome contrast.

"When Christopher and the nanny came home from school or nursery I'd just nip down for an hour or so, just to spend some time with them. And then invariably when Christopher went to bed, or maybe later when Jim [her husband] had gone to bed, I'd be back up there again. So that became a bit silly because I tended to be up there all the time" (Design manager to co-director of graphic design agency).

While this respondent appreciated the greater flexibility of working at home, and enjoyed seeing more of her son than she had previously, she also raises what many women felt was its key disadvantage - the fact that one can never go home and leave work behind, that work is simply always there and that there is a temptation to just keep on doing it. This issue was discussed previously in section 7.3.2, which explored the constraints of self-employment, and permeated the stories of several women whose businesses were

conducted in this way. For six of the fourteen women who started their businesses from home, that situation was always considered temporary; the plan was to seek outside premises as soon as it was financially viable. Of the eight women who were still at home at the time of interview, one hoped to move sometime in the future, and two had managed to create separate spaces for their businesses with purpose-built additions. The remaining five were happy with existing arrangements. As trainers and consultants, they typically ran courses and conducted their business at their clients' places of work - home, in these cases, was simply where they did their preparation and planning.

It appeared that whereas in sectors like training and consultancy, working from home is fairly typical and is consistent with clients' expectations, in other sectors it runs contrary to such expectations. A solicitor, for example, explained how in the eyes of some of her clients, working at home was seen as quite unacceptable.

"I don't think it is ideal from the clients' point of view, I think there are clients who worry about it... Being a lawyer, working out of your home, the two didn't really seem to go together. Accountants do it, quite a lot of other people do it, but it's quite unusual for a lawyer to do it" (Assistant solicitor in firm to sole practitioner).

In addition to raising questions about her professional credibility, working at home also created potential problems in terms of clients feelings of security and confidentiality. On a concrete level, clients worried about the storage of confidential documents, *"which I don't think they'd have thought about with a secretary, a receptionist and all the trimmings"*. More abstractly, she explained how whereas the environment of the conventional law firm connoted feelings of "safety", for many clients the idea of meeting their lawyer at home was distinctly "unprofessional", and made them feel vulnerable. This issue, and the related issue of "professional identity" are discussed below.

8.5.2 Professional Credibility, Identity and the Question of Business Premises

Central to issues about *where* to work and the implications of working in a particular setting are questions to do with professional identity. While some women found that working at home was entirely consistent with their sense of themselves as professionals,

and felt that home was the appropriate setting in which to develop their businesses, others found it difficult to take their businesses (or themselves as business people) seriously until they had moved into "business premises". As suggested above, this sense of professional identity seemed to be related to what was seen as "normal" for a particular sector and the extent to which a particular woman saw herself as fitting in with those sets of expectations. It was also related to how respondents perceived of "the professional woman" more generally. Clothing emerged as a significant issue here. At home, women suddenly found themselves spending entire days in pyjamas and tracksuits. After years of "getting dressed up" to go to work, and equating tracksuits with weekends and holidays, this felt all wrong.

"At home it would be jeans and a T-shirt. If you felt that way out you'd be in your nightie at four o'clock! But if you've got a business address you actually put yourself in a different light. It's amazing, and I think that [after we moved out] we were also taken more seriously. We took ourselves more seriously, and other people did as well" (Personnel manager to chief executive of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

The extent to which this respondent saw herself as "professional" was inextricably linked to how others saw her. Moving out of her house and changing back into "work clothes" made her feel more like she was running a business. At the same time, she felt sure that with the move to business premises she and her business also became more "legitimate" in the eyes of her clients and peers. The importance of appearing credible, not only to clients, but also to professional peers (as well as to oneself), came up time again in the data. Several woman who struggled with such issues whilst working at home felt that the simple fact of moving to a business address significantly impacted on how they were perceived and evaluated by others.

An salient gender issue emerges here which, although only raised by one respondent, in the context of this thesis is worthy of consideration. This woman, a trainer, explained how she herself had no problem with working at home and felt that it was the most appropriate place in which to conduct her business. However, she felt that neighbours in her small, rural community saw her as someone who "didn't really work". In contrast,

her (male) architect friend across the way, who also worked at home, was seen as highly professional. This is, perhaps, a reflection of a traditional ideology which in which the man *works* and the woman does *housework*; or it could have resulted from the fact that while everyone knows what architects do, what trainers do can be a bit unclear. Nevertheless, it does raise the question of whether a woman moving from employment to self-employment has to work harder to establish her legitimacy, a question considered in section 8.3 which focused on professional networks and the issue of partnership.

For the six women in the sample who moved their businesses from home to outside offices, the move was described in terms like "milestone" and "turning point", a hugely important event in their experience of self-employment.

"It's amazing the change that moving made. Because we'd got a business address and a letterhead, and we used to meet people at the office. It sort of changed the culture, it made you feel good, as though you were actually getting somewhere. And in actual fact we hadn't done a lot. We'd rented an office for fifteen pounds a week" (Personnel manager to chief executive of agency seeking to promote employment of people with disabilities).

For these women, getting into work clothes, leaving the house, writing on letterhead paper and meeting with clients at a business address had real symbolic importance, and contributed significantly to respondents' perceptions that their businesses were *real*, and to their developing sense of professional identity.

What is significant about these data is the extent to which, for many clients, what counts as "professional" is essentially bureaucratic. From these data it is difficult for me to discern whether the kinds of offices respondents set up reflected their prior organisational experiences, or if they simply represented some idealised version of what constitutes a professional woman's environment. Nevertheless, it is notable that having rejected organisational life and tasted a very different sort of experience, respondents found themselves returning to aspects of that life; indeed, that these were central to their sense of identity and professional legitimacy. Only one woman in the sample expressed any misgivings about this return - she resented the fact that after giving up bureaucratic

ways of working she found herself in an office, bound by a whole set of organisational "rules" and "regulations". Although this was an isolated case, it served to elucidate the extent to which for the others, the return was not only unproblematic, but was experienced as a tremendous boost, and a clear sign of success.

8.6 Moving On: women's ideas about the future

Bearing in mind those factors which respondents highlighted as having had a significant impact on their experience of self-employment, to conclude this analysis, it is important to consider how women saw their businesses and themselves unfolding and developing in the future. Respondents talked about their ideas both in the short and the long term - about their plans for the coming year, as well as their visions for "sometime in the future". In examining this data, I am not particularly concerned about the feasibility of these ideas. While such issues would be central to a further, longitudinal study into women's experiences of self-employment, in so far as this piece of research is concerned, I am more interested in how women's ideas about the future fit into their stories more generally, and into the patterns of thinking and sense-making which have been explored thus far in this thesis.

In talking about the future, women's ideas can be divided into four broad groupings. First there are those who describe their future in business terms - how they see their businesses developing and where they see them leading. In contrast, the women who fall into the second group focus not so much on the development of their businesses, but on their own professional growth. Finally, in the third group are those whose visions of the future have more to do with how they want to live their lives generally, about the balance of work, family, friends and self. Finally, two women who have returned to organisations describe their future in terms of this move.

8.6.1 Describing the Future in Business Terms

When asked about their visions of the future, several women talked about where they saw their businesses heading. Some were aiming for growth, innovation and the creation of new markets:

"I have an idea of where I want to go... I want to aim more up-market, where margins are better, where service is appreciated, rather than the cheap commodity end, the 'bucket and spade' end, where I think the margins are going to be squeezed forever more now with the big multiples" (Marketing and sales manager in multi-national company to owner/manager of travel business).

Others, however, aimed simply to survive:

"For a period, during the boom years, we saw expansion and had plans for, and planning permission to build an extension of sixteen more bedrooms... at the moment, in these times, I can't really see that happening. It's about keeping going now" (Hotel manager to hotel co-owner/manager).

Central to these very different visions is an analysis of the market, and of the economic situation more generally. In spite of their differences, though, both visions are organised around the respondent's commitment to the particular business at hand. In contrast, in a third case the respondent, a co-owner/manager of a rock'n'roll catering company, recognises because of her age, her involvement in the business may be drawing to a close. When this happens, her plan is to start something new.

"One day I'll wake up and think, 'I can't tour anymore, that's it'. And once that happens, I just think I'm the sort of person that would think, 'Right, I don't want to tour now, what am I going to do?' And I'll go off and do it. I can't guarantee that it'll be successful, but I'm not frightened by making a transition... I would love to have a little dress shop, and I can see, I really know exactly what I want to sell in it and how I'm going to do it" (Catering manager to co-owner/manager rock'n'roll catering company).

Significant here is that although the respondent realises the limited lifespan of her current business, she continues to sees herself as ultimately self-employed. Faced with the prospect of transition, she does not for a moment consider returning to organisational employment - in her eyes, the question is not whether to start a new business, but which new business it should be. Looking at this respondent's transcript as a whole, this vision

makes sense. Permeating her story is a discourse of enterprise which serves as a kind of filter through which that story was told, and which provides its underlying logic: it was there when she talked about her choice of occupation, her experience of organisational life, and her subsequent move to self-employment. It is notable, too, that she was one of the few respondents who identified herself as an "entrepreneur".

8.6.2 Describing the Future in Professional Terms

In contrast to the respondents cited above whose visions of the future were largely organised around their ideas about business - either their current business or a potential new business - others' aims and aspirations were focused on their own development and growth as professional women. In some cases this had to do with becoming more knowledgeable and more skilful, and involved further education and closer collaboration with colleagues.

"What I am looking for is maybe three others who are also consultants, and we could get together sometimes and talk about what we're doing. And I need to start writing articles, to get myself thinking about where I should go from here, about what skills and experience I am lacking at the moment... I won't go and work for an agency as a consultant, though. It's very much about me having my own identity, but working alongside other people" (Race relations officer to management consultant).

This respondent had recently set herself up as a management consultant, having worked for many years as a local authority race relations officer. It is not surprising, therefore, that she thinks about the future in terms of extending her skills and competencies, and at the same time in terms of consolidating her new-found identity as a management consultant. For other women, however, the move from employment to self-employment involved no such shift in occupational identity; instead, as discussed in Section 6.4, it was about continuing one's professional work in a new context. In these cases, the professional discourse underlying respondents' ideas about the future was not so much about extending one's knowledge of the field, but about a commitment to certain professional values. In the following quotation, a nursing home manager explains how it

was traditional nursing values that influenced her move to self-employment, and that these same values continue to inform her ideas about the future.

"I always saw myself really as wanting to give good care to a small client group. I didn't ever want to be big - I've got to thirteen now, and that's me, finished. I do not see myself as having a chain of homes. I think commitment to one home is really what I've always wanted. I want to be able to give my best to these people. That's why I'm always available" (National Health Service sister to owner/manager of nursing home).

Unlike the women cited above whose visions of the future were highly personal, several women had aims were much higher profile, much more public. Having set themselves up in businesses, they were keen to establish themselves as experts. For some, this meant greater recognition within their particular sector, while others sought a wider public platform. Four women in particular talked about their commitment to Sheffield, their desire to get involved in city-wide initiatives, and to "give something back to Sheffield".

"I feel a real commitment to the city. I really like it here, and I think it's got huge potential, and it really frustrates me to see it not getting anywhere. There's no reason at all why Sheffield shouldn't succeed, but I think the city is its own worst enemy... A while back somebody said to me, 'Well, what is your goal?'. And I said, 'I want to be the PR name in Sheffield' ... I want people to remember me"(Public relations manager to director public relations agency) .

"I want to move on to other things that aren't really part of the business. I was involved in organising the events at the Sheffield Arena [an event focused at city-wide regeneration], and I've been invited to join the START team, the team that is particularly looking at change and strategic change in Sheffield, where we want to make a difference in other areas. So I feel that being a successful businesswoman will allow me to take time out to do that" (Sales representative to pyramid sales representative to owner/manager of pyramid sales company to senior partner of recruitment agency).

This confidence, this desire to become a sort of "statesperson" for Sheffield is really interesting, especially in contrast to the almost apologetic way in which many women talked about their lack of a career plan at the outset of the interview (see section 4.3.1). Having moved from organisations in which they felt undervalued and set up their own businesses, these women feel that they are now in a position to be role models for other women in Sheffield. As a researcher I find these comments very inspiring! As has been discussed in this analysis, the extent to which self-employment offers a real alternative to women in the labour market, and the extent to which it has impacted on traditional ideas about women's roles, may be limited. However, it seems significant that having experienced self-employment, a handful of respondents had the confidence to tell me that they want to be seen as experts, that they feel that they are now in a position to influence and inspire others.

8.6.3 Regaining Control of One's Life

Whereas the two sections above focused on those respondents whose ideas about the future were based around their careers, and particular career discourses, this section looks at those women who described the future, not in career terms, but in terms of their lifestyle more generally. The three oldest women in the study talked about retirement, and the kind of lives they hoped to lead at that time. Two of these women in particular planned to spend more time with their husbands, travel, get involved in voluntary work and hobbies, and maybe to pursue further education. These plans, they hoped, could be subsidised through selling their businesses.

In contrast, consistent with Mirvis and Hall's (1994) work on the "boundaryless career", which emphasises notions of empowerment, personal development and fulfilment, and the integration of the various aspects of one's life, two much younger respondents, partners in a graphic design business, talked not about retirement, but about working in a different way, in order to allow time and space for *"what was really important in life"*. They used the word *"simplify"* to describe a lifestyle in which work was more effectively integrated into other aspects of their lives.

"I may well move back home, and Kate may move back to their house. We'll probably end up with a huge amount of computer equipment between us and just talk over the Internet and things like that... My ethos is to simplify, and to make much more of the quality of your life, to enjoy what you're doing... When I said, 'make life easier' I don't mean slowing down, it's just concentrating on what's important, stopping trying to be Superwoman" (Design manager to co-director of graphic design agency).

In section 8.5 which explores the issue of premises, this respondent was cited to illustrate the significance of taking on business premises, and here she and her partner are talking about moving back home! In this case, a number of different career and lifestyle discourses seem to be operating almost oppositionally. Whereas the earlier move into business premises was described in entrepreneurial terms, focusing on concepts like innovation, growth and business success, here that discourse seems to have been superseded by one which emphasises "sanity", "simplicity", and a balanced and meaningful life. In my view, the way in which oppositional discourses interact/collide to create meaning is fundamental to understanding the data generated in this study, and will be considered in the discussion which follows.

Finally, one respondent, a woman who owned a bakery and sandwich shop, simply wanted a break. She wanted to take time off, have a baby, and pursue hobbies and activities which for several years had been eclipsed by the demands of her business. Of all the women in the study, she spoke most negatively about her experiences of self-employment - family and relationships always came first, and she explained how she had only started the business because it seemed to be the only alternative at the time (see section 6.4.1).

8.6.4 Organisational Futures

As explained elsewhere, two respondents in the sample returned to organisational employment: one had returned several years before our meeting, and the other had just been offered a position at the time of interview. Unsurprisingly, their ideas about the future were very different from the other women in the study. Both could be described as bureaucratic in their orientation, yet what this means in each case is very different.

One had always aimed at becoming a marketing manager in a large organisation; she was leaving her non-disposable nappy business to take up just such a position, and was looking forward to the colleagues, the meetings, the banter and the office politics. The other, however, who worked in a medium-sized recruitment agency, had very different ideas about what she wanted to achieve.

"I'd like to make it successful for them. I get as much pleasure seeing them earning the money as I do" (Sales manager in newspaper company to co-owner/manager of clothing manufacturing business to office manager of recruitment agency).

Unlike the marketing manager who described her future in terms of bureaucratic structures and measures of success, what this respondent particularly appreciated about organisational life were the relationships it afforded, and its security.

8.7 Conclusion

In discussing their experiences of self-employment, women identified a number of factors as particularly significant, not only during the start-up phase, but also as their businesses grew and developed. Most crucially, they suggested that their prior organisational employment, their professional networks, husbands and families, and their chosen business premises impacted on their experiences and perceptions of self-employment. Examining these factors, the issue of occupational identity emerges as a permeating theme, consistent with Nicholson and West's (1988, 1989) research into career transition.

As suggested in Section 8.2 above, respondents found that their organisational experiences proved invaluable to their new business ventures, in terms of the skills and competencies they acquired, their involvement in organisational processes and practices more generally; and the professional contacts they made. On a somewhat more abstract level, it appeared that such experiences gave them a sense of themselves as working women, and provided them with an understanding of the world of work, which they were able to apply to self-employment. This is not to suggest that women did not feel uneasy about certain aspects of the move, but what emerged from the data was an underlying

sense of self-confidence. Indeed, it is this self-confidence which in my mind serves to differentiate the women in this study from other studies of women entrepreneurs.

The issue of occupational identity was further noted in respondents' accounts of their professional networks. Having severed formal relationships with their organisations women were concerned about being isolated professionally, and about jettisoning their professional identities. However, for a number of women, particularly those who saw the move to self-employment as a way of continuing their professional work in a new context, informal relationships established during their organisational days continued to sustain them during their transition to self-employment and beyond, providing continuity and stability, as well as professional stimulation, during that time of change. In contrast, those respondents in particular whose move to self-employment was described, not just as a change of context, but as a whole new career direction, had no such established networks. For them, the creation of new professional networks (formal or informal) was central to the change process, and to the development of new ways of thinking about themselves as professional women.

The issue of professional identity was raised once again when women discussed their choice of business premises, in particular their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of working at home. Although at first several respondents explained how they appreciated the lack of demarcation between home and work afforded by such arrangements, it was not long before they began to feel somewhat "de-professionalised". For these women, moving into business premises, with all its associated "trappings", was a way of regaining a sense of professional identity which they felt might be slipping away. Linked with the issue of identity is that of professional legitimacy - how they were perceived by others was extremely important to many respondents, and was central to how they saw themselves. Several respondents explained how, having left their organisations, they felt that they had lost their professional credibility, in particular if they had set up their new business from home. For these respondents, moving into business premises was a way of establishing themselves as legitimate, in the eyes of their peers, their clients, and themselves. Here, occupational sector and gender emerged as salient factors: respondents who worked in sectors where self-employment was atypical, or which were male-dominated, struggled with such issues, and developed strategies to help

them establish themselves as credible, and serious (such as taking on a male business partner).

In seeking to understand how the women in the sample experienced self-employment, however, it is not enough to simply focus on professional issues and considerations; emerging in this analysis is the futility of attempting to examine a woman's career life in isolation from her life more generally. Just as the professional networks impacted on women's experiences of self-employment in a number of ways, so too respondents described their husbands' roles as wide-ranging, influencing them on a variety of levels. As regards the issue of occupational identity, women's perceived domestic roles and responsibilities, and the extent to which their husbands valued them, not only as wives and mothers, but also as professionals and businesswomen, significantly impacted on their sense of themselves. While some women experienced their personal life as conflicting with their professional life, and struggled with their competing identities, others saw the two as consistent, and mutually enriching. As described in section 8.4, such patterns were typically not the result of self-employment; rather, they were enduring patterns which the move to self-employment served to elucidate.

Finally, a consideration of women's thoughts about the future provides further insights into their sense of themselves and their developing occupational identities. Having moved from employment to self-employment, respondents ideas about the future were diverse. For some, the future was described in terms of their business - growing and developing their existing business, or starting up an entirely new venture, while others talked not about their businesses, but about their own professional development. Women in a third group had a more holistic vision, and sought to find ways to effectively integrate their personal and professional lives and identities. In spite of these differences, however, what these women shared was that they saw themselves as self-employed - organisational employment seemed to have no place in their ideas about the future. In stark contrast, two women in the study returned to organisations. Although for both women the experience of self-employment was described as having been extremely valuable, they felt that it was fundamentally at odds with how they saw themselves and with what they valued professionally. At the time of interview, both felt that it was within organisations that they were most at home.

