

Moral struggles, subtle shifts. Narrative practices of identity work in career transitions

Kirsi LaPointe



Moral struggles, subtle shifts.
Narrative practices of identity work in
career transitions

Kirsi LaPointe

Aalto University publication series
DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 34/2011

© Author

ISBN 978-952-60-4098-1 (pdf)
ISBN 978-952-60-4097-4 (printed)
ISSN-L 1799-4934
ISSN 1799-4942 (pdf)
ISSN 1799-4934 (printed)

Images: Cover: Sami Korkiakoski, "Pallopäiväkirja" (2003)

Aalto Print
Helsinki 2011

Author

Author(s): Kirsi LaPointe

Name of the doctoral dissertation

Moral struggles, subtle shifts.
Narrative practices of identity work in career transitions

Publisher School of Economics

Unit Department of Management and International Business

Series Aalto University publication series DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 34/2011

Field of research Organization and management

This thesis examines the practices, resources and constraints of identity work in unpredictable career transitions. It aims to problematize individualistic views of career change and identities by focusing on the mundane, gendered and culturally situated activities of identity work.

Based on dialogical narrative analysis of interviews among Finnish business graduates, this study specifies three practices of doing identity work: 1) positioning as the main character of a career change narrative, 2) temporal ordering of multiple identity positions, and 3) negotiating identity conflicts. Moreover, it identifies three master narratives used to account for career transition - disruption, mismatch and life renewal. In addition to these narratives, the study illustrates the variety of resources that come to play in identity work and analyzes how identity work is gendered via the identity positions available. Based on follow-up interviews, this study also describes practices of identity work in career transitions over time as well as the resources, constraints and actions influencing changes in identity work.

This research contributes to the literature on identity work and career transitions by showing how identity work is done in situated interaction and empowered or constrained by the cultural and habitual resources available in given contexts. In contrast to idealized images of heroic, individualistic career identity changes, this study argues that identity work in transitions involves moral negotiation and struggle among conflicting culturally situated notions of what good careers and lives mean. However, it also points to the possibilities for reflexivity and change through subtle shifts of repositioning by engaging with alternative cultural practices and resources.

Keywords identity work, career identity, narrative, positioning, gender, career transition

ISBN (printed) 978-952-60-4097-4

ISBN (pdf) 978-952-60-4098-1

ISSN-L 1799-4934

ISSN (printed) 1799-4934

ISSN (pdf) 1799-4942

Location of publisher Espoo

Location of printing Helsinki

Year 2011

Pages 209

Tekijä

Author(s): Kirsi LaPointe

Väitöskirjan nimi

Moraalisia kamppailuja, pieniä siirtymiä. Identiteettityön kertomukselliset käytänteet työuran muutoksissa

Julkaisija Kauppakorkeakoulu**Yksikkö** Johtaminen ja kansainvälinen liiketoiminta**Sarja** Aalto University publication series DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 34/2011**Tutkimusala** Organisaatiot ja johtaminen**Tiivistelmä**

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan identiteettityön käytänteitä, resursseja ja reunaehtoja työuran ennakoimattomissa siirtymävaiheissa. Tutkimus kyseenalaistaa individualistisia käsityksiä uramuutoksista ja identiteeteistä tuomalla esille identiteettityön arkisia, sukupuolittuneita ja vuorovaikutukseen paikantuneita kulttuurisia käytänteitä.

Pohjautuen suomalaisten, kauppatieteellisen tutkinnon suorittaneiden henkilöiden haastatteluiden dialogis-narratiiviseen analyysiin tutkimus määrittää kolme identiteettityön tekemisen käytännettä: 1) tietyn uramuutosmallitarinan päähenkilöksi paikantumisen, 2) moninaisten identiteetin paikkojen ajallisen järjestämisen ja 3) ristiriitaisten identiteetin paikkojen neuvottelun. Lisäksi tutkimus kuvaa kolme uramuutoskerrontaa ja identiteettityötä ohjaavaa kulttuurista mallitarinaa: murtumis-, yhteensopimattomuus- ja uudistumiskertomukset. Tutkimus myös osoittaa identiteettityön resurssien moninaisuuden merkityksen uramuutosvaiheessa ja tarkastelee erityisesti sitä, miten identiteettityön resurssit ovat sukupuolittuneet. Toistohaastatteluihin perustuen tutkimus kuvaa identiteettityön muutoksen käytänteitä, rajoitteita sekä muutosta edistäviä resursseja ja tekoja.