As regards the issue of occupational identity, what to me emerges most strongly in this chapter is the complexity of factors which contribute to respondents' sense of themselves as working women. Considering the issue of identity at the outset of this study, I expected that the data would tell a story of change and rupture, that implicit in the move from employment to self-employment would be a radical shift in the way respondents saw themselves as working women. While in some cases such transformation did happen (though this was typically incremental rather than radical), others' transcripts were characterised by a sense of continuity - indeed, for such women it seemed to be this enduring occupational identity that supported their radical change in occupational context. The relationship between the processes of change and continuity, and the centrality of this relationship in women's accounts of moving from employment to self-employment will be explored further in the discussion which follows.

Chapter Nine

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the research findings. Section 9.2 through 9.6 consider the contributions of this study to the literatures reviewed in Chapter 2: section 9.2 focuses on the culture of enterprise, section 9.3 on self-employment and women in the labour market, section 9.4 on women and career theory, 9.5 on 'corporate flight', and finally section 9.6 re-visits the literature on entrepreneurship. Moving on, section 9.7 returns to the broad aim of the study, as outlined in section 2.6.1, and introduces two models for understanding the transition from employment to self-employment.

9.1 Introduction

It was suggested in the concluding section of the literature review that the first aim of this thesis was:

"to contribute new empirical data to a previously under-researched area".

These data were presented in considerable detail in Chapters 4 through 8, which addressed the five central research questions identified in the Methodology chapter. Two further questions thus arise:

1. How do the findings generated in this study contribute to the literatures reviewed in Chapter 2?

2. How do these findings serve to fulfil the second aim of the research as outlined in Section 2.61:

   "to develop a theoretical understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women who leave their positions within organisations and set up their own businesses?"

These questions form the basis of the discussion which follows. Sections 9.2 through 9.6 consider the contribution of this study to each of the literatures reviewed, while Section 9.7 focuses on the broad aim of the study, introducing a theoretical framework (grounded in the data generated in this study) for understanding women's transition from employment to self-employment.

9.2 Contributing to the Literature on the Culture of Enterprise

In the conclusion to the review of the literature on the culture of enterprise, it was suggested that this study would contribute to this developing literature in two central ways:

"First, an examination of the reasons why respondents chose to leave their organisations will shed light on the usefulness of restructuring theories in explaining significant increases in self-employment among women in the 1980's. On a more ideological level, exploring how women who moved from employment to self-employment in the 1980's and early 1990's make sense of the discourse of enterprise, and the extent to which they identify with it, will provide insights into the relevance of this discourse for women."

The following sections will address these contributions in turn.

9.2.1 The Usefulness of Restructuring Theories

As noted in section 2.1.3, it has been argued that the increase in small business activity in the 1980's was largely attributable to structural changes in the economy generally, and more specifically within organisations (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Goodman et. al., 1988; Massey, 1984). However, it is significant that in spite of large-scale corporate re-structuring, down-sizing and widely-publicised redundancy programmes, not a single respondent in this study explained their decision to leave their organisation as a direct result of such initiatives. Furthermore, while job insecurity seems to have become a "normal" feature of corporate life in the 1990's (Mirvis and Hall, 1994), this was not reported as a major issue for any of the women in the sample, and did not appear to be a

significant factor in their resignation. Although two women in the sample were able to use redundancy schemes to finance their new business ventures, neither was forced into this option. On the contrary, in both cases respondents had decided to become self-employed, and had then found ways of taking advantage of existing schemes.

Mirvis and Hall (1994) suggest that:

"A decade-and-a-half of corporate downsizing and broad-based-de-industrialisation has had employers reducing staff, shutting down facilities, and making more use of consultants and the contingent workforce. As a result, notions of cradle-to-grave job security have been shattered along with the psychological contracts binding people to companies" (p. 366).

While it appears that respondents' decisions to leave their organisations were not a *direct* result of re-structuring programmes, the data generated in this study suggest that the *indirect* effects of such initiatives may well be significant. No respondents in the study had to leave their organisation through redundancy or corporate re-structuring programmes, however, as noted in section 6.4.1, several women made the decision to leave only to find themselves in a job market which offered few opportunities. Having left positions which they described as secure, those respondents who wished to re-enter organisational employment found that they were unable to do so. There were, quite simply, no suitable jobs. Given such limitations, these respondents saw self-employment as their only option. An analysis of the relationship between economic change, re-structuring initiatives and the job market which respondents entered upon resigning from their jobs is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important that respondents' perceived lack of opportunities in the traditional labour market is seen against a backdrop of widespread economic and organisational change.

As regards respondents' decision to resign, section 5.3 detailed the organisational factors leading to this decision, focusing in particular on the issues of restricted opportunity, clashing values, and the experience of marginality. Although there were notable exceptions, taken together these accounts paint a bleak picture of organisational life, a

picture characterised by a lack of care and support, by suspicion and competition, monotony, and in many instances by a culture of uniformity and gender discrimination. Although respondents' particular positions may not have been at risk, permeating many accounts was a sense of insecurity and instability. Thus it appears that as far as this study is concerned, while on a *structural* level the effects of economic and corporate re-structuring programmes may be limited, consistent with Burrows and Curran's (1991) argument, the *cultural* effects of such initiatives merit consideration.

Although none of the respondents in this study were *forced* into self-employment by virtue of redundancy or corporate down-sizing, many found that organisations were becoming increasingly unpleasant places to work. In stark contrast to despondency about life within organisations, several respondents described their growing excitement about self-employment. As suggested in section 7.3, whereas organisational life was associated with constraint, restricted opportunity and powerlessness, self-employment was seen as embodying notions of freedom and control. This notion of small business activity as representing an alternative to conventional organisational employment is central to the culture of enterprise, as discussed in section 2.1.4. In that section it was suggested that *"theorists exploring the emergence of 'the culture of enterprise' use the concept to link material, structural change with changing perceptions and sense-making processes" (DuGay, 1991; Salaman and DuGay, 1992; Ritchie, 1991).* While on a structural level respondents' circumstances had not changed significantly, on a cultural level they described their growing dissatisfaction with organisational employment, and the gradual realisation that self-employment could be a real possibility.

The data generated in this study thus enhance our understanding of the relevance of re-structuring theories (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Goodman et. al., 1988; Massey, 1984; Williams et. al., 1987). Considering their usefulness in explaining increases in self-employment amongst the respondents, the study has demonstrated that on their own such theories have limited value: while structural economic changes may have impacted on a few women's decisions to become self-employed, not a single respondent explained their decision to resign as a result of change initiatives. However, what is important are the cultural effects of re-structuring theories, the extent to which the ideas embedded within such theories became central to respondents' thinking about their working lives

and contexts, and to subsequent action. Therefore, what is essential is that re-structuring theories be applied, not in isolation, but in conjunction with a cultural level of analysis which seeks to understand how these structures are both represented and constituted through thought and action.

9.2.2 The Relevance of the Discourse of Enterprise for Women in Business

The review of the literature suggested that women have been largely excluded from the culture of enterprise (Rees, 1992). Indeed, it has been argued that on an ideological level the culture of enterprise is based on the experiences and lifestyles of men (Allen and Truman, 1992), an androcentric perspective which is reflected and re-constructed through academic debates and theories, as well as government statistics, and policy initiatives. Feminist critics in particular argue that permeating the public discourse of enterprise and its associated policy, training and support programmes is a powerful and enduring discourse of the family in which women's roles as carers, nurturers and homemakers are central.

Similarly, the review of the (related) literature on entrepreneurship took issue with the unrecognised gendered assumptions upon which much of that literature is based, its stereotypical definitions and models, and the extent to which it has largely rendered women invisible (Moore, 1990; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Marlow and Strange, 1994). It was argued in that section that more adequate understandings of entrepreneurship will be based on a re-conceptualisation of many of the key terms and concepts within that literature.

The culture of enterprise, as noted in the literature review, has been described as a "central cultural motif of the present period" (Burrows and Curran, 1991, p. 10). Given this significance, and the exclusion of women from much of the public discourse of enterprise, as well as traditional theories and definitions of entrepreneurship and "the entrepreneur", I was particularly interested in examining how the respondents in this study made sense of the discourse of enterprise, whether they identified with it, and the extent to which they saw it as relevant. During their interviews women talked at considerable length about their perceptions of their careers and their career development.

Given this focus, I felt that issues concerning respondents' participation in/identification with the culture of enterprise would be most easily accessed through discussions about the concept of "the entrepreneur".

The findings on these issues were detailed in section 4.5. That section reported a marked diversity in respondents' understandings of the term "entrepreneur". In that discussion, several points emerged as particularly significant. First, there was a dichotomy between those women who came from small business backgrounds, and those who previously had had no experience of business ownership. While those in the first group saw the entrepreneur as something which was essentially "normal", those in the latter typically saw it in stereotypical terms, often with reference to high profile celebrities. Second, the meanings that women attached to the term "entrepreneur" were not value-neutral; rather, they were value-laden, often reflecting respondents' political sympathies. Finally, respondents' understandings changed over time - partly as a result of their own change in circumstances, and partly due to the increasing influence of the discourse of enterprise in our society generally (it is notable that where such changes were apparent, it was *always* the case that judgements went from negative to positive - *never* the other way round).

As regards women's identification with the term, here too there was significant variation in response. While two unequivocally said that they did see themselves as entrepreneurs, others were equally adamant that the term was inappropriate. Significantly, the dichotomy noted above between those with small business experience and those without such experience was again apparent. What is notable about the second group, particularly in light of this discussion about the relevance of the enterprise discourse for women, is that while they categorically rejected the entrepreneur label, several considered themselves entrepreneurial - and were very clear that these entrepreneurial qualities were positive, especially in view of their positions as small business owner/managers. Although they did not want to lock themselves into an entrepreneurial identity, these respondents appropriated aspects of the discourse of enterprise that were relevant to how they saw themselves as working women. While "entrepreneur" as an occupational identity felt totally inappropriate, certain characteristics of enterprise made sense.

The key point, then, is that the discourse of enterprise can not be seen as monolithic (Salaman and DuGay, 1992; Ritchie, 1991); instead, it must be seen as diverse, appropriated and used by people in a variety of ways depending on their position, circumstances, and the economic/social/cultural/political world(s) in which they live. This is not to suggest, however, that there are not "preferred readings" of the discourse. Of course those structurally powerful groups in society, organisations, etc. will be in a position to more publicly disseminate and, through policy initiatives, to enforce their interpretations. However, ordinary individuals do not necessarily accept these definitions; rather, individuals "read against the grain", interpreting and re-constructing the discourse in ways that make sense. It is important to note, though, that these differences in interpretation are not just idiosyncratic, and thus are not adequately explained simply through individual differences. Rather, these different "readings" reflect and constitute individual interpretations *within* different structural positions, encompassing both consensus and resistance. This relationship between dominant and subordinate interpretations of a particular discourse is not static, but a site of struggle and negotiation, as evidenced by the changing notions of "the entrepreneur" as articulated by the women in this study. Thus, the discourse of enterprise (and any other discourse, for that matter) must not be seen as unitary, but as diverse and changeable. Indeed, it has been argued that it is this *multiaccentuality* that ensures that a discourse "maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development" (Volisinov, 1929, p. 23).

As regards the contribution of this study to the literature on the discourse of enterprise, while I would agree with feminist critics (Allen and Truman, 1992; Rees, 1992) that women have been largely rendered invisible within the dominant discourse of enterprise as constructed by academics and policy-makers, I would argue that this interpretation of the discourse is a unitary one, lacking in both diversity and dynamism. Furthermore, it presupposes that meaning is constructed by those in powerful positions, and that ordinary people are simply included in or excluded from such meanings. The findings generated in this study suggest otherwise - that respondents have most certainly engaged with, and found relevance in the discourse of enterprise. Their appropriation of this discourse is evidenced in the way they see themselves as owner/managers, as well as in the sense they make of their organisation and their expectations of self-employment

(discussed in the previous section). The data thus demonstrate that it is not enough to examine the enterprise culture simply from the perspective of academics and policy-makers; what is equally important is an understanding of the ways in which the enterprise discourse is seen as meaningful to ordinary people who, on a day-to-day basis, "do enterprise".

9.3 Developing Understandings of Self-employment and Women in the Labour Market

The review of the literature on self-employment and women in the labour market examined studies into women's disadvantaged position within the labour market, and theoretical frameworks for understanding this disadvantage. In addition, it considered research into the move to self-employment (including men and women), central to which was the "push/pull" debate, and the importance of emerging holistic perspectives. Women's decision to become self-employed was analysed in Chapter 6, examining in particular the relevance of the model put forward by Granger et. al. (1995), and introducing a potentially more useful framework for understanding. This framework, as detailed in that chapter, explains the move from employment to self-employment as either a single decision, or as two separate, though related decisions, and incorporates a range of personal, professional, sectoral, organisational and ideological factors. Constructed in light of the data generated in this project, it thus represents a significant contribution to the existing literature. Having explored that contribution at some length in Chapter 6, the discussion which follows will be slightly broader in its perspective. Concluding the literature review, it was suggested that this study into women who moved from employment to self-employment:

"provides a unique perspective from which to explore women's participation in the labour market. In particular, it will contribute insights into the extent to which for women self-employment can be seen as an agent for social change, providing an alternative to traditional employment patterns."

This issue is discussed in the following section.

9.3.1 Are Self-employed Women Breaking New Ground or Simply Balancing the Demands of Women's Work in a New Way?

As outlined in the literature review, given the persistent vertical and horizontal segregation of women in the labour market, and the ideology of the family which underpins such segregation, the question raised by academics is whether indeed self-employment

"can provide an alternative set of chances for people disadvantaged by the rigid sets of structures and processes that determine the allocation of opportunities and rewards in the traditional labour market" (Allen and Truman, 1992, p. 179).

The findings of this study are ambiguous. While on one hand the move to self-employment can be seen as a way of maintaining existing patterns of domination and subordination, on the other, self-employment can lead to feelings of liberation and control, and can result in women feeling better able to make choices about their careers and their lives more generally.

Permeating this analysis is a persistent tension between respondents' identities, aims, roles and responsibilities as working women, and as wives and mothers. Chapter 8 considered those factors which respondents identified as having significantly impacted on their experience of self-employment; in particular section 8.4.1 focused on the importance of women's family networks, and the support which they received from their partners. All of the respondents with husbands and children felt that as small business owner/managers, they would greatly benefit from their husbands' support and the sharing of domestic responsibilities. However, the findings suggest that the move to self-employment made little or no difference to respondents' domestic arrangements. Those who were well supported before the move continued to be so, those who were not continued to be unsupported, and to take on the bulk of the responsibilities when self-employed. Although their employment contexts had changed, their positions within the family remained the same.

Thus on one level it could be argued that self-employment does not appear to have altered women's fundamental position in any significant way. Instead, the move from employment to self-employment could be seen as enabling women to more effectively cope with the competing demands of both paid and unpaid work, and therefore ensure that they continue to take responsibility for both. Far from being an agent of social change, self-employment in this sense could be seen as a hegemonic process - giving women the opportunity to negotiate, to feel autonomous, empowered and in control, and in doing so ensure that existing circumstances remain essentially unchallenged.

On the other hand, however, data on respondents' perceptions of the differences between organisational employment and self-employment, and on their thoughts about the future suggest that the move to self-employment has led to respondents' thinking about their careers and themselves in quite different ways. Considering respondents' expectations of self-employment, section 7.3.4 found that in spite of the very real constraints of business ownership/management, many women reported how they *felt* freer in their new contexts, and more in control. Running their own businesses, they explained how they could "be themselves" - a stark contrast to the feelings of marginalisation, and "otherness" experienced by some women within their organisations. Furthermore, section 4.3 on career planning, and section 8.6 on respondents' visions of the future both emphasised the confidence and clarity with which women discussed their plans. In that context, respondents described themselves as successful career women, and three in particular saw themselves as role models for other aspiring women. This could be distinguished from the apologetic manner in which they described their past career development - as ad hoc, and lacking in focus and direction. Possible reasons for this change in approach and style are suggested in section 4.3.3. As regards this discussion, what is most significant is the sense of empowerment and control which underpinned respondents' ideas about the future. And significantly, at the time of interview many respondents felt that they were in a position to choose. The product manager who started an environmentally-friendly nappy business is a case in point. Although she had always aspired to the role of marketing manager, she could not see a clear route to achieving that goal. Having run her own business, she felt that she was in a position to go back into the labour market, and to seek out that job. Two months after our

interview, that respondent was in post, as a marketing manager of a large mail order company.

The data are thus contradictory. In attempting to explain women's disadvantage in the labour market, the persistence of the traditional ideology of the family is seen as central (Arber and Gilbert, 1992; Morris, 1991; Rees, 1992). Given the findings of this study which show that self-employment made little difference to women's domestic arrangements, that those who assumed the bulk of domestic responsibility and assumed the role of carer and nurturer continued to do so, one might conclude that self-employment merely served to make the existing situation slightly easier to manage. In contrast, though, are the findings outlined above. Thus, in spite of their domestic arrangements, respondents described how self-employment made a difference to the way they felt about themselves as working women, and to their plans for the future. Although this ideological shift is in itself highly significant, it does not stand alone. Rather, intrinsic to it is a sense that women felt able to exercise control. They could choose the direction their business would take, they could choose to remain self-employed, they could sell their existing business and start another, they could close their office and work from home, or as two respondents did, they could opt back into traditional employment. Here again, structural and agentic dimensions must be seen as mutual and interdependent. Based on the data generated in the study, it is not the case that respondents were locked into particular structural positions, positions which were merely reflected in their patterns of thought and sense-making. Rather, they were active participants in the labour market, negotiating with it, making sense of it and finding their own way through. Given this dialectical relationship between structure and agency, self-employment *per se* can not be seen as an "agent of social change" for women. Rather, it is in the way in which women constitute themselves as self-employed, and the relationship between these patterns of thought and subsequent action, that such change becomes possible.

9.4 Furthering Analyses of Women and Career Theory

In concluding the review of the literature on women and career theory, it was suggested that this study into women who left their organisational positions and set up their own businesses would

"contribute to the literature on career theory in two important ways. First, in focusing on women who have moved from employment to self-employment it will further develop existing understandings of career transition. Second, although the recent literature on emerging career structures is compelling, much of it is not empirically grounded. This study will thus provide new data on how women construct and make sense of their careers, in particular shedding light on the experiences of women working outside of traditional bureaucracies."

These contributions will be considered in sections 9.4.1 and 9.4.2 respectively.

9.4.1 The Transition from Employment to Self-employment

Section 2.3.5 considered Nicholson and West's model of the transition cycle (1988). Given its focus on managerial job change, it was my view that its applicability to this study may be limited. In particular, I suggested that the preparation and encounter phases, which consider expectations of the new situation and the extent to which these are realised, may not be relevant in the move to self-employment. However, despite this difference in focus, I felt that the model offered a great deal of potential. Specifically, its emphasis on the importance of studying transitions in seeking to understand careers more generally, its interdisciplinary approach and consideration of both structural and agentic perspectives, and its cyclical form (as opposed to a linear one) were seen to be promising.

The findings generated in the study, detailed in section 7.3, confirmed the suggestion raised above that Nicholson and West's analysis of the preparation and encounter phases would not be applicable to the transition to self-employment. What that analysis

elucidated was, first, the extent to which respondents' expectations of their new context were influenced by their previous experiences of self-employment; indeed, the significance of coming from a small business background is emphasised throughout the analysis. Second, it highlighted the centrality of respondents' organisational experiences in making sense of self-employment: their expectations of self-employment were based, in part, on their rejection of organisations - self-employment, therefore, was seen to represent whatever organisational employment was not.

Notably, it was not only in the preparation phase that respondents' organisational experiences were seen as significant. On the contrary, the findings show that the salience of respondents' organisational positions extended way beyond the "preparation phase", to the day-to-day reality of small business ownership/management. Indeed, section 8.2 identified women's previous employment as one of the most significant factors in their experience of self-employment; in particular, respondents' occupational identity, their sense of employability, their professional support networks, and their sense of self-confidence were shaped, in part, by their previous work experience. In developing a framework for understanding the transition from employment to self-employment, it is therefore important to recognise the centrality of the past in this process.

9.4.2 Women's Careers and the Move to Self-employment

As suggested in section 2.3.6, feminist writers have taken issue with androcentric approaches to career theory, approaches which focus in particular on rationality and linearity. The findings of this study support such views. In contrast to what Marshall (1989) refers to as the basic arrow design of career theory, a jigsaw puzzle, or even a house of cards would more aptly describe the ways in which respondents in this study saw their careers developing. And consistent with other studies into women and their careers (Gallos, 1989; White, 1995; Lambert, 1990; Howard, 1992), permeating the analysis of the data is the significance of women's personal and domestic circumstances in their unfolding career stories. This inextricability of women's professional and personal lives was evident not only in their transition from employment to self-employment, but in their accounts of their careers more generally, from their early socialisation and career decisions, to their aims and visions of the future.

Despite the feminist call for a radical re-thinking of career theory (Astin, 1984; Larwood and Gutek, 1987; Marshall, 1989; Gallos, 1989; White, 1995), Section 2.3.6 argued that underpinning much of the work on women's career development is a persistent bureaucratic ideology, fundamental to which organisational employment is constituted as the norm (Gowler and Legge, 1989). Thus, attempts were made to re-work existing theories in order to accommodate women's domestic roles and responsibilities, while leaving intact the bureaucratic assumptions upon which such theories were based. While some feminist scholars have recognised this implicit ideological position as problematic (Gallos, 1989; Marshall, 1989), alternatives remain largely undeveloped and untheorised. This study on women's move from employment to self-employment thus sought to explore the ways in which women experienced and made sense of other career forms.

Kanter's work on career forms, re-conceptualised in section 4.4 as "career discourses" to reflect a more dynamic, more dialogical relationship between structural and agentic dimensions, proved a valuable framework for examining alternative ways of thinking about careers. These bureaucratic, professional, entrepreneurial and self-development discourses, based on particular beliefs, values, priorities and definitions of success, were seen throughout the analysis as colliding, competing and overlapping in women's career stories. However, the interconnectedness of women's personal and professional lives is clearly such that these career discourses can not be studied in isolation. Rather, they must be seen as existing in a kind of dynamic tension alongside discourses about respondents' lifestyles more generally (most typically discourses about the family (which are themselves diverse), and about the desire for a "balanced life").

As regards the literature on women and career theory, I see this perspective as potentially very useful. First, in contrast to traditional approaches which failed to consider the centrality of personal and domestic circumstances in a woman's career experiences, or which attempted to graft women's situations onto male models, this approach takes as its starting point the inextricability of career and personal life. Indeed, it is, in part, the relationship between these different spheres that gives the perspective its dynamism. Furthermore, it is based on the idea that careers are not necessarily enacted within organisations, and do not necessarily embrace bureaucratic norms, beliefs and

values. Thus, it could offer a way out of the "bureaucratic impasse" of much existing career theory (this point will be further considered below). Finally, as suggested in section 4.4 it emphasises the extent to which careers must be explored not only in terms of career forms and structures, but also in terms of the sense individuals make of those structures, and their subsequent actions. Thus careers are not seen as static entities, provided by organisations and simply taken on by individuals; instead they must be seen as dynamic processes, socially constructed.

Regarding the "bureaucratic impasse" noted above, it could be argued that Kanter's career forms, re-formulated as "career discourses" could be seen as providing an alternative to traditional career theory and its implicit bureaucratic ideology. It was suggested in section 2.3.7 that in spite of its pervasiveness, such an ideology is not inevitable (Gowler and Legge,1989; Pollert, 1991, Mallon, 1995; Mirvis and Hall, 1994; Inkson, 1995). On one hand, the findings generated in this study could be seen as confirming this view. As detailed in section 8.6 which considered respondents' ideas about the future, while a few saw the future unfolding in a very linear way, equating achievement with hierarchical success, others were concerned about the continued growth (or in some cases survival) of their businesses, maintaining their commitment to certain professional values, their own professional development and stimulation, or about lifestyle issues more generally - in particular, several respondents wanted above all to regain a sense of balance and quality in their lives.

On the other hand, it could be argued that in spite of their moves away from bureaucracies, in a number of accounts a bureaucratic ideology continued to prevail. For example, for those respondents who saw themselves as becoming role models for other aspiring businesswomen, success was clearly equated with public recognition. Similarly, Gowler and Legge suggest that "in bureaucratic organisations, an individual's progress depends crucially on the evaluation of his or her superiors" (1989, p. 446), that developing a "high profile" is central to career achievement. This implicit bureaucratic ideology was also apparent in the discussion of premises. Section 8.5.2 considered the links between this issue and women's occupational identities; specifically, it was suggested that where a number of women felt that working from home cast doubt on their professional credibility, and on their sense of themselves as professional women,

these concerns were alleviated with the move to business premises. For these respondents, the more their businesses took on the "trappings" of more "typical" organisations, the greater was their sense of professional legitimacy. Thus, on some subconscious level, "proper work" seemed to be connected with the physical spaces characteristic of bureaucratic, organisational employment.

Notably, although the focus of this section is on the contribution of the study to our understanding of women's careers, I do not see its findings as only applicable to women. On the contrary, I support Marshall's view that much traditional career theory is inadequate for both women and men (1989), and would argue that a more useful framework for understanding women would at the same time provide insights into the experiences of men. Thus, the need to find ways of theorising careers which fall outside the bureaucratic norm, and the need to incorporate professional and personal/domestic dimensions of experience, must be seen as central to the construction of more useful frameworks for understanding the careers of both women and men. This is not to minimise the significance of gender in a woman's career experience - quite the opposite, gender was seen as impacting on women's accounts of their careers at every stage. However, the precise nature of this impact was variable, and depended on a whole range of factors. The findings thus support Wearing's suggestion, cited in section 3.2.2 that

"All women may currently occupy the position 'women'... but they do not occupy it in the same way" (1994, p. 6).

In my view what is therefore most useful is not a theory which simply dichotomises women and men, but which recognises the significance of gender in a person's experience of career (life, etc.), and can accommodate the different ways in which this significance is manifest.

To conclude this section, then, the study can be seen to contribute to the literature on women and career theory in a number of ways. In addition to providing new data on an under-researched group, in focusing on the transition from employment to *self*-employment, it has served to further develop Nicholson and West's "transition cycle", focusing in particular on the "preparation" stage, and highlighting key differences

between managerial job change, and the move to small business ownership/management. More broadly, it has emphasised the relevance of their previous organisations in respondents' experiences of self-employment, and highlighted the importance of theoretical frameworks which account for this experience, looking to the past as well as to the present and future. As regards women and career theory more generally, it has confirmed the findings of other feminist research which insist on the inextricability of women's personal and professional lives. At the same time, it has sought to incorporate this dimension into a theoretical framework which can accommodate, not just traditional bureaucratic careers, but a range of career possibilities. Based on Kanter's career forms, the notion of career discourses, which intersect and compete, not only with each other, but also with discourses about personal and family life, is seen as providing a useful way forward - although the extent to which it really does pose a challenge to the bureaucratic ideology embedded within much of our thinking and theorising about careers is still an open question.

9.5 Contributing to the Literature on "Corporate Flight"

In the conclusion to the review of the literature on "corporate flight", it was suggested that the study would make a

"significant contribution to this literature. Whereas Marshall's study (1991, 1994, 1995) focused on women at the transition, this study explores the next stage - women who are making a go of self-employment and are looking back, reflecting on their experiences within their organisations, and their reasons for leaving. This perspective will thus contribute new data to what is currently known about how women make sense of their experiences of organisations and the phenomenon of "corporate flight".

Chapter 5 provided a detailed analysis of respondents' decisions to leave their organisations. The purpose of this discussion is therefore not to reiterate these findings, but to outline the ways in which such findings contribute to existing understandings. In particular, this study into women who moved from employment to self-employment differs from earlier research into "corporate flight" in several important ways. First, in so far as it differs *methodologically* from other research on the topic, the nature of the

findings it has produced are also different, and thus serve to further enhance what is already known about women's decisions to opt out of their organisations. Second, it differs from earlier study in terms of its *focus* - on respondents' decision to leave their organisations within the context of the transition from employment to self-employment more generally. Finally, its particular *vantage point* - looking back on that decision from the perspective of self-employment - contributes a new perspective. The first of these points is discussed in section 9.5.1 below, while the second and third are considered in section 9.5.2 which follows.

9.5.1 New Insights Yielded through Taking a Different Methodological Approach

The review of the literature on "corporate flight" focuses in particular on the work of Rosin and Korabik (1992; 1995) and that of Marshall (1991, 1994; 1995). Methodologically, these studies are very different. Rosin and Korabik's work is large-scale and quantitative, aiming for generalisable outcomes on the incidence of and reasons behind women managers' decisions to leave. Marshall's, on the other hand, is small-scale and interpretive: an "exploration in sense-making" (1995, p. 10), its aim is to paint rich, detailed pictures of women's career stories to the point at which they decided to leave their organisations.

This study poses an interesting contrast to both of these approaches. Like Marshall's work, it is qualitative, focusing on respondents' experiences and perceptions. Thus its aim is to more fully understand many of the important issues raised by Rosin and Korabik, and in particular the often complex and ambiguous relationships between these issues. For example, in their 1992 study Rosin and Korabik found that in comparison with men, women were more likely to cite parental responsibilities as a reason for leaving than were the men in their sample. In itself, this is a significant finding. However, what is particularly interesting to me is the nature of such responsibilities, and of respondents' domestic arrangements more generally, and the reasons why women managers felt that they were unable to fulfil these responsibilities within their organisational contexts. This study thus sought to more fully understand the circumstances which lay behind Rosin and Korabik's findings. And, like Marshall, I am interested in gaining insights into the sense which respondents make of their experiences and situations.

Marshall was above all interested in the stories that women told of their careers: "I have wanted to voice each woman's view, to be authentic both to their experience and to their self-reflection" (1995, p. 10-11). While recognising her own perspective, and drawing out key themes, in so far as it was possible, she wanted to let these stories speak for themselves. In contrast, the approach taken in this study is less open, less wide-ranging. While acknowledging the diversity of possible interpretations, my interest was in finding systematic ways of making sense of the data. Thus, in so far as women's accounts of their decisions to leave included a range of both personal and organisational factors, my interest was in exploring these factors explicitly, and in particular examining the complex relationships between them.

9.5.2 Examining the Decision to Leave within the Context of Women's Career Transition

While very different methodologically, these existing studies, and others (see for example Brett and Stroh, 1994) are similar in that their focus is respondents' decisions to leave their organisation. However, in this study, this decision is examined in the context of women's career development more generally. Thus the decision was explored not only as a significant event in its own right, but also in so far as it shed light on our understanding of the move from employment to self-employment. Its vantage point was also unique. Unlike earlier studies (Maynard, 1988; Schwartz, 1989; Rosin and Korabik, 1992, 1995; Marshall, 1991, 1994, 1995) which were based on data collected around the time that women were deciding to leave, or shortly after leaving their organisations, the respondents in this study were already running their own businesses at the time of interview. Indeed, many of them had been self-employed for several years.

Considering respondents' expectations of self-employment, it was suggested in Section 7.31 that meaning must be seen as relational, that these expectations were based partly on their understanding and experiences of bureaucracies. Similarly, looking back, the sense women made of their organisations and their decisions to leave was inextricably linked to their experience of self-employment. In his analysis of sense-making, Weick (1995) suggests that we make meaning retrospectively, from a "specific moment in time

(a specific here and now), [therefore] whatever is occurring at the moment will influence what is discovered when people glance backward" (p. 26). According to this view, then, women looking back at their decisions to leave their organisations make sense of that decision in light of all that happened between that time and the present, and in particular in light of their current circumstances. The meanings they construct, of their organisations and their decisions to opt out, will inevitably be very different from those constructed by women who have only recently decided to leave.

Asked about their reasons for resigning, respondents' answers looked backwards, to their organisational experiences, and forward from that point, to where their careers had gone. Because of their particular perspective, the stories of the women in Marshall's sample were largely oriented to what had gone wrong in their organisations. While they may have had ideas about what would happen next, they did not have firm plans. Thus their accounts of leaving represent a kind of rupture, leading to an unknown future. To cite a fictional example which to my mind illustrates eloquently this sense of uncertainty (though admittedly at a more extreme level) the protagonist in Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, after a traumatic incident which resulted in a radical change of life course, spoke about how difficult it was to make sense of a future that she simply knew nothing about: "I saw this as my afterlife, and for a long time it didn't occur to me that it contained a future... I felt a semisubmerged conviction that I had entered upon the changeless eternal" (1992, p. 334). Whereas the women in Marshall's study spoke of life after resigning from their organisations haltingly, in vague terms, the women in this study knew precisely what had happened after leaving and beyond, and thus constructed seamless narratives.

To illustrate, in section 5.2.1 it was suggested that a number of respondents had always intended to set up their own businesses, that organisational employment had only ever been a sort of "apprenticeship". These women thus explained how they had decided to leave when self-employment became a real possibility. As suggested in that section, and again in section 6.3.1 which considered women's decisions to become self-employed, permeating the stories of such respondents is an entrepreneurial discourse which serves to provide a kind of underlying logic, a continuity. This logic is largely absent from the stories of Marshall's respondents, where the decision to leave was typically constructed

as a kind of rupture, rather than as an important moment in an evolving process. Similarly, section 5.3.2 recounted the story of a nurse who had become increasingly disillusioned with the health service which, she felt, had abandoned its commitments to patient care and traditional health care values. Her decision to leave was based on her enduring belief in these values, and a desire to find an employment context in which they were central. This respondent's commitment to traditional nursing values gave her account a certain continuity; far from representing a break or schism, her decision to leave the NHS served to reinforce this underlying sense of continuity. Of course one can not say how these respondents' accounts would have differed had the women been interviewed at the time of their departure from their organisations. However, what is notable is that in spite of the obvious significance of these decisions, from the vantage point of self-employment, they were neatly incorporated into women's unfolding career stories.

As regards the contribution of this work to the developing "corporate flight" literature, then, two points are particularly worthy of note. First, its methodological approach serves to build on existing *quantitative* research, emphasising the range of factors which contributed to women's decisions to leave their organisations, and exploring the dynamic, interrelationship between these factors. At the same time, in taking account of both organisational and personal issues, and exploring the relationship between these dimensions, it provides a framework for understanding more interpretative, *qualitative* findings. Such a framework, I would argue, serves to illuminate the complexity of individual accounts, while at the same time facilitating comparisons between accounts. Furthermore, in examining women's decisions to leave their organisations from the perspective of self-employment, this study provides insights into how women make sense of that decision *in the context of their developing careers*. The decision is thus at once explored as a significant event in its own right, and as part of an unfolding process, contributing a new perspective to existing understandings of the phenomenon. In doing so, it elucidates the idea of meaning as relational, and highlights the significance of vantage point in the process of meaning-making.

9.6 Furthering Understandings of Women and Entrepreneurship

Concluding the review of the literature on women and entrepreneurship, it was suggested that this study would:

"contribute to what is currently known about women entrepreneurs, and provide insights into developing feminist perspectives. The perspective of women with previous organisational experience provides a new lens through which to examine women's experiences of self-employment, thus enriching our understandings of the phenomenon. At the same time, considering the experience of entrepreneurship in the context of women's lives more generally, examining the relationship between women's personal and professional lives, and between structural and agentic levels of experience, the study will further enhance emerging holistic perspectives."

The discussion that follows is divided into three sections. Section 9.6.1 considers the extent to which the findings generated in this study represent a challenge to traditional, androcentric approaches to entrepreneurship, focusing in particular on respondents' understandings of and identification with the term "entrepreneur". Section 9.6.2 turns to the question of focus, and the unique contribution of this study which examines self-employment from the perspective of those with previous organisational experience. Finally, section 9.6.3 considers the value of examining women and entrepreneurship from a holistic perspective, outlining the insights provided by such an approach.

9.6.1 Re-thinking Traditional Definitions

The review of the literature on entrepreneurship revealed a persistent male orientation, with women rendered largely invisible, both empirically and ideologically. In so far as traditional definitions and frameworks for understanding were based on the experiences of (stereotypical) men, it was argued that such perspectives failed to account for the ways in which business ownership/management was experienced by real women and men (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Stevenson, 1990; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Carter, 1993; Cannon et. Al., 1988; Carter and Cannon, 1992).

As noted in the literature review, the precise definition of "the entrepreneur" has long been a topic of vigorous debate within the academic literature (Schumpeter, 1934; McLelland, 1961; Carland et. al., 1986; Stevenson, 1989). Researchers have constructed frameworks for distinguishing "the entrepreneur" from all other individuals involved in business. In so far as differentiation seems to be the aim of such theorising, the resulting definitions are exclusive by their very nature - and typically exclude women. While these comprehensive definitions might be useful in outlining the range of perspectives from which the phenomenon of business ownership/management can be understood (and the extent to which these perspectives can render whole groups of people invisible), the insights they provide into the lifeworlds of real women and men involved in running their own businesses remain limited.

As far as this study is concerned, its purpose was *not* to divide respondents into those who *really were*, and those who *really were not* entrepreneurs, nor was it to make existing definitions more "women friendly". Instead, given the salience of the discourse of enterprise, generally, and the debate on the definition of "the entrepreneur" within the academic literature more specifically, the study sought to more fully understand the ways in which respondents made sense of the term "entrepreneur", and the extent to which they identified with it. Central to both was an interest in the issue of gender, as a significant factor in a woman's experience of business. The analysis of these data are detailed in section 4.5. What is important in the context of this discussion, though, was the diversity of women's responses: their varied understandings of the term, and their ambiguous identification with it, and the irrelevance of existing definitions - in particular their inability to accommodate this difference. Although the data did not enable me to categorise the women in the sample in any clear or straightforward way, they provided me with valuable insights into respondents' perceptions of their businesses, and of themselves as business owner/managers. As regards the contribution of this study, the data demonstrated the futility of applying reductionist, stereotypical definitions to complex phenomena and processes, and the importance of developing frameworks which seek, not to ignore difference, but to better understand it. The discourse perspective, outlined in section 4.4 and discussed further in section 9.4.2 above, is an illustration of such a framework.

9.6.2 The Significance of Respondents' Organisational Experience

Traditional approaches to entrepreneurship have been criticised for their excessive reductionism, and for their failure to recognise diversity. Thus, important concepts such as "the entrepreneur", "risk", and "success" are used unproblematically, as if their meaning was unambiguous. Recent feminist methodological perspectives, as suggested in section 3.2.2, have taken issue with the homogeneity of traditional social science. Thus Sexton wrote:

"generalisations can be misleading, inadequate, and lacking in any flesh and blood reality, they can also fail to take account of the astonishing variations among women and the work they do. Women have not one but many voices... Both the themes and the variations, the individual and the collective voices need to be heard" (1982, p. 4)

Similarly, feminist approaches to entrepreneurship take as their starting point the diversity of women, their experiences of self-employment, and of the small business sector itself (Carter and Cannon, 1992; Allen and Truman, 1993).

This emphasis on difference notwithstanding, the significance of women's past experiences has received little academic attention. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, a number of noteworthy studies into women entrepreneurs identified as a significant group those women who had set up their own businesses after leaving their organisations (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Cannon et. al., 1988; Carter and Cannon, 1992). However, in spite of its relevance, the impact of this experience has received little explicit research attention. It is therefore this study's focus on women who have embarked on self-employment having left their organisational positions, which differentiates it from other research into women entrepreneurs, and which represents its unique contribution.

This contribution is, first, empirical. As suggested in the discussion of Nicholson and West's "transition cycle" above, a permeating theme in this thesis is the importance of respondents' previous organisations in their experiences of self-employment. Not only

was this experience central in their decision to embark on business ventures, it also contributed to women's expectations of their new employment context, to the day-to-day reality of small business life and finally, to respondents' ideas and visions for the future. The data generated in this study thus provide a new dimension to what is currently known about the experiences of women in business. Taking the issue of confidence as an example, recent studies into training and support for women entrepreneurs stress the importance of assertiveness and confidence-building in designing start-up courses for women (Truman, 1993; Kaur and Hayden, 1993; Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993). However, whereas the women in their programmes were frequently unemployed and had limited education, the respondents in this study were, generally speaking, highly trained professionals, who brought with them from their organisations a sense of confidence in themselves as competent working women. This is not to suggest that respondents did not feel insecure, or afraid, as they embarked on their new ventures; on the contrary, section 7.2 details the risks perceived by women as they moved to self-employment. However, the issue of confidence for them was on a different scale to the women in the studies cited above; and clearly, any support or training initiative would need to take this diversity into account.

Likewise, theoretical frameworks for understanding the lifeworlds of women entrepreneurs must be able to accommodate the range of women's past experiences. Thus, in considering the relevance of Nicholson and West's "transition cycle", section 9.4.1 above stressed the importance of looking not only to the future, but also back to the past, in seeking to understand the process of moving from employment to self-employment. Similarly, central to the analysis of women's decisions to become self-employed, detailed in Chapter 7, was the recognition of the complex relationship between women's past organisational experiences and their decisions to opt for small business ownership/management.

Thus, on an empirical level, as well as a theoretical one, this study contributes a new dimension to our understandings of the experiences and perceptions of women entrepreneurs, providing insights into the relevance of previous organisational experiences in the move to business ownership/management. More broadly speaking, these findings warn us against constructing theories for the "generic" woman

entrepreneur, theories which homogenise women's experiences, instead of seeking to account for their differences.

9.6.3 Taking a Holistic Perspective

As suggested above, I see the holistic approach taken in this study as contributing important insights to our existing understandings of women's entrepreneurship. In what follows, this contribution is discussed in terms of three broad areas: first, an emphasis on the interconnectedness of personal and professional life and the need to explore entrepreneurship in this context; second, a focus on both diachronic and synchronic perspectives; and third, a recognition of the mutuality of structure and agency, and the need to incorporate both dimensions in seeking to understand the perceptions and experiences of women entrepreneurs.

The review of the entrepreneurship literature argued that much of the traditional work has been very narrow in its focus - examining entrepreneurial activities, and entrepreneurs themselves, only in so far as their businesses are concerned. Although more integrated approaches have acknowledged the importance of drawing on a range of disciplinary perspectives in seeking to understand entrepreneurship (see for example Cooper, 1981; Carsud et. al., 1986; on network analysis see Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986), and consider the phenomenon of entrepreneurship as resulting from a number of intersecting factors, they do not examine an entrepreneur's business experiences within the context of their life more generally. Thus entrepreneurship tends to be explored as a phenomenon in its own right, in isolation from the broad social context in which it is enacted. In contrast, feminist approaches have taken as their starting point the inextricability of personal and professional life, and have examined women and entrepreneurship in that context (see for example Goffee and Scase, 1985; Cannon et. al., 1988; Carter and Cannon, 1992; Allen and Truman, 1994).

The findings of this study, likewise, demonstrate the complex (and frequently conflictual) relationship between the different dimensions of women's lives. This interdependent, though often incompatible, relationship was most clearly elucidated in the tension between respondents' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as professional (and

business) woman, and as wives and mothers. However, it must be noted that this is not just an issue for wives and mothers, but for all working people (indeed, there is an emerging literature on the conflict between home and work lives as experienced by men, see in particular Franklin, 1996). This theme permeated women's accounts, from their earliest career decisions, to their decisions to leave their organisations, to set up in business, and finally to their visions of the future. In the analysis of the experience of business more specifically, it was central to respondents' fears and expectations upon embarking on self-employment, as explored in Chapter 7, and crucially to the extent to which they felt supported, both materially and emotionally, detailed in section 8.4. This dynamic, sometimes conflictual relationship between women's personal and professional lives is aptly illustrated in the tension between career and "lifestyle" discourses embedded within women's accounts of their careers.

However, the holistic perspective taken in this thesis involved more than recognising the importance of respondents' personal lives in their experiences of business. As outlined in section 3.4.3 of the methodology chapter, it also involved looking *diachronically*, at the process of moving from employment to self-employment and how women constructed that transition from the vantage point of self-employment; and *synchronically*, at key decisions and stages, and the factors which most influenced them (Wiseman, 1974; Reinharz, 1992; Plummer, 1983). As regards the experience of business ownership/management, then, the study explored how respondents made sense of their transition from organisational employment through to self-employment, looking at once to the past and to the future; and it also focused more specifically on significant events or issues : for example, the decision to become self-employed, their fears and expectations as they set up their new businesses, and factors which most significantly impacted on their experiences of self-employment once their businesses were up and running. Taken together, these two perspectives provide rich insights into women's experiences and perceptions of enterprise.

Finally, I see a holistic perspective as encompassing both structural and agentic levels of experience. In contrast to traditional approaches to entrepreneurship which tended to be positivist in their orientation, this study explored the ways in which respondents made sense of the structural situations in which they found themselves, and their subsequent

action. Indeed, embedded in women's accounts of their business experiences was an active dialogue between their structural circumstances (as women with previous organisational experience, working in specific sectors, in light of particular domestic arrangements), and their interpretations of these circumstances. The discussion about whether self-employment can be seen as a real alternative for women, section 9.3, is a case in point. In this struggle to make sense of their situations, as professionals, small business owner/managers, colleagues, friends, wives, mothers and daughters, the issue of identity emerges as central. Indeed, it is a theme which permeates the above analysis, and is discussed more explicitly in section 8.7, which highlights the significance of women's occupational identities in their experience of self-employment. In particular, that section outlines the importance of respondents' previous organisations, their professional and social networks, their domestic circumstances and the physical spaces in which they work, in the construction of their identities as working women. In seeking to understand women's experiences of self-employment, I see this issue as fundamental.

This study thus makes a number of significant contributions to our existing understandings of women and entrepreneurship. First, it raises questions about the usefulness of existing approaches to and definitions of "the entrepreneur", definitions which ultimately serve to differentiate and exclude. It was suggested that more useful models, such as the discourse perspective applied in this study, would take the lives of real women and men as their starting point, seeking not to mask diversity and ambiguity, but to better understand them. Second, the study highlights the extent to which respondents' previous experiences of organisations significantly impacted on their decisions to become self-employed, their fears and expectations of self-employment, and the day-to-day reality of small business ownership/management. In so doing, the research not only adds a new dimension to what is already known about women entrepreneurs, but, reiterating the point made above, at the same time it illustrates the importance of acknowledging the diversity of women entrepreneurs, and of constructing theories which can accommodate and shed light on this difference. Finally, the study contributes to emerging perspectives on women and entrepreneurship (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Carter and Cannon, 1992; Allen and Truman, 1993a). Specifically, consistent with other feminist research into women entrepreneurs (Allen and Truman, 1993b; Epstein, 1993; Richardson and Hartshorn, 1993), it recognises the intense and inextricable

relationship between women (and men's) personal and professional lives, and seeks to integrate both perspectives into its theoretical analysis. In addition, it has examined women's experiences of self-employment both diachronically and synchronically. Thus, it looked at women's accounts as narratives, and explored the ways in which, during their interviews, they reflected on and made sense of the process of business ownership/management. At the same time, it examined the constellation of factors which were seen as impacting on particular events and stages along the way. Finally, the study provides insights not only into the ways in which women responded to the particular structural situations in which they found themselves, but the complex ways in which they negotiated with, and made sense of these situations. In constructing their particular versions of reality, respondents constructed themselves. Thus, emerging from the data was the centrality of women's occupational identities, their sense of themselves as working women, in their experience of self-employment.

9.7 Theorising Women's Move from Employment to Self-employment

Having thus considered the contribution of this study to the literatures reviewed in Chapter 2, this discussion now turns to the broad aim of the research:

"to develop a theoretical understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women who leave their positions within organisations and set up their own businesses".

The findings of this study were analysed in Chapters 4 through 8. The purpose of this discussion is not to reiterate these findings, but to draw them together in order to create a theoretical model for understanding the process as a whole. Such a model, while not explicitly detailing each stage in the process, must be able to account for the issues raised in the analysis, and for the diversity of respondents and their experiences. At the same time, it must seek to accommodate the central themes which emerged as permeating the analysis, incorporating both the structural circumstances in which women were positioned, and the ways in which these were made sense of, and acted upon, by the women themselves.

9.7.1 Change and Continuity: related aspects of the same process

As suggested in section 8.7, reflecting on the data analysis and the underlying patterns which have emerged, the themes of change and continuity can be seen as permeating women's accounts of moving from employment to self-employment. While typically understood as dichotomous, in the data generated in this study, they seem to exist in parallel, as related aspects of the same process.

This relationship is very clearly elucidated in the stories of the NHS sister who became an owner/manager of a nursing home, and the race relations officer who moved to management consultancy. As described elsewhere, for the nurse the move from the health service involved radical changes in her perceptions of her roles and responsibilities, her professional networks, and her sense of competence and confidence. However, her enduring commitment to basic nursing care, and traditional nursing values remained constant. It was this commitment that led her to resign from the NHS, and to set up a home where she could *"give [her] best to these people"*, and which, at the time of interview, continued to influence her ideas about the future. Indeed, it may well have been this commitment, and her abiding sense of herself as a nurse, that enabled her to cope with the change, and sustained her through the difficult period of transition.

The management consultant, however, had no such vision, no such enduring occupational identity. Indeed, in her account she described the process of "becoming" a management consultant, and in particular the point at which she became aware that such a change had taken place. However, with this change in how she saw herself professionally, came the realisation that there were indeed many similarities between the two work contexts; in particular, she recognised for the first time that she already had many of the skills and capabilities necessary for management consultancy. Thus she became aware of the continuity between the past, present and future, and embarked on her new business venture feeling confident and competent. Significantly, describing her future plans, this respondent did not see management consultancy as her final career destination. Rather, in her quest for personal and professional development and challenge, she anticipated further career change, and the appropriation of new

occupational identities. In contrast to the nurse whose career transition could be understood, in part, in terms of her enduring professional identity and her commitment to certain professional values, in the case of this respondent it was her desire for personal and professional growth and stimulation that provided an underlying logic to her career story.

Although the specific patterns of change and continuity illustrated in these stories are very different, the relationship between these processes, and the sense that they are mutually dependent, permeates the data generated in this study. It appears, then, that these interrelated processes, and the significance of the past in the making sense of the present and future, are central to our understanding of the move from employment and self-employment. They must, therefore, be taken into account in the development of theory in this area.

9.7.2 Synthesis and Transformation : understanding the transition from employment to self-employment

Two models for understanding women's move from employment to self-employment are thus introduced. The first, figure 9.1, is a generic model, providing a skeletal framework for understanding this career transition. Figure 9.2 incorporates into this generic model the range of factors, analysed in Chapters 4 through 8, which women in this study identified as impacting on and central to their experiences and perceptions. These models are considered in turn in the following sections.

<u>The generic model</u>

A provisional, generic model for understanding women's transition from employment to self-employment is introduced overleaf (figure 9.1).

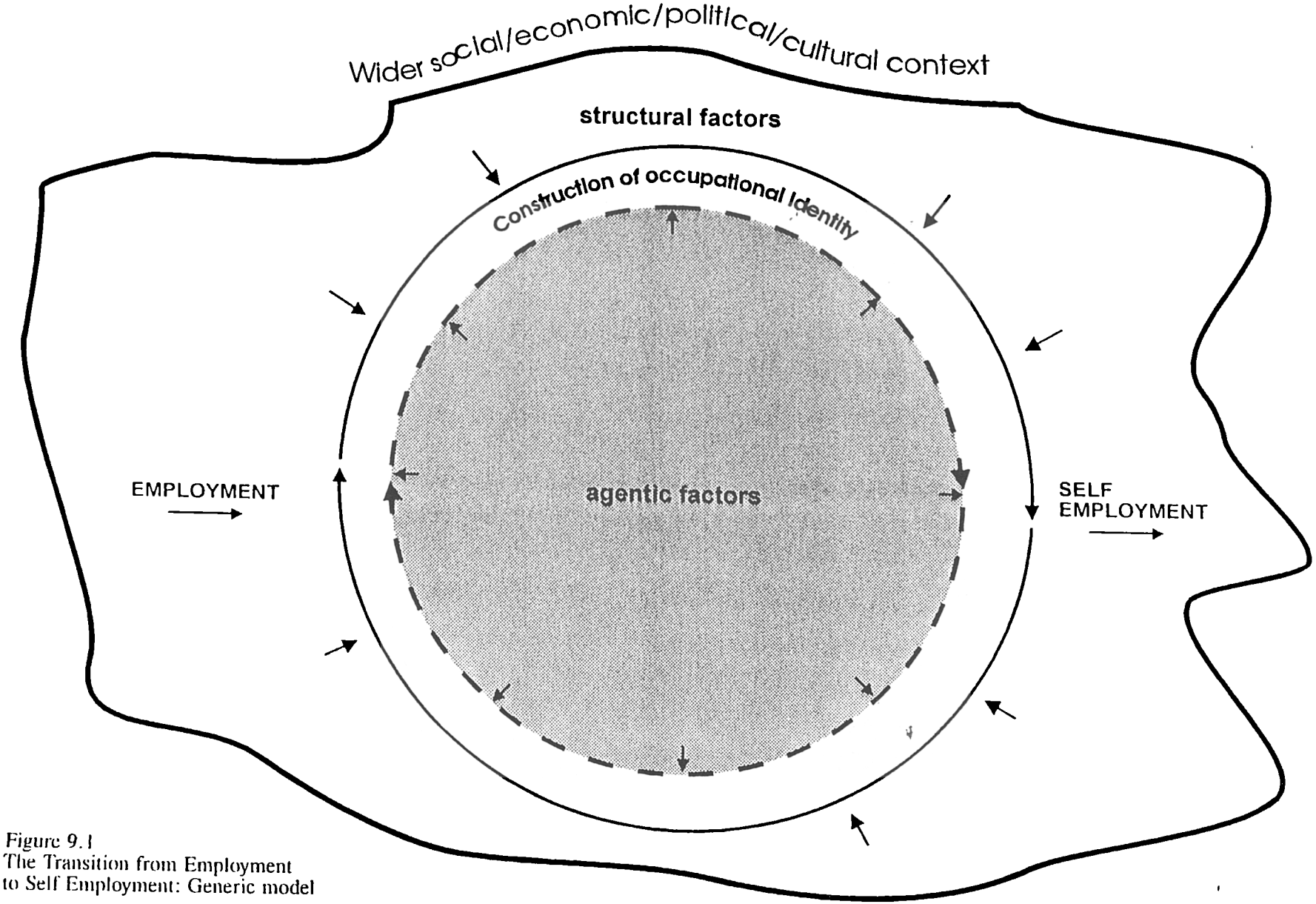

Figure 9.1
The Transition from Employment
to Self Employment: Generic model

Like Nicholson and West's "transition cycle" (1988), the model is cyclical in form. Thus the move from employment to self-employment is not seen as a strictly linear process, moving neatly forward from one employment context to another. Rather, as illustrated by the solid line, it is an iterative process, involving both change and continuity, and incorporating the past (employment) in respondents' experiences and perceptions of the present (self-employment) and their visions of the future. It must be noted, however, that although it incorporates respondents' ideas about the future, the model does not attempt to project into the future, or to theorise about what might happen after the time of interview.

As emphasised throughout this thesis, my interest was in exploring women's transition from employment to self-employment in terms of the dynamic interplay between structural and agentic dimensions of experience, consistent with theorists such as Nicholson and West (1988, 1989), Gowler and Legge (1989), Holmwood (1995) and Hekman (1995). Sociologists have long debated the definitions of these concepts, and the nature of their relationship (Layder, 1994; Craib, 1992, 1984; Archer, 1982; Giddens, Bhaskar, New; Mous; Bryant and Jary,); this debate is considered in Chapter 11. The definition of structure which being used in this thesis, and upon which this model is grounded, is broadly based on the work of Bhaskar, who defines structure (which he terms "society") as "the ever present condition... and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency" (1979, p. 43). This concept is further clarified by Layder's definition of social structure as: "the structured pattern of social relationships (over time and space) that give societies their form and definition" (Layder, 1994, p. 140). The definition of agency, or individual action, can be seen in Giddens' terms as "a continuous flow, a process which can't be broken down into reasons, motives, intentions, etc. to be treated as separate entities. Rather, it is a process which we constantly monitor and 'rationalise'... The crucial feature of action is that it is not determined" (Craib, 1992, p. 34). In the model, the structural dimension is depicted as existing outside of, and impacting on the process of moving from employment to self-employment. Significantly, these structural factors are themselves illustrated as existing within their wider social/economic/political/cultural context.

As argued throughout the analysis, equally important are the ways in which women make sense of their structural circumstances, and their subsequent action. This agentic dimension is represented inside of the circle. And just as the structural factors were seen above as impacting on individual action, so too do agentic factors influence women's structural circumstances.

Moving on, the issue of occupational identity has emerged as central to our understanding of women's experiences and perceptions of moving from employment to self-employment. As explained in section 8.7, the findings generated in this study illustrate the complexity of factors, personal as well as professional, which contributed to respondents' developing sense of themselves as working women. This developing identity, as suggested above, can at once be understood in terms of the processes of change and continuity. Considering the dialogical relationship between structural and agentic levels, section 9.6.3 above suggested that it is in the negotiation between these two dimensions of experience that women's occupational identities are constructed. In the model, this process of identity construction is illustrated by the dotted line, positioned just inside the circle, at the nexus of structure and agency. Occupational identity can thus be seen as both representative and constitutive of the structural situations in which women find themselves. And just as these situations, and women's experiences and perceptions of them, change and evolve, so too the ways in which they make sense of themselves as working women are illustrative of this dynamic process.

The detailed model

The model outlined above can thus provide insights into our understanding of the process of moving from employment to self-employment *generally*. A more detailed model, incorporating the *specific* issues and factors identified as significant by the respondents themselves, is introduced overleaf (figure 9.2).

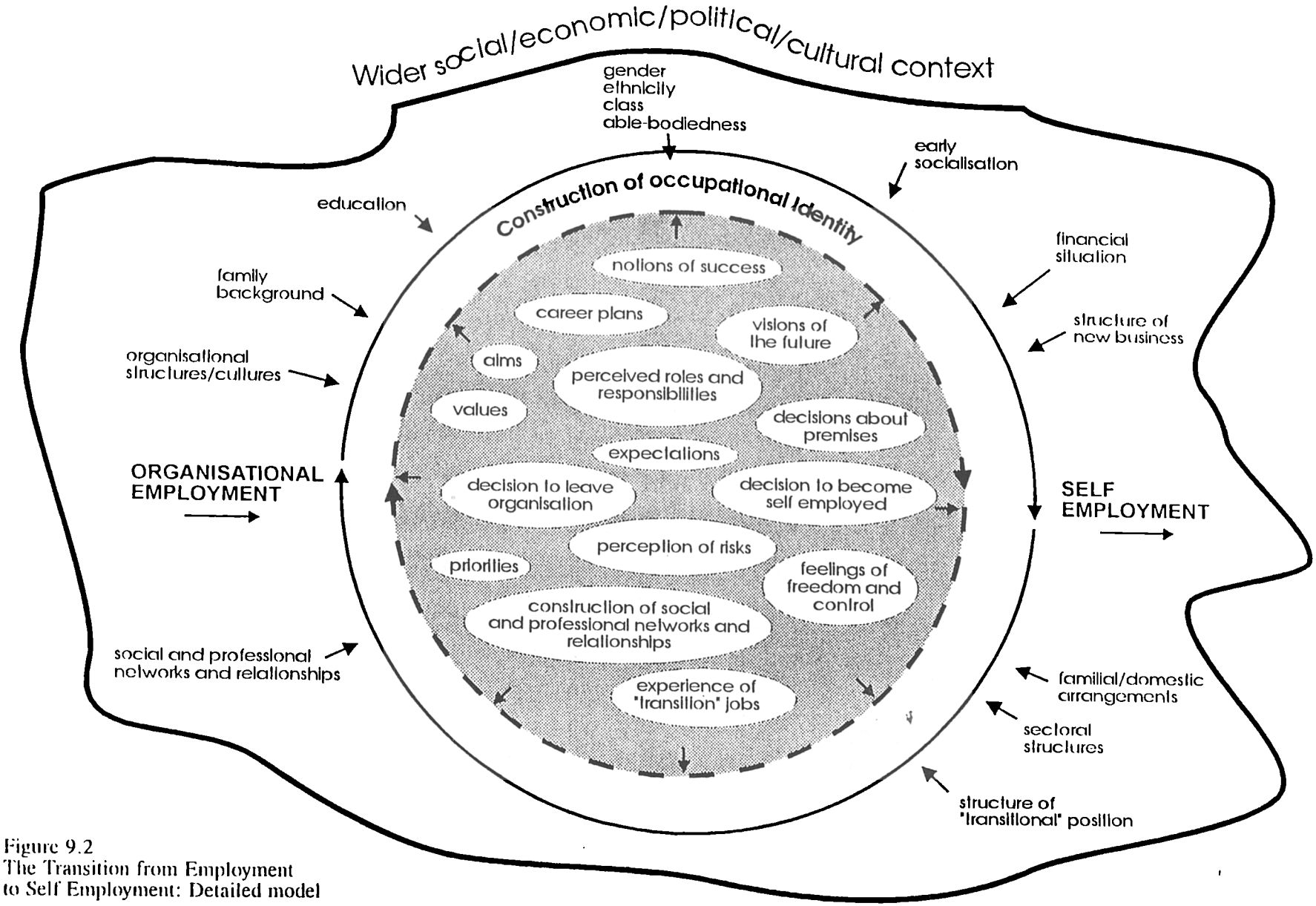

Figure 9.2
The Transition from Employment
to Self Employment: Detailed model

Taking first the structural dimension, shown in the model on the outside of the circle, in their career stories respondents described their structural circumstances in terms of a number of factors, including: family background, education, early socialisation, organisational structures and cultures, the structure of their new businesses, familial and domestic arrangements, social and professional networks and relationships, and sectoral structures. As noted above, these are depicted as existing within a wider social/economic/political/cultural context.

Here it is important to clarify a number of points. First, as illustrated in the data analysis, the experience of being female was seen to impact on women's experience of career transition at every stage. As far as the model is concerned, then, on one hand gender could be seen as integral to each of the structural factors outlined above. However, my concern is that in doing so, it could quite easily become invisible; subsumed within each individual category, it could quite simply disappear. Thus, I have decided to include gender as an important structural factor in its own right. This is not to suggest that it is no longer integral to our understanding of all the other variables, but simply to emphasise its salience. Second, a note about "ethnicity" and "class". As explained in Section 3.4, this sample was largely white, largely middle class. While I recognise the potential significance of such factors, the limitations of the sample were such that they could not be explored in any detailed way. However, notwithstanding these limitations, it is nevertheless important to include ethnicity and class in seeking to create a model for understanding women's transition from employment to self-employment. Third, although difficult to represent pictorially, I see these structural factors as existing not in isolation, but as co-existing - clashing and overlapping in a dynamic relationship with one another.

Turning to the agentic dimension, depicted on the inside of the circle, as detailed in the analysis respondents identified such issues as: career planning, priorities, values, notions of success and career aims, perceived roles and responsibilities (personal and professional), the decision to leave the organisation, the decision to become self-employed, the risks they foresaw in embarking on self-employment and their expectations of their new employment context, the construction of social and professional networks, decisions about business premises, the extent to which they

experienced self-employment as liberating and empowering, and their ideas and visions of the future. These, like the structural factors identified above, should be seen not as existing in isolation, but as interrelated - sometimes mutually enriching, and sometimes in conflict.

The factors noted above, both structural and agentic, were identified by the women in this study as crucial to their accounts of career transition. However, this is not to suggest that these are the only possible factors which might impact on an individual's experience of moving from employment to self-employment. Rather, the model is designed in such a way that it can incorporate future research findings, adding, omitting and substituting specific data as appropriate. Similarly, while the detailed model includes the range of salient issues (which, as illustrated by the findings, must themselves be seen as polysemic), it is important to note that these were not relevant to each and every respondent, nor did they carry equal weight in individual's career stories. For each individual, then, certain factors and issues will emerge, with others receding into the background. Thus, while the model does not presuppose a particular "route" through these factors, it does allow for the mapping of each individual's account, at a particular moment in time.

As emphasised throughout this discussion, a model for understanding women's move from employment to self-employment must not be unitary, but must be able to accommodate difference. Providing insights into the complex and dynamic relationship between structural and agentic levels of experience, and between the key issues and factors in a woman's experience and perception of career transition, I see this model as encompassing such diversity.

9.7.3 Applying the model: two empirical illustrations

To demonstrate how this framework might be used empirically, in the section which follows it is applied to the cases of two respondents: Elizabeth who worked as a university catering manager and left to set up a "pop catering" business; and Joan, the nurse mentioned earlier who left her Sister's post within the NHS to become the owner/manager of a nursing home. While Elizabeth's career story could be described as

entrepreneurial in its orientation, Joan's is permeated by a professional career discourse. Each of these accounts is characterised by a particularly strong - but different career orientation; emphasizing a range of social structures and agentic features. Applying the model to these two cases thus serves to illustrate its ability to accommodate diversity.

In the sections which follow, the relevant aspects of each account are outlined diagrammatically, and further explained textually.

A snapshot representation of an entrepreneurial career

In figure 9.3 (overleaf), the model for understanding women's transition from employment to self-employment is applied to Elizabeth, a respondent who left her position as catering manager in a university to set up a catering business for touring pop bands. Relevant elements have been selected from framework 9.2, and tailored more specifically to Elizabeth's case.

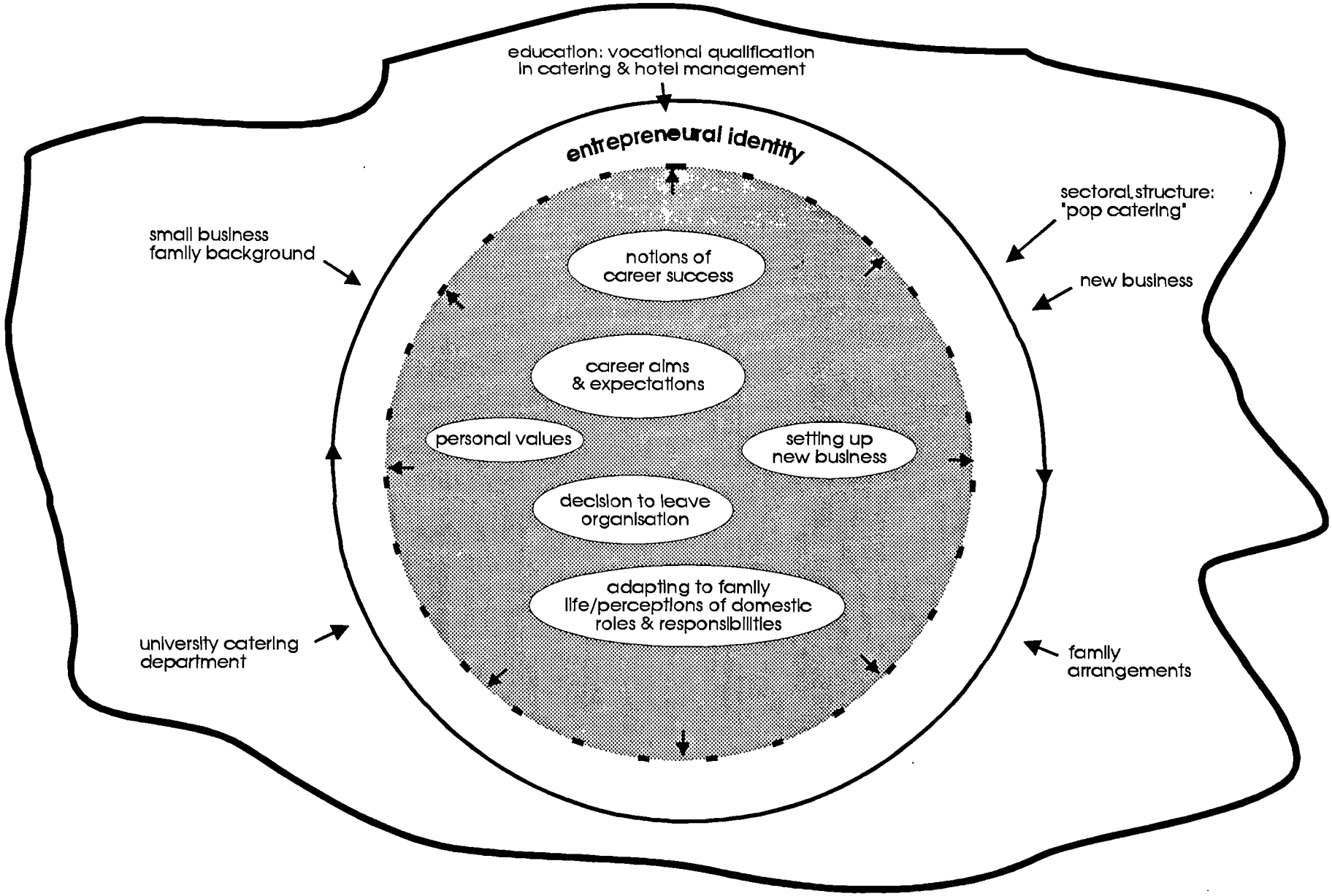

Figure 9.3 The transition from Employment to Self-Employment: a snapshot representation of an entrepreneural career

As regards the structural level, those social structures which emerged from Elizabeth's account as most significant include: family background; education; the university in which she worked prior to setting up her business; her occupational sector (that is, pop band catering); the business she and her husband established; and her own domestic situation. On the agentic level, the most salient features include: personal values; career plans and expectations; notions of success; reasons for leaving her university position and the decision to become self-employed; the setting up of the new business and establishment of particular roles and responsibilities; and adapting to family life - incuding her peceptions of her roles and responsibilities as a wife and mother. On a general level, what comes over strongly in Elizabeth's account is the degree of consistency between these structural and agentic dimensions. From her descriptions of her early childhood through to her ideas about the future, there is a strong emphasis on business ownership and its attendant values: the need for freedom, independence and flexibility; the importance of making money for oneself; the willingness to take risks; and the value of strong and stable family life. These values and attitudes were central to Elizabeth's early family life, and reproduced through her own decisions about education, career and family.

This apparent continuity in Elizabeth's account can beexamined by investigating the interplay between structural and agentic dimensions, as outlined in the diagram. On a structural level, Elizabeth spoke of the significance of her family, and of coming from a small business background. Both of Elizabeth's parents worked in the family business, and she explained that the family was, to a certain extent, organised around the needs of the business (in terms of day-to-day arrangements, holidays, parental roles and responsibilities, etc.). In addition, she described how from very early on her parents attempted to instill in her the importance of being financially independent; indeed, even as a child she was encouraged to work and to make her own money. In terms of agentic aspects, Elizabeth explained how as a young girl she had embraced these values, and how as a teenager she had started up a number of small businesses, always trying to find new and more innovative ways to earn money. As regards her early career plans, although she did not have a specific venture in mind, Elizabeth knew that ultimately she did not

want to work for anyone else, and that one day she would run her own business. Although she was successful at school, Elizabeth chose not to pursue academic qualifications. Instead, upon leaving school she enrolled on a vocational course in hotel management and catering, a course which was designed to accommodate students who intended to eventually go into business for themselves. Thus, Elizabeth found herself within an educational structure in which the small business values embedded within her early family life were reinforced. As part of her educational programme Elizabeth took a placement with a "rock'n'roll" catering business. It was on this placement that she met Vince, who she would one day marry and go into business with. Elizabeth and Vince started to make plans for setting up their own pop catering business.

Although upon leaving college Elizabeth would have liked to jumped straight into the business venture, she was constrained by a number of factors resulting from the structure of the "pop catering" sector more generally. First, there was the financial constraint. Setting up such a business would require a significant capital investment which at that point Elizabeth and Vince were unable to make. Therefore, they had little alternative but to work as employees until they were in a stronger financial position. Second, because the sector is based largely on "word-of-mouth" recommendations, before setting up such a business, it is essential to have robust personal contacts in the sector and the pop world more generally. Although Vince had been touring for a few years and was beginning to establish such contacts, they knew that it would be some time before the business would be viable. Third, at that time the rock'n'roll world was very male. Apart from band members' wives and girlfriends who sometimes did a bit of cooking in the back of the bus, there were very few women on tour. Although on her placement Elizabeth had worked in a team and experienced few problems in this regard, she was a bit concerned about working on her own in such a context. For this reason, it made sense for Vince to start, and for Elizabeth to continue in her steady university position, with a view to joining him as soon as the business could support them both.

Elizabeth thus found a job as manager in the catering department of a university. Her attitude towards this job was instrumental - it would provide some useful experience, and serve as a stop gap until she could join Vince in the business on a full-time basis. Up to this point Elizabeth had experienced a level of consistency between the various social

structures (that is, most specifically, family and educational structures, as suggested above), in which she was situated, and between these structures and her own values, expectations, and choices. However, she described how life within the university bureaucracy was at odds with her experiences. She explained that the values and expectations implicit in the service context of a university (which she described as emphasizing stability and conformity) were in stark contrast to those imposed by her family background. In terms of her own values, career plans and ambitions, she found that the university structure offered little autonomy, limited financial prospects and restricted opportuntities for career development. However, the job did provide Elizabeth with a secure position from which she and Vince could establish their new business. Thus, at the same time as she experienced the university structure as stifling and constraining, she also recognized that it enabled her to fulfil her ambition of self-employment. This relationship between constraint and enablement is further considered in section 11.2.2. Elizabeth only ever saw her university employment as a temporary arrangement; as intended, she resigned as soon as this business became viable.

The discussion to this point has focused on the sense Elizabeth made of the social structures in which she was situated (family, education, business sector, organisation), and the degree of consistency between the values and attitudes embedded in these structures, and Elizabeth's own perceptions and expectations. However, as the arrows situated within the agentic dimension suggest, this is not intended to be a deterministic model. On the contrary, individual agency must be seen, not simply as constructed by structure, but also constitutive of structure. This concept of the duality of structure (Giddens; Bhaskar) is considered in greater detail in Chapter 11. In the context of this discussion, however, the key point is that this relationship between structure and agency must not be seen as one-way, but as mutual and reciprocal. This is perhaps best illustrated when one considers the construction of the new business. At the time of transition, this process could be considered a feature of individual agency (defined above as "a continuous flow, a process which can't be broken down into reasons, motives, intentions, etc. to be treated as separate entities. Rather, it is a process which we constantly monitor and 'rationalise'" (Craib, 1992, p. 143). However, as the business derives an identity, as it takes on a particular shape, embodies a set of values and, as it impacts and imposes on others (ie. employees, customers, suppliers), it becomes an

aspect of structure (defined earlier in this section as "the structured pattern of social relationships (over time and space) that give societies their form and definition" (Layder, 1994, p. 140).

A similar pattern emerges in relation to the family. On one hand, as Elizabeth and her husband have children, work out their respective roles and responsibilities as parents, and essentially come to terms with family life, the construction of the family could be considered a feature of individual agency. However, it could also be understood as a social structure, as the context in which individual agency is enacted, serving to both constrain and enable such action (Giddens, 1979; 1984. See also Chapter 11 for a discussion of structure as at once constraining and enabling). This is not to suggest that structure and agency are the same thing (Bhaskar, 1983). On the contrary, that they represent different dimensions is central to the proposed theoretical framework for understanding women's move from employment to self-employment. However, the key point is that their relationship must not be understood as a dualism, with structure on one end of the continuum, and agency on the other. Rather, as indicated in the model, it is a much more fluid, more permeable, circular relationship which is being proposed.

In my view, whether something is considered an aspect of structure or of agency depends largely on the focus of the particular observer. That is, one could explore the process of setting up the business, as a feature of human agency, or conversely one could investigate how the businesses itself serves, as a social structure, to constrain or enable. It is important to note, however, that neither the agentic process nor the social structure exists in isolation from the other. Unfortunately, this fluidity also makes such a framework quite difficult to apply empirically, and to describe textually. Indeed, one of the criticisms of both Bhaskar and Giddens, as noted in Chapter 11, is their dearth of empirical illustrations, resulting in theories which *make sense* theoretically, but become a a complex web of shifting interrelationships when applied to real situations - relationships which can be difficult to capture in graphic forms, and also to describe textually. In my view this difficulty does not mean that we should not attempt such analyses, but it does illustrate their inherent complexity.

Returning to the setting up of their new business, then, on the level of agency Elizabeth talked about how she saw the venture fitting in with her career aims and expectations, and with her notions of career success. Shortly after starting up, Elizabeth had a baby. Thus, at the same time as she and Vince attempted to find the appropriate "shape" for their business, defining their respective roles and reponsibilities and outlining plans for its development, they underwent a similar process in relation to their domestic life. Elizabeth explained how most of the time these two processes unfolded in synchrony - dovetailing together and making the necessary accommodations where necessary

Although Elizabeth and Vince had set up their business from "scratch", this is not to suggest that this was in isolation from structural factors. In describing her experiences of self-employment, the factors which emerged as most significant were her business sector, and Elizabeth and Vince's domestic situation. Initially, the pop catering industry provided a kind of "blueprint" against within which they were able to construct their particular business niche. While at first they felt constrained by certain aspects of this structure (in particular, certain pricing structures, and the casual, non-professional culture of the sector generally); indeed, Elizabeth suggested that their attempt to create business that did not conform to the industry's norms was at first a source of considerable tension. However, in time Elizabeth and Vince began to carve out their own particular business identity: an identity which not only encompassed certain professional standards, but which also reflected Elizabeth and Vince's values and attitudes, and their particular domestic situation.

As regards their domestic arrangements, in the previous paragraph it was suggested that, in setting up their new businesses and adapting to their changing domestic situations, Elizabeth and Vince attempted to create family and business arrangements that would be mutually beneficial. Once these structures were in place (though of course they continued to change and evolve), for the most part Elizabeth found her professional and personal arrangements to be consistent and mutually enriching - for the most part she was able to be both a "good mother" and a "good businesswoman". However, there were times when they clashed, particularly during the transition periods - for example, in the days immediately preceding a tour she said that she often felt guilty at the prospect of leaving her children for an extended period. Apart from the conflict arising during these

transitions, Elizabeth felt that the relative conflict between family and business arrangements was due to the fact that she and Vince both worked in the business and at home, sharing out responsibilities equally in both arenas.

Central to the notion of "the duality of structure"is the process by which social structures are both reproduced and transformed through human agency (Giddens, 1976, 1984; Bhaskar, 1976, 1983; see also Chapter 11). As regards the reproduction of social structures, the significance of Elizabeth's family background was noted earlier. Of particular relevance was the emphasis on independence, freedom and the value of working for oneself. Elizabeth seemed to embrace these "entrepreneurial" values; indeed, they were seen as central to her career expectations, her notions of success, and to her occupational choices. As a mother and a successful businesswoman, Elizabeth explained how she is trying to instill (or reproduce) the same values in her own young children.

As far as the process of transformation is concerned, Elizabeth suggested that since she and Vince started up their business, the industry had changed significantly: the market had become much more differentiated, with more firms delivering a higher quality service; women were represented in far greater number and were not subject to the sort of male-dominated cultures that had prevailed in the industry's early days; and the industry as a whole had aged. It was no longer a business full of young single men, but of men and women with families and domestic responsibilties. Elizabeth saw their business as influential in this change process. Although they had consciously not set out to transform the industry (Giddens, 1984; also see Chapter 11 for a discussion of "unintended consequences"), she explained how over the years their business had become a benchmark for other newly established rock'n'roll catering ventures.

Elizabeth's move from employment to self-employment can thus be seen in terms of this interrelationship between the salient structural and agentic features of her experience. As suggested at the outset, there is a certain consistency in Elizabeth's career story. Indeed, permeating her account is an emphasis on entrepreneurial" values and attitudes. These values were described as central to early family life, embraced and articulated by Elizabeth herself in her career plans, expectations, her notions of success, and in her

educational and employment decisions. Finally, they were reproduced in the structures and cultures implicit in her own business and family arrangements. As noted above, it is in the negotiation between structural and agentic dimensions of experience that women's occupational identities are constructed. In the model, this process of identity construction is illustrated by the dotted line, positioned just inside the circle, at the nexus of structure and agency. Whereas a number of respondents struggled with their occupational identity as they moved from employment to self-employment, for Elizabeth her sense of herself as a businesswoman persisted throughout. At the start of her interview, talking about her teenage business ventures, Elizabeth explained how she had "*always* been an entrepreneur". And at the end, discussing how much longer she envisaged touring with the bands she added, "and when I finally stop, I'm going to open a wonderful dress shop. When I close my eyes I can just see what it's going to be like..."

A Snapshot of a Professional Career

Whereas Elizabeth's account revealed considerable consistency within and between structural and agentic dimensions, Joan's, illustrated in Figure 9.4 (overleaf), was characterised by both consistency and conflict.

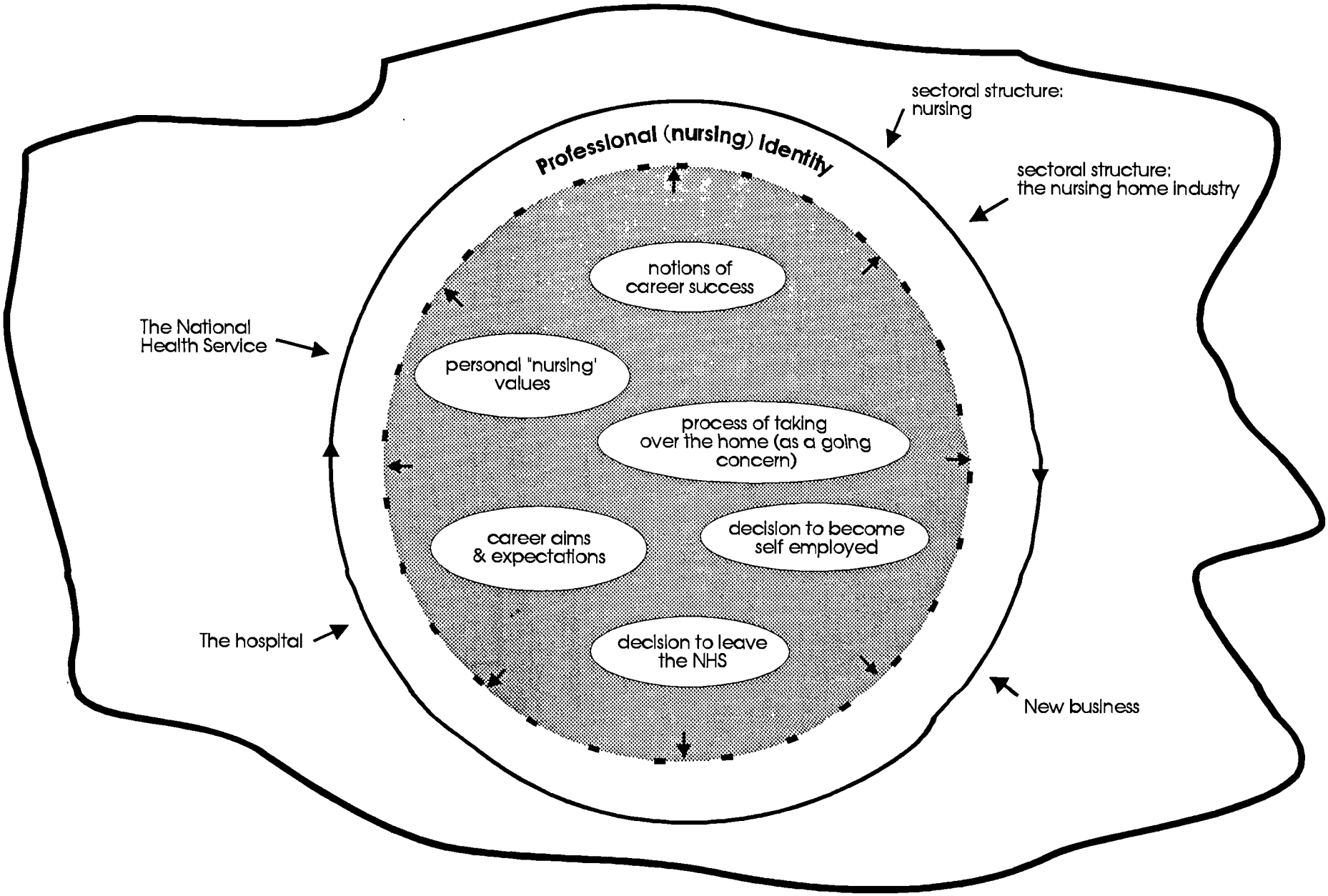

Figure 9.4 The transition from Employment to Self-Employment: a snapshot representation of a professional career

Joan was an NHS nurse who became disillusioned with changes in the Health Service, and in public sector nursing, and left to become an owner/manager of a nursing home. As illustrated above, in Elizabeth's case personal circumstances emerged as central to the way in which her career developed, and her perceptions of this development. In contrast, personal and domestic factors played a much less significant role in Joan's career story. For Joan, the social structures which emerged as most salient included: the National Health Service, in particular the hospital in which she worked as a night sister; the nursing sector; the nursing home which she subsequently owned and managed; and the nursing/residential home sector more generally. The most salient agentic factors included: her personal values - which Joan described as "traditional nursing values"; her career aims and expectations; decision to leave the Health Service, the decision to become self-employed; and the process of taking over the home (as a going concern).

It was suggested that Elizabeth's account of her career transition had an explicit entrepreneurial orientation. In contrast, it was a professional career discourse, more specifically a nursing discourse, which permeated Joan's story. While this discourse was embedded within the agentic features identified above, there was considerable tension between her perceptions of nursing and of herself as a nurse, on one hand, and what had come to be expected of nurses in the organisations and sectors in which she worked, on the other: tension, thus, in the interplay between thse agentic featurers and the social structures in which she was situated.

Joan described nursing as her vocation. Focusing first on the level of individual agency, embarking on her career she embraced a set of values - caring, patience, a concern for individuals and families, warmth, sensitivity - which she saw as central to the nursing profession. As regards her career aims and expectations, she wanted to rise to the top of her profession - in terms of skills and expertise, as well as status. Joan anticipated spending her working life within the NHS, and sought promotion where possible; at the time of leaving, she had achieved a senior nursing post with considerable responsibility. Turning to the relationship between these agentic processes, and the social structures in which she worked, during most of her time within the Health Service Joan experienced a high level of consistency between her own values, aims and expectations, those of the nursing sector, and of the Health Service. Within those structures, she felt that she could

achieve her professional aspirations, and saw professional development as entirely consistent with advancement within the NHS hierarchy.

By the mid-1980's, however, Joan explained that the Health Service had begun to change - it was becoming much more competitive and more business-like. She saw these changes as fundamentally incompatible with her own professional values. Likewise the nursing sector was moving in a direction which she did not support: she felt that its increasingly academic focus, with its emphasis on *knowledge* rather than *skills*, was serving to undermine its traditional commitment to caring for individual patients. While there was a certain consistency in the changes initiated in the Health Service and the nursing profession, Joan described a growing gulf between these structures and her own understandings of nursing. Joan experienced these new structures as highly constraining, and was finding it very difficult to maintain her professional standards within them. She described her resignation from the NHS as a direct result of the tension between these structural changes, and her own perceptions of what being a nurse meant - in terms of attitudes and values, as well as professional practices. Joan explained that it was her desire to re-establish these nursing values and practices that led her to purchase a nursing home. A brief note, though, about this notion of structural constraint. As mentioned above, and detailed in Chapter 11, central to the conceptualisation of structure and agency upon which this thesis is based is the mutual relationship between constraint and enablement (Giddens, 1976, 1984). In this case, Joan explained how restricted she had felt by the changes within the NHS. However, reflecting on her career transition at the time of interview she insisted that the situation had actually been fortuitous - it had prompted her to make a radical break with the NHS, and to embark on a venture which, in the end, was very successful, and which gave her tremendous satisfaction.

As noted above, in seeking to understand women's transition from self-employment in terms of the "duality of structure", the fact that in many cases the businesses did not actually exist before, and were actually *created* by the respondents themselves, raised issues about what we consider to be aspects of structure and agency. In Joan's case, however, the nursing home *did* exist prior to her decision to become self-employed. On the morning the purchase was completed, she stepped into a home that was up-and-running. As noted above, Joan's motivation in buying the home was that she saw it as a

route back to "real nursing". However, on that first day she quickly realised that this was a *business*, not a hospital, and that she was the owner. She also discovered that as the owner, she was legally prohibited from practicing as a nurse within the home. As a nurse who was not allowed to practice nursing, and who instead found herself running a business, Joan felt highly insecure and incompetent. In terms of this theoretical framework, here again this tension can be understood as a conflict between Joan's structural situation, and her own perceptions and understandings.

Thus far this analysis has focused on the degree of consistency between the social structures in which Joan was situated and the agentic features of her experience, and in particular on the constraining aspects of those structures. As emphasised in the case of Elizabeth above, however, this model is not intended to be deterministic. On the contrary, also significant is the extent to which social structures are constituted by individual agency. Here, Joan's influence on the development of the nursing home is an apt illustration. Once the initial shock of running the businesses had subsided, Joan set about introducing changes which, she felt, reflected her "nursing values". At the same time, although restricted from formal nursing, she found ways of applying her nursing skills and competencies in the new context, not only in a direct sense, but also through staff training and development. Furthermore, embarking on this business venture she became part of an occupational sector which had acquired a highly dubious reputation. Joan was troubled at being associated with such a sector, and just as she set about transforming her own nursing home in accordance with her beliefs and values, so too she became involved in a local association of nursing home owners whose aim was to improve the sector's public image by establishing greater regulation and control.

Describing her visions of the future, Joan's aim was not to expand or develop the business, but to continue to provide her residents and families with the highest standard of care and personal attention. Thus, embedded in her thinking about the future were the same understandings, expectations and aspirations which had permeated her account of her career throughout. At the time of interview she expressed her pride in her achievements - in particular she was proud of the home that she had "re-created" in a way that was consistent with her own system of values - with how she saw herself. Central to Joan's accout of her career transition is the tension and contradiction in the

relationship between structural and agentic dimensions of her experience. However, in the negotiation between these dimensions Joan's sense of her own professional identity - her sense of herself as a nurse - remains constant.

9.8 Conclusion

This chapter has thus fulfilled two purposes. First, it detailed the specific contributions of this study to the literatures reviewed in chapter 2. Second, turning to the broad aim of the study, it introduced a theoretical model for understanding the experiences and perceptions of women who left their positions within organisations and set up their own businesses, applying this model to two empirical examples.

The chapter which follows will suggest possible directions for further research, and outline the conclusions of this study.

Chapter 10

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

Section 10.1 suggests possible directions for further research, while section 10.2 outlines the broad conclusions of this study.

10.1 Directions for Further Research

Research into this area could be very usefully developed on both substantive and methodological levels. On a substantive level, future research into the move from employment to self-employment could take a number of different directions. As suggested elsewhere, the women in this study were largely white, and largely middle class. While recognising the importance of ethnicity and social class, the limitations of this study were such that these issues were not examined in a detailed way. Therefore, work which focused explicitly on the experiences of women of colour, or of working class women, would contribute a new dimension to what is currently known about women's move from employment to self-employment. Such research would further enhance current debates on difference and diversity (Hearn and Parkin, 1993; Hekman, 1990; Walby, 1992; Wearing, 1994).

Second, permeating this analysis is the significance of the employment sector on the move from organisational employment to self-employment. As detailed in section 3.4, the respondents in this sample were drawn from a range of employment sectors, from health care to manufacturing. While this diversity yielded insights into the breath of women's experience, none of these sectors was explored in depth. The data generated in this study provided glimpses into the world of public relations, or hotel management, for example; however, because the data were so diverse, they did not provide us with sufficient information to construct rich, holistic pictures of these professional worlds. A study which focused exclusively on a particular sector would enhance our understandings of that occupational world, and at the same time shed further light on the importance of employment sector in the experience of self-employment.

Finally, for the reasons outlined in the literature review, I felt that a central focus on *women* was very important; and indeed, the experience of being female was seen as a central factor in respondents' career stories, and in particular in their move from organisational employment to self-employment. However, as emphasised throughout this thesis, I do not see the findings generated in this study as being exclusive to women. On the contrary, a critical look at traditional theoretical perspectives, the recognition of gender as a significant aspect of a person's experience of work (and life in general), and the construction of more adequate theoretical frameworks, are also relevant to men. In light of current research interest in men's employment, and in particular on their experiences of the relationship between personal and professional life (see for example Hearn, 1992; Franklin, 1996), I see a follow-up study on men as contributing to our understandings of the career experiences of both women and men.

The research could also be further developed on a methodological level. In particular, I feel that undertaking a discourse analysis, in an explicit way, would be illuminating. The notion of discourse as a potentially useful "analytical tool" was introduced in section 3.4.4. In considering the first research question, the concept of discourse was used as a lens through which to examine women's accounts of their careers generally, and in particular emerging patterns in their career stories. Subsequently, section 4.4 introduced the notion of professional, bureaucratic, entrepreneurial and self-development *career discourses*, and their interaction with other *family and lifestyle discourses*. These discourses, it was suggested, incorporate both structural and agentic dimensions of experience; indeed, it was argued that it is through discourse that the relationship between structure and agency is played out. As noted in that section and elsewhere in the analysis, central to the notion of discourse is that of identity - thus, in the struggle over meaning between the different career and lifestyle discourses, women construct (and re-construct) their occupational identities.

The concept of discourse thus emerged as central to the data analysis. Taking discourse analysis as an explicit methodological approach, and building on the findings generated in this study, future work could thus serve to develop existing discourse theory (Bakthin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992; Casey, 1993), and at the same time to further enhance our

understanding of the move from employment to self-employment. This could be a very powerful and exciting perspective.

10.2 Conclusions

This study set out to explore the experiences and perceptions of women who moved from employment to self-employment. More specifically, it sought, first, to contribute new empirical data to an under-researched area; second, to contribute to the literatures reviewed in chapter 2; third, to examine the specific questions outlined in at the end of chapter 3; and finally, to develop a theoretical model for understanding the transition from employment to self-employment.

Considering the study as a whole, four broad conclusions can be drawn. First, while the study set out to explore *career change*, the findings demonstrate that implicit in the process of *change* is that of *continuity*. Although the specific patterns of change and continuity discernible in women's accounts of their careers were very different, far from being seen as dichotomous, the study illuminates the mutual, and inextricable relationship between these two processes. Given this interrelatedness of change and continuity, the past emerges as central to women's experiences of the present, and to their perceptions of the future. Thus, the move from employment to self-employment is seen not as a linear progression, moving discretely from one stage to the next, but as an iterative process.

Second, emerging from the study is a sense that women's perceptions of their move from employment to self-employment, and the stories they told of that transition, must be understood in light of their particular vantage point. Thus, their circumstances at the time of interview were central to the sense they made of their careers at that time, and thus to the accounts which they constructed. Underpinning this perspective is a view of meaning-making as relational. The sense which women made of their organisations, then, can not be understood as simply "existing" in a kind of vacuum, but must be seen as inextricably linked to their experiences of self-employment. Likewise, respondents' sense of their professional roles and responsibilities were integrally related to their perceptions of their personal and domestic situations. In seeking to understand women's experiences

and perceptions of their transition to self-employment, these relationships must be explored explicitly, and taken into account in the construction of useful and relevant theoretical frameworks.

Third, this study took issue with approaches which tended to examine individuals' business and professional lives in isolation from their personal and domestic circumstances, and sought to examine women's move from employment to self-employment within the context of their lives more generally. As detailed in the analysis as well as in the subsequent discussion, the findings illustrated a dynamic, and frequently conflictual relationship between the personal and professional dimensions of women's lives. At the outset of the study I had considered this relationship on a structural level, in terms of balance and compromise, and finding ways of negotiating between the often incompatible demands of personal and professional lives. However, what emerged from the study was that equally important were the ways in which women made sense of this significant relationship. Consistent with the second point raised above, the meanings women made of their professional lives and circumstances were integrally related to the ways in which they constructed their personal circumstances. And importantly, as suggested in section 9.6, these perceptions impacted significantly on respondents' sense of themselves as working women.

Fourth, as outlined in section 2.6, this study took as its starting point the view that both structure and agency are central in the process by which people make sense of their worlds. Thus, it sought to examine not only the ways in which structural circumstances were represented through individual sense-making and action, but also the ways in which these circumstances were at the same time constructed by such thought and action. The findings generated in this study suggest that it is in the nexus between these two dimensions that individual realities are constructed, that individuals construct themselves. In describing their career transition, women talked at length about how they saw themselves, as professionals and, more generally, as women. Indeed, as detailed elsewhere, the construction of respondents' occupational identities emerged as a permeating theme in the analysis of their career stories. Consistent with the first point raised above, this process was seen as encompassing both change and continuity, incorporating women's interpretations and perceptions of the past and present, as well as

incorporating women's interpretations and perceptions of the past and present, as well as their ideas about the future.

The following issues thus emerge as central to our understanding of women's move from organisational employment to self-employment: the recognition of both change and continuity in the process of career transition; the notion of meaning as relational, and the significance of vantage point in the construction of meaning; the inextricability of personal and professional life; and the mutuality of structural and agentic dimensions of experience and their importance in the construction of occupational identity. Together, they will serve as a valuable starting point for further research into the transition from employment to self-employment.

Chapter eleven

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter considers the relationship between structure and agency, specifically focusing on the concept of structure which is being applied in this thesis. In particular, section 11.2 outlines Giddens' theory of structuration: his notion of the duality of structure and his conceptualizations of structure and agency, and considers important criticisms of his approach. Section 11.3 focuses on Bhaskar's transformational model of human activity, outlining in particular the ontological status of structure, and briefly noting the epistemological limitations of the model as outlined by Bhaskar himself. Section 11.4 considers the approach taken in this study, highlighting salient aspects of Giddens' and Bhaskar's perspectives.

11.1 Introduction

Emerging from respondents' accounts of their move from employment to self-employment was the significance of their external environments, the social/economic/cultural worlds in which they existed: their departments and organizations, their families, occupational sectors, and their communities more generally. Throughout the thesis, these have been referred to as aspects of "structure". The importance of this "structural" dimension of women's career transition was discussed in the data analysis, and illustrated theoretically in the models introduced in Chapter 9.

Thus far this structural/agentic framework has only been described in very general terms. Given the significance of the structure/agency debate within the sociological literature however, it is important, in this final chapter, to outline more specifically the position taken in this thesis. While a review of the this literature is clearly beyond the scope of the chapter, the contributions of Giddens (1976; 1979; 1984; 1991) and Bhaskar (1975; 1979;1983;1989) are particularly relevant to this study, and to the proposed theoretical models for understanding women's transition from employment to self-employment. As suggested, this model privileges neither structure nor agency, neither determinism nor voluntarism. Rather, it is based on a relationship between structure and agency which I have described as inextricable and mutually dependent. Thus, as Weick (1995) maintains, "people create their environments as those environments create them" (p. 34). Likewise, both Giddens and Bhaskar reject models of social action which dichotomize

structure and agency. Instead, Giddens' theory of structuration and Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity take as their starting point the interrelatedness of structure and agency, and the view that social processes - and the reproduction and transformation of social structures - must be seen as both constitutive of and constructed by human action.

However, this is not to suggest that Giddens' and Bhaskar's perspectives are one and the same. On the contrary, there are significant differences between them, on the level of ontology as well as epistemology. The sections that follows highlight the central aspects of Giddens' and Bhaskar's approaches to the structure/agency debate. The first section provides a critical overview of Giddens' theory of structuration, while the second introduces Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity, highlighting the key points on which it differs from structuration theory. The concluding section outlines the perspective taken in this thesis, highlighting in particular those aspects of both approaches which are most relevant to this study of women's career transition.

11.2 Structuration Theory

Seeking to explain the nature of human social action, and the relationship between actions and institutions, Giddens takes issue with both deterministic and voluntaristic approaches, with theories which are based on a polarity between structure and agency, and between "subjective" and "objective" aspects of reality. Instead, his structuration theory is an attempt to transcend these dualisms. Giddens' starting point is the view that both structure and agency are present in the reproduction and transformation of social life: "the basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experiment of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time (1984, p. 2). Thus, "the constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality" (1984, p. 25).

At this stage, it is important to note that Giddens' use of the term "structure" differs radically from more conventional definitions. Layder explains (1994) that whereas structure is typically used interchangeably with social systems, and "tends to refer to the institutional features of society as opposed to the micro features of face-to-face interaction... the visible patterning of social relationships in society" (p. 138), for Giddens this is not the case. Rather, he sees structure as the "rules and resources that actors draw upon as they produce and reproduce society in their activities" (Layder, p. 138). In Giddens' view, structures thus "have no specific socio-temporal location" (1976, p. 119); instead, he describes them as abstract, having only a *virtual existence* (1976,1979, 1984). This concept is further discussed in section 11.2.3 below.

In addition, it should be recognized that it was not Giddens' intention for structuration theory to be used as a research methodology - that researchers should undertake "structuration theory studies". Instead, he maintains throughout his writing that its concepts should be used as "sensitizing devices", "to be used in a selective way in thinking about research questions or interpreting findings" (1984, p. 213).

11.2.1 The Duality of Structure

This "duality of structure", the notion that "social structures are both constituted *by* human agency, and yet at the same time are the very *medium* of this constitution" (1976, p. 121), is central to Giddens' theory of structuration. Giddens uses this concept to investigate his core concern: that is, the production and reproduction of social life. As regards social production, Giddens is interested in how social life is produced by people as they engage in everyday social practices. In his view, these practices can not be understood in isolation, but as occurring within particular social settings - settings which make social action possible, and which at the same time are created by such action. These settings, according to Giddens, have no independent existence outside of the social practices which they embody. Social reproduction, on the other hand, concerns the continuity, and persistence of social life - how it is that social practices come to be

routinised, and how they form patterns. Layder (1994) suggests that whereas interpretive sociologists have traditionally focused on social production, on the individual as the creator of social reality, structural and functionalist approaches have typically eclipsed the individual, concentrating instead on the constraining influences of institutions and other enduring social patterns. With structuration theory Giddens attempts to synthesize these opposing perspectives.

Although Giddens maintains that social life must be understood as a "duality of structure", he nevertheless suggests that, methodologically, it is often useful to "bracket" (in other words, to set aside), those dimensions which are taken as "given", but which are not of central relevance to a particular study. In other words, a researcher interested in an institutional level of analysis might "bracket" individuals' skills and actions. On the other hand, if the focus of study is the "strategic conduct" of individuals, "where the focus is upon modes in which actors draw upon structural properties in the constitution of social reality" (1984, p. 288), than it is the dimension of "institutional analysis" which is "bracketed". This process of methodological bracketing has been strongly criticized (Archer, 1982; Mouzelis, 1989). Archer takes issue with Giddens' concept of the duality of structure, arguing instead for a dualistic, systems approach. She maintains that the notion of duality is problematic, and that methodological bracketing, which is itself based on dualistic thinking, is evidence of its limitations. "Ironically, what does his bracketing device do other than traduce this very principle [of duality], since it merely transposes dualism from the theoretical to the methodological level - thus conceding its analytical indispensability" (p. 466). Thus, dualism is allowed in through the back door. While it could be argued that methodological bracketing is merely an intellectual sleight of hand, this need not be the case. For Giddens, it is central that such a device is underpinned by a recognition of the mutual and inextricable relationship between structure and agency. Because, as suggested both in the literature review and in the methodology chapter, the literature which explores women's perceptions and experiences of self-employment remains limited, this study into the transition from employment to self-employment explores such perspectives, and therefore effectively "brackets" institutional analysis.

This is not to suggest, however, that the level of the social system is in any sense irrelevant, but that it is the ways in which individuals construct their social realities which is of central focus.

Giddens' concept of the duality of structure has been widely debated (Archer, 1982; Cohen, 1989; Thompson, 1989; Mouzelis, 1989; Craib, 1984, 1992; Layder, 1994; New, 1994). In her notable critique of structuration theory mentioned above, Archer (1982) suggests although traditional voluntaristic and deterministic approaches have been overly reductionist, Giddens' attempt to transcend this dualism has resulted in a theory which "provides no analytical grip on *which* is likely to prevail under what conditions or circumstances... In other words, the 'central notion' of the 'structuration' approach fails to specify when there will be 'more voluntarism' or 'more determinism'. In fact, on the contrary, the 'duality of structure' *itself* oscillates between the two divergent images it bestrides" (p. 459). In her view it fails, thus, to be predictive. Archer argues that it is only through the adoption of an "analytic dualism" that this theoretical "fence-sitting" can be avoided, and that robust frameworks for understanding social action can be developed.

While I would agree with Archer that structuration theory "remains fundamentally non-propositional"(p. 459), I do not see this as problematic. Structuration theory does not set out to make predictions about degrees of voluntarism or determinism - this is precisely the dualistic thinking that Giddens is seeking to transcend. Indeed, like New (1994) I would argue that Archer's criticism fails to take on board the reciprocal and inextricable relationship between structure and agency upon which the concept of the duality of structure is based. Structuration theory does not "oscillate" between voluntarism and determinism - and it is a mistake to try and place it along this continuum. Instead, in its attempt to synthesize structure and agency, and to demonstrate their dynamic interplay, it proposes a fundamentally different relationship between these two dimensions.

In contrast to Archer, Mouzelis (1989) supports Gidden's notion of the duality of structure. However, he feels that as a conceptual framework it is both limited, and difficult to apply in real situations (an issue that pervades critiques of structuration theory, see also Craib, 1992; Albrow, 1990; Thompson, 1989). In his view, the duality of structure may be useful in illuminating the ways in which social systems are produced and reproduced on a macro-level. However, individuals themselves frequently construct relationships with their social world(s) as dualistic - in a whole range of circumstances and for a myriad of reasons. As regards this study, several women spoke of the constraints imposed by their social worlds - for example, how they were channeled into particular educational and career paths. These women felt that at the time they had had little choice but to accept the restrictions imposed upon them, that they were, in some senses, determined by their social contexts. In other cases, recounting their experiences of employment, respondents reified their departments and organizations: they described them as entities quite separate from themselves (and from individuals generally). Some women explained how their organizations stifled them, and how they resisted change. Given the dualistic frameworks within which individuals construct their social worlds, and themselves within these worlds, Mouzelis concludes that a more adequate social theory must encompass both dualism and duality. Giddens recognizes this point, but maintains that the fundamental relationship between structure and agency must nevertheless be understood as the latter: "Structure and action *cannot* form a dualism, save from the point of view of situated actors, because each is constituted by and in a single 'realm' - human activity" (1990, p. 299). Here the device of methodological bracketing is useful. By bracketing "institutional analysis", and focusing instead on "strategic conduct", the researcher can investigate individuals' perceptions of their social worlds, and their subsequent actions. However, such an analysis does not render the institutional level invisible or irrelevant - instead, it is inevitably underpinned by an awareness of the duality of structure.

11.2.2 Giddens' Concept of Agency

Giddens conceptualizes agency as a process, a "continuous flow of conduct" (1979, p. 55). Every act can be seen as both contributing to the reproduction of existing

structures, and as an act of production - working to transform those very structures. Giddens sought to transcend the functionalist conception of the individual as determined and constrained by their structural contexts. Thus, central to the theory of structuration is the notion that the actor "could have acted otherwise" (1976, p. 75). Fundamental to this view is what Giddens sees as an inextricable relationship between enablement and constraint. This is not to say that individuals are not restricted by their particular situations or that asymmetrical power relationships do not serve to limit individual choice - indeed, he maintains that sometimes these limitations are of an "implacable character". However, as New (1994) suggests, even the most constraining relationships and situations are in some senses enabling. The key point here is that "social constraints cannot abolish agency (indeed they presuppose it), and 'immanent possibilities of change flow from the fact that this is so'" (Giddens, 1990, p. 312).

In terms of this study, as highlighted in the cases of Elizabeth and Joan, illustrated in section 9.7.3, this concept of the mutual relationship between constraint and enablement is particularly useful. In addition, the notion of agency as "the ability to do otherwise" has considerable resonance. Giddens cites Gambetta's (1982) study into educational opportunities in Piemonte to illustrate this link between the processes of constraint and enablement. In particular, he suggests that the question "were they pushed or did they jump into particular educational options?" is reductionist - and that to understand this move one has to examine both processes, and their inter-relationship. Similarly, as argued in Chapter 5, women's decisions to set up their own businesses can not be understood in terms of a simple "push/pull" framework. Rather, the data generated in this study illustrates that the reasons for embarking on self-employment were complex, and involved both enablement and constraint. This was demonstrated in section 6.4.1 which explored the notion of self-employment as "the only option". While several women initially explained that they had no choice but to set up in business, as their accounts developed what emerged was that self-employment was not actually the *only option*, but the *best option in their particular circumstances*.

Giddens' introduces a "stratified" conceptualization of the actor. Based loosely on the work of Freud and Erikson (and roundly criticized by Craib, 1992), he identifies three

levels of consciousness: the unconscious, practical consciousness and discursive consciousness. The first level, that of the unconscious, is the level of motivation - and refers not to action itself, but to the potential for action. As far as action is concerned, according to Giddens, individuals are knowledgeable agents who act on the basis of "practical consciousness", tacit knowledge which can not be articulated, and "discursive consciousness", which the actors can formulate through language. A central feature of individual knowledgeability is "the reflexive monitoring of activity" (1984, p. 376). This "self-regulation" enables a person to respond flexibly, and to adapt to changing circumstances. In spite of the analytical delineation between practical and discursive consciousness, Layder (1994) maintains that there is no absolute distinction between them.. As regards this study, this rather blurred line was apparent between these levels of consciousness as women's stories of their career transitions unfolded. A number of women discussed how they had organized their businesses in particular ways to fit in with their existing domestic arrangements. However, several explained that it was not until they started talking about this process in the course of their interviews that they actually became aware of - and for the first time articulated - the implications of these arrangements.

Another relevant aspect of agency concerns the extent to which individuals' actions can have unintended, as well as intended consequences. Thus, in getting married one might foresee love, companionship, children, financial security, etc. However, a possible unintended consequences of that decision might be that it contributes to the reproduction of marriage as an important and enduring institution in our society. This concept is particularly relevant at the institutional level of analysis. Although this study focused more on the level of strategic conduct, these unintended consequences can feed back as the tacit conditions in which individuals act - conditions which, as explained above, were frequently raised to the level of discursive consciousness in the course of the interviews. For example, a solicitor explained how her reasons for setting up as a sole practitioner had been solely to do with her own lifestyle and career. However, one of the unintended consequences of the move was that she became part of a growing trend in that direction, so much so that the Law Society saw fit to set up a department supporting such initiatives. She explained how since those early days, sole practitioners had gained

credibility and status; the occupational world which she inhabited was clearly changing. Similarly, as discussed in section 9.7.3, in setting up their pop catering business Elizabeth had not set out to transform the industry. However, in so far as their business became an example for others to follow, she could be seen as having unintentionally contributed to the sector's rapid change and development.

Within structuration theory, a key aspect of social life is individuals' need for "ontological security", for a sense of stability and safety in the world, and a fundamental trust in others. This, Giddens argues, develops from early childhood, in the establishment of certain patterns of behavior and everyday routines. The reproduction of social systems is a consequence of this need for security. Giddens' concept of ontological security has been criticized by Craib (1992) for being overly simplistic. This may be true of Giddens' early work, but as Layder (1994) suggests, much of his more recent work seeks to further develop the concept (see for example Giddens, 1989; 1991).

11.2.3 Structures as Rules and Resources

The concept of "structure" is clearly fundamental to structuration theory. However, as noted earlier, Giddens' use of structure is entirely distinct from conventional sociological approaches, as well as everyday definitions. Typically, the term "structure" or "social structure" refers to institutional aspects of society - Layder (1994) suggests that it is frequently used interchangeably with "system". Thus, the family, the educational system, occupational sectors and organizations are often considered aspects of structure. This is the way that I understand structure, and the way that the term has been used in this thesis. However, within structuration theory the use of these terms is totally different. Considering structuration theory in light of this study, I agree with critics (Craib, 1992; Layder, 1994) who find this tendency to re-define familiar terms and concepts unwieldy and problematic.

Giddens' conception of structure is abstract. Within structuration theory, structures are *not* patterns or systems of interaction, and they have no independent existence in time

and space; rather, like the concept of *langue* within structural linguistics, they have a *virtual order* and, like *langue*, work at the paradigmatic level (Mouzelis, 1989). Giddens refers to structures as "systems of generative rules and resources that members draw upon, but also thereby change, in their continuous production and reproduction of society"(1976, p. 127). As regards rules, these can be many and varied: they can be explicit and formally codified, or unwritten and implicit. Rules of both types provide parameters for our actions, enabling us to "get by" in social situations - even if we may not be conscious of them, or able to articulate them in any detail. Resources, too, are constituted through human actions, and can be changed or maintained through such action. Resources come in two forms: allocative and authoritative. The former refers to material objects, while the latter is used for non-material features such as role, status or hierarchical position. Like rules, authoritative resources have no independent existence - they only exist when people are actually using them, only in their *instantiation* in social practice. In his discussion of rules and resources, the centrality of power to the structuration process becomes apparent.

Given this very abstract conceptualization of structure, Giddens needs to find another way of talking about those aspects of social life that are more observable, and more enduring - those aspects which are more conventionally considered "social structures". Giddens refers to these as "social systems", which he defines as "the patterning of social relations across time-space, understood as reproduced practices." (1984, p. 377). Social systems, as I understand them, can thus be seen as the instantiation of structures (rules and resources) in "time-space". Institutions, on the other hand, refer to "reproduced rules and resources" (Layder, 1994, p. 140). Layder suggests that "system" and "institution" might be more usefully understood as aspects of the same thing: "the structured pattern of social relationships (over time and space) that give societies their form and definition. This includes established practices and the power relations that underpin them". Like Layder, I find Giddens' distinction between these two concepts very ambiguous and somewhat inaccessible. In addition to social systems and institutions, Giddens identifies a number of other subdivisions within the category of structure, including "structural principles", "structural sets" and "structural properties". These appear to refer to varying levels of abstraction, but because his definitions are

quite obtuse, and because he provides very few concrete examples, in my view rather than clarifying or enhancing his concept of structuration, they serve to further obfuscate it.

11.2.4 Criticisms of Structuration Theory

Layder clarifies Giddens' definition thus:

"in Giddens' sense structure is 'internal' to activity - it has no existence beyond the situations in which people are acting. In this sense structure does not have a continuous and tangible (real) existence. Rather it has a virtual existence which can be understood first, as traces in the memories of people who draw on the rules and resources that constitute it. Secondly structure exists only at the instances in which the rules and resources are being employed in the activities of people. This is what Giddens means when he says that structure only exists in its 'instantiation' in human action" (1994, p. 139).

It is perhaps no surprise that Giddens' reconceptualisation of structure has been the subject of considerable criticism. Craib (1992) and others (see for example Outhwaite, 1990; Layder, 1981; Urry, 1982) take issue with the "peculiar ontological status he gives to structure" (p. 153). If structure is defined as having a "virtual existence", the question is: do structures exist or do they not? "If they have a real existence, then it does not help to say that their existence is 'virtual' and if they are real, we must be able to distinguish them from agency, on which they might none the less be dependent" (p. 153).

Furthermore, on an epistemological level, Craib argues that if we accept Giddens' definition of structure, then this will raise serious questions about how we can go about studying the process of structuration:

"... either structures appear in systems in what he calls an 'essentialist' way (I imagine him to mean by this that structures appear everywhere, rather like God is everywhere), or the number of empirical mediations are so great that it becomes impossible to study structures" (p. 153).

Giddens, however, is not interested in grappling with issues of epistemology (1984; 1991). Indeed, his apparent disinterest has been the subject of considerable debate (Craib, 1992; Layder, 1994). On the one hand Layder agrees with Giddens that a preoccupation with such issues would lead to a particularly "sterile" sociology (p. 130). However, he maintains that ontological questions can not be studied in isolation from epistemology: on the contrary, "it is always important to take note of the assumptions that underlie social theories since they are crucial to assessing their adequacy" (p. 130). Although in some ways structuration theory can be seen as an attempt to break out of the shackles of traditional sociology, as a synthesis of perspectives, Layder argues that Giddens' rejection of epistemology effectively eliminates other potentially useful approaches: "We are faced with a choice between either accepting Giddens' model or seemingly falling into the error of the three 'isms' (naturalism, objectivism and functionalism)" (p. 130). I would add that this rejection also provides structuration theory with a sort of immunity from criticism - if Giddens disassociates structuration theory from issues of epistemology, then questions of validity become irrelevant.

Some of the strongest criticisms of structuration theory relate to the relationship between the processes of enablement and constraint, in particular, to what critics see as the weak ontological status Giddens affords to structure (Craib, 1992; Layder 1981; Archer, 1982; Thompson, 1989; Baber, 1991) First, Thompson takes issue with what he sees as Giddens' undifferentiated conceptualizations of these terms. Others maintain that notwithstanding Giddens' insistence on the mutuality of the processes, the theory remains voluntaristic - giving very little analytical weight to the constraining aspects of structure:

"If structures do not exist in time-space except in the moments of the constitution of social systems, they might well be irrelevant to specific action. Thus, using Giddens' definition, what emerges is not a reconceptualisation of structure and agency but rather an obliteration of structure and exaggeration of the power and capacity of agents" (Baber, 1991, p. 226).

The point here is that Giddens' conceptualization of structure simply does not account for the extent to which individuals are compelled by social forces.

Layder (1994), too, takes issue with Giddens' conceptualization of structure. In his view (a view which I would support), Giddens' re-definition of commonly used terms creates considerable problems. "The notion of structure is far too closely associated with the idea of a framework or scaffold, upon which social activity is hung and interwoven, for it to take on a radically different meaning" (1994, p. 140-141). In particular, Layder maintains that one of the central difficulties with the concept of structure stems from its separation from system, a concept which carries far greater meaning and salience. He suggests that if Giddens' is attempting to overcome the dualism between structure and agency, but then completely re-defines structure, than his resulting theory can not be seen as "resolving" the original problem at all. In other words, Layder argues that Giddens' "duality of structure" does not represent a transcendence of traditional dualistic thinking; instead, it simply raises a series of new problems and issues.

As far as this study is concerned, the concept of structure as a "virtual order" has little relevance. Instead, throughout this thesis the term has been used in a way that is much more analogous with Giddens' concepts of social system and institution (bearing in mind Layder's point that these can be thought of as aspects of the same thing. What is needed, then, is a conceptualization of structure that has greater ontological status, which is situated in time and space, and endures beyond the life span of individuals, but which is also inextricably linked to the actions of individuals. I would argue that the

notion of structure central to Bhaskar's transformational model of human action could provide such a framework. The key aspects of this model are outlined in the section that follows.

11.3 Bhaskar's Transformational Model of Human Activity

In their interest in social reproduction and transformation, their emphasis on the mutuality of structure and agency (the duality of structure), and their conceptualizations of agency, Bhaskar's transformational model of human activity and Gidden's theory of structuration have much in common. However, one of the key differences between these perspectives concerns their ontological positions on structure. As noted above, critics have raised important questions about Giddens' conceptualization of the term. As regards this study, questions were asked about the usefulness of his re-definition of structure as an abstract concept, a "virtual order" which exists outside of time and space. Bhaskar's conceptualization of structure is much closer to traditional definitions. While recognizing the similarities between his own work and that of Giddens, Bhaskar argues instead for a concept which gives structure a greater ontological status:

"I believe our concepts are very close... I think that the theory of structuration as formulated by [Giddens] does presuppose something akin to a transcendental realist ontology and epistemology... [but] I am more inclined to give structures a stronger ontological grounding and to place more emphasis on the pre-existence of social forms" (1983, pp. 84,85).

In this section, Bhaskar's transformational model of human activity is briefly outlined.

Bhaskar's transcendental realism is based on the distinction between two domains: the intransitive domain is the realm of "real" material things and structures, while the transitive domain refers to "that body of historically and culturally situated theories which seeks to describe, measure and explain..." (Baehr, 1990, p. 767). My

understanding is that these refer to what are more commonly termed "ontology" and "epistemology". Unlike Giddens who, as noted above, expressed his disinterest in questions of epistemology, Bhaskar maintains that the two domains are inseparable; furthermore, he insists that the object we are studying determines the knowledge we can have of it, and the way in which we study it (Craib, 1984, p. 21), therefore establishing a close link between the two concepts.

According to Bhaskar, social structures (which he refers to as "societies") exist within the intransitive realm. In Bhaskar's view, the aim of all science is to identify underlying structures and causal mechanisms; indeed, this is precisely what social scientists are doing when they study societies (Craib, 1992). However, this is not to suggest that the intransitive realm is static or absolutist; instead, within Bhaskar's transcendental realism intransitive reality is seen as complex, multi-faceted and dynamic (Bhaskar, 1989). According to Bhaskar (1979), a significant difference between natural and social reality is that while natural phenomena are revealed in close systems, and thus can be tested positivistically, the social world is only revealed in open systems, and thus are not amenable to deductive approaches. He argues that social science can only be explanatory - never predictive. This epistemological issue will be considered further below.

11.3.1 The Dualities of Structure and Praxis

The starting point for Bhaskar's transformational model of human activity is the inadequacy of perspectives on human action which dichotomize structure and agency, as well as those which suggest that social and individual processes are simply aspects of the same process. Bhaskar insists that "society and individuals are two radically different kinds of thing" (1983, p. 42); theoretical models for understanding human action must therefore be able to account for this "ontological hiatus between society and people" (1983, p. 44). Societies, like language, were there before individuals were born, and go on after individuals die. However, societies only survive and change through the actions of individuals:

"It is easy to see that both society and human praxis must possess a ***dual character****. Society is both the ever-present* ***condition****...and the continually reproduced* ***outcome*** *of human agency. And praxis is both work, that is conscious* ***production****, and (normally unconscious)* ***reproduction*** *of the conditions of production. One could refer to the former as the* ***duality of structure****, and the latter as the* ***duality of praxis****" (1979, p. 43-44).*

Although they are conceptualized as analytically distinct from one another, central to Bhaskar's perspective is the interrelatedness of society and individual agency. In spite of his emphasis on the pre-existence of social forms, society and individual action do not exist independently of one another. Indeed, the failure to recognize this relationship would result in just the sort of dualistic analysis that his transformational model is seeking to transcend.

It is important to note that in contrast to Giddens, Bhaskar's does not see the *construction* of social structures as being dependent on human actions; indeed, he takes issue with what he sees as the voluntaristic connotations implicit within structuration theory. Instead, central to his transformational model is the idea that societies provide the raw materials upon which individuals act. However, consistent with Giddens, Bhaskar insists that action is central to the reproduction and transformation of these structures.

11.3.2 Criticisms of the Transformational Model of Human Activity

Bhaskar's transcendental realist approach has been the subject of considerable academic debate (Baehr, 1990; Johnson, Dandeker and Ashworth, 1984; Hirst and Woolley, 1982). For the purposes of this chapter, as regards his transformational model of human activity, a few key points are worthy of note. First, just as Giddens was criticized for his undifferentiated use of the term "rule", and the general "looseness" of his concept of structure (Thompson, 1989), Baehr (1990) raises questions about what he sees as Bhaskar's unitary notion of society, and his lack of detail on the issue of social structure.

And as in the case of Giddens, this lack of clarity is compounded by Bhaskar's failure to provide empirical examples to illustrate his work. This paucity of examples makes it difficult to apply Bhaskar's model to empirical situations.

In addition, Bhaskar himself (1983) outlines what he sees as they key limitations of his transformational model of human activity. These, as suggested above, focus largely on epistemological issues. First, Bhaskar expresses some concern about the "unavailability of spontaneously closed systems" (p. 84) in the social world, and hence the impossibility of predictive, positivistic social science. Thus, social science loses what Bhaskar sees as the "neutrality" of science (p.84-85). I would support Bhaskar's questioning of the relevance of positivism in social research (at the same time, I would question his concept of natural science as necessarily "neutral"). In my view, though, that this rejection inevitably leads to more interpretive approaches is not problematic.

A much thornier issue, however, is how such subjectivist approaches square with Bhaskar's realist ontology. He suggests that although society must be seen as analytically distinct from individual action, empirically it remains unobservable:

"as an object of inquiry [society] is necessarily 'theoretical', in the sense that, like a magnetic field, it is necessarily unperceivable. As such it cannot be empirically identified independently of its effects; so that it can only be known, not shown, to exist... not only can society not be identified independently of its effects, it does not ***exist*** *independently of them either. But however strange this is from an ontological point of view, it raises no special epistemological difficulties" (1979, p. 57).*

According to Bhaskar, this idea that society is "real", but unperceivable, does not appear to be problematic. However, it could be argued that within Bhaskar's approach there is a contradiction between his ontological and epistemological positions - between his objectivist ontology and his more subjectivist epistemology. Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest that social inquiry involves a choice between "subjectivism" and "objectivism", and that these alternatives are "incommensurable", or "mutually exclusive" (p. viii).

They maintain that in order to avoid what they refer to as "ontological oscillation" (p. 266) there must be a consistency between one's ontological and epistemological perspectives. Other theorists, however, have taken exception to such "ontological purity" (Weick, 1995, Weaver and Gioia, 1994). The issue of "paradigm incommensurability" has been widely discussed within the sociological and organizational literature (Johnson, 1995; Weaver and Gioia, 1994; Weick, 1995; Sayer, 1981, 1984; Margolis, 1986); indeed, this "oscillation" between realism and objectivism is just the sort of theoretical stalemate that Giddens and Bhaskar were seeking to transcend.

Bhaskar maintains that although we can not observe society in a positivist sense, we can get to know it through its effects. Although he is not very clear on this point, I would suspect that this perspective would lead to studies into the ways in which social structures (which according to Bhaskar include "means, media, resources and rules" (1983, p. 83)) are reproduced and transformed by human action. Such processes, he maintains, are not limited to the physical realm, but also include "the mediation of meanings and the expression of self" (1983, p. 83). The task of the researcher is thus to access these meanings. Of course the precise line of inquiry would depend on the nature of the study. Here, Giddens' concept of "methodological bracketing", introduced above, is useful. For example a study could, in Giddens' terms, focus on "institutional analysis"; or alternatively, this could be bracketed and the focus could be on "strategic conduct". In this study, qualitative interviews were used to explore women's experiences and perceptions of their move from employment to self-employment. While the precise nature of the society, or social structures, in which they lived may not have been observable, what could be investigated were the ways in which the women made sense of these structures, and their subsequent actions (in Bhaskar's terms, the "effects" of these structures).

By conceptualizing society (or "social structure") as he does, by giving structures ontological depth and situating them in time and space, I see Bhaskar's transformational model of human activity as avoiding some of the pitfalls of structuration theory - namely its problematic, abstract conceptualization of structure and what some critics have described as its tendency towards voluntarism. Furthermore, Craib (1992) suggests that

one of the limitations of structuration theory is that it can not accommodate the idea that social structures can have an external existence, and thus does not allow for the investigation of causal mechanisms. Bhaskar, however, maintains that we can examine the nature of social structures "at the same time as we recognize the existence of social praxis, which we can still conceive of in terms similar to Giddens' own" (Craib, p. 121). In Craib's view, as in my own, Bhaskar's model, giving structures a stronger ontological status prior to individual action, offers greater potential than that of Giddens.

11.4 Structure and Agency: the approach taken in this thesis

The "duality of structure", the notion that *"structures are constituted structurally, and reciprocally [that] action is constituted structurally (Giddens, 1976, p. 161)*, thus emerges as central to this thesis, and to the framework for understanding women's move from employment to self-employment introduced in Chapter 9. Within this duality, this thesis has applied a concept of structure which can be seen as broadly based on that outlined by Bhaskar (1979; 1983; 1989) in his transformational model of human activity (it must be noted, though, that where Bhaskar uses the term "society", throughout the thesis this concept is referred to as "structure"). Thus, I have considered features such family background, organization, occupational sector and the new business to be aspects of structure. Bhaskar's model, as suggested above, gives structure an ontological depth which is absent from Giddens' conceptualization. While embracing the mutual and inextricable relationship between structure and human agency, and the role of agency in social reproduction and transformation, he nevertheless maintains that such structures are never the product of individual action. Instead, central to Bhaskar's model is the idea that structures exist prior to, and outlive, human agency. This study broadly supports this view of structures: indeed, in relation to social structures such as family background, the organization and the occupational sector, the concept of structures as having a prior existence is very useful. However, as noted in section 9.7.3, there are other structures, such as the new business, which had no such prior existence, and which therefore must be seen as the *product* of human activity. Two important points emerge here. First, that structures must not be seen as fixed or static - that it is possible for new structures to be created. Second, that these structures are nevertheless created in the

context of other, pre-existing social systems. Thus, Elizabeth did not construct her catering business in a structural vacuum, but in relation to existing business, organizational and family structures. A key issue here is at which level one locates the concept of structure - an issue on which Bhaskar himself does not appear to be explicit.

With the exception of the stronger ontological status he affords to structures, Bhaskar suggests that his transformational model of human activity closely resembles structuration theory. As far as this study is concerned, there is much in both Giddens' and Bhaskar's work that is useful. As regards their conceptualization of agency, their emphasis on the relationship between enablement and constraint, and the individual's ability to act otherwise (within the constraints imposed by their structural circumstances) has particular relevance to the women's accounts of their decisions to become self-employed. Similarly, the concept of the agent as knowledgeable, both on a "tacit" and a more explicit level, common to both structuration theory and the transformational model of human activity, has been shown to be useful - most significantly the study has demonstrated Giddens' point that these must not be seen as static, strictly delineated "stages", but as fluid and dynamic. Finally, Giddens and Bhaskar highlight the salience of unintended consequences of action, consequences which, as demonstrated by the data generated in this study, can serve to reinforce (and thus reproduce) existing social structures, or to transform them.

It is important to note that neither Giddens nor Bhaskar is offering a comprehensive research agenda. Bhaskar maintains that although societies must be thought of as real, they are unperceivable, and thus themselves can not be the object of investigation. Rather, it is the effects of these structures that researchers can seek to explore. Furthermore, he insists that in so far as societies are "open-systems"- ever-changing and dynamic - studies which aim to predict, which are positivist in their orientation, are misguided (1983). Thus, Bhaskar seems to be saying that it is through more interpretive research approaches - such as that taken in this study - that we can begin to understand the process of human activity, and thereby gain access to wider social structures. Giddens, likewise, is interested in understanding how it is that structures come to be produced, reproduced and transformed through human agency, and how such agency is

constituted structurally. However, he insists that his theory of structuration should not be considered a "research programme" (1984; 1991). Instead, he maintains that it should be thought of instead as a "sensitizing device" to aid interpretation and facilitate understanding. It is in this sense that salient aspects of structuration theory have contributed to this study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Invitation to participate in the study

WOMEN'S MOVE FROM EMPLOYMENT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT: understanding the transition

This PhD study focuses on women who have left middle and senior positions within organisations and moved to self-employment. It thus explores two worlds: the world of the organisation, and the world of business ownership/management.

Despite the increasing trend in female business ownership, research continues to be dominated by male examples, definitions and meanings. Studies are therefore needed which explore the perspectives of women in business. In particular, I am interested in looking at such areas as: women's views of organisational life, their reasons for leaving their organisations, their decisions to set up in business, their experiences of self-employment, and their visions for the future.

At present, I am looking for a number of women who have moved from employment to self-employment to participate in the study. Participation would involve recounting one's career experiences, and in particular the transition from organisational employment to business ownership/management, in an informal, one-to-one discussion. This would last approximately one-and-a-half hours, and would be arranged at the participant's convenience. Such discussions would, of course, be strictly confidential, and any subsequent references to them would be treated anonymously.

If you would like to become involved in the research, or to discuss it further, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above numbers.

Thank you very much for your interest.

Appendix 2

Interview guide

Standard form for personal details

Name:

Date of birth:

Relationship status:

Is your partner employed?

- If yes, what does he do?

Have you got any children?

- How many children do you have?
- Ages?

Who beside yourself (and your partner) lives in your home?

Have you got any other caring responsibilities?

Education and qualifications

Have you had any post-school education or training?

Did you obtain any qualifications?

Begin to tape now

Employment history

Could you give a brief, 'thumbnail' sketch of your career history (you don't need to include holiday or weekend work here unless you think it is significant). Include important events, like marriages and births, in this sketch.

Did you at any time have a 'career plan'?

Last job prior to becoming self-employed

I want to look more closely at the last job you had before becoming self-employed. Could you tell me about that job in a little more detail?

- what duties did it involve
- what skills/competencies were required?
- what were your particular strengths/weaknesses?
- who did you see as the key people?
- did you identify with any particular group/s?
- were there opportunities for promotion?
- what did you like/dislike about the job?
- what personal qualities were valued in that organisation?

When you first started working there, did you have any particular goals, or did you see your career developing in any particular way? How did that compare with what actually happened?

Did you experience any particular conflicts between your professional and personal life at that time?

What about social networks and relationships outside work?

Do you think there is any way in which your experiences in that organisation would have been different had you been a man?

Are there any incidents or stories which you think really capture what life was like in that organisation, or that influenced the way you felt about the organisation? Or stories that you think illustrate why you left?

The transition

You've already mentioned reasons why you left that job and your decision to become self-employed. I'd like to pick up on some of the points you made, and to talk about that transition from employment to self-employment in more detail.

You said that it was XXX that made you start thinking about leaving your job. Consider:

- What were the main reasons for leaving?
- Was there anyone who influenced your decision?
- At what point did you begin to think about self employment?
- Idea for **this** business?
- Timing
- Support from others (people, support agencies)
- Gender issues

Had you any prior experience of self-employment? (family, friends etc.)

How did you expect self-employment to differ from (be preferable to) employment within your organisation?

Were there any aspects of self-employment that worried you?

What skills etc. did you think you would take with you, and what did you think you'd have to learn? Were you right about this?

How clear were your ideas about your future business?

How would you describe the first few weeks or months of self-employment?

In retrospect, is there anything you'd do differently next time?

Clearly the move from employment to self-employment is enormous, and you have talked a lot about the work-related changes you experienced. Were there any other significant changes that you experienced in your life at that time?

Experience of self-employment

Now I want to look more closely at your experience of self-employment. Would you describe your business, and your role in it?

- what skills/competencies are required?
- what are your particular strengths/weaknesses?
- who do you see as the key people (within or outside the business)?
- do you identify with any particular group/s?
- what do you like/dislike about the job?
- premises

Do you see yourself more as an 'employed type' or as a 'self-employed type'?

Could you describe a typical working day. For example, could you describe yesterday.

We've talked about conflicts etc. between personal and professional life experienced when you were working at XX. What about now?

Has the move from employment to self-employment had financial implications for you?

Has the move changed the nature of your relationship with your partner?

Do you think that being a woman has been a significant factor in your experience?

How do you think your experienced would have differed had you been a man?

Do you think there have been any critical events, or the turning points in the life of your business so far?

How significant do you think Sheffield as a city has been a significant factor in your experiences, either within XX or in self-employment?

How would you feel about the prospect of relocation to a different city?

How do you see your business developing in the future?

In terms of your own professional development, what are your priorities?

Entrepreneurship

In the press we hear a lot about entrepreneurs. What image does the word conjure up for you?

Do you think of yourself as an entrepreneur?

Further questions, comments