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus osallistuu keskusteluun identiteettityöstä ja uramuutoksista näyttämällä, kuinka tietyssä vuorovaikutustilanteessa ja kulttuurisessa kontekstissa tarjolla olevat resurssit ja käytänteet mahdollistavat ja rajoittavat identiteettityötä. Kyseenalaistaen uramuutoksen yksilölliset sankaritarinat tutkimus esittää, että identiteettityö uramuutosvaiheissa sisältää moraalisia neuvotteluja ja kamppailuja ristiriitaisten, kulttuurisesti paikantuneiden hyvän elämän ja uran käsitysten välillä. Tutkimuksessa osoitetaan myös muutoksen mahdollisuus pienien identiteetin paikantamisen siirtymien ja vaihtoehtoisten identiteettiresurssien kautta.

Avainsanat identiteettityö, uraidentiteetti, kertomus, paikantuminen, sukupuoli, uramuutos**ISBN (painettu)** 978-952-60-4097-4**ISBN (pdf)** 978-952-60-4098-1**ISSN-L** 1799-4934**ISSN (painettu)** 1799-4934**ISSN (pdf)** 1799-4942**Julkaisupaikka** Espoo**Painopaikka** Helsinki**Vuosi** 2011**Sivumäärä** 209

Acknowledgements

“Has it ever occurred to you that you could be genuinely interested in any of these issues?” This question was posed to a class of business administration students by a professor in the early 1990s. As one of those students, I found this idea unsettling. Wasn't it enough to just get the degree and embark on an undoubtedly spectacular, international career? As it turns out, it wasn't for me. However, it took me many, many years to find something I could be so genuinely interested in but when I finally did, I felt compelled to do research on it. By then business administration had become organization and management and I came to find a whole new world of fascinating topics. This report is one outcome of my long process of searching for meaningful work and becoming an academic. For this I owe thanks to many people.

The professor who posed that disturbing question was Keijo Räsänen who eventually became my doctoral dissertation supervisor. It has been a privilege to work with such a versatile and well-read scholar who has been able to guide me throughout this study despite its rather eclectic theoretical base. His rigorous standards have challenged me and, at times, made me despair. Most importantly, his dedication to examining fundamental moral questions such as what our (professional) lives are for has encouraged me to find my own voice as a scholar and teacher.

Sinikka Vanhala was the first person who encouraged me to begin doctoral studies after supervising my Master's thesis. I have greatly appreciated her empathy and mentoring in navigating the academic life. She has also supported me in taking on teaching responsibilities as well as in arranging funding for my research.

During the various twists and turns of my research process, I have spent quite a number of hours in Elina Henttonen's armchair. The discussions on our shared interests in academic and personal lives as well as our cooperation in teaching and writing about gender issues have been a crucial part in my process of becoming an academic. I am also grateful for Elina's sharp comments on this research manuscript.

In finding my place in the academia, the strong presence of gender and diversity scholars in our department has been significant. In addition to Sinikka and Elina, I would like to thank Janne Tienari who has been important in including me in teaching and writing projects, commenting on my texts and keeping me highly caffeinated! Thanks also to all other former and current colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure to study, teach and do research on these inspiring and intellectually challenging topics.

The wider community of scholars in the discipline of organization and management has made me feel that I am in the right place doing work that matters. Kari Lilja and Risto Tainio have played an important role in the history of this unit and making it a welcoming place that fosters diversity and dedication to research. As doctoral research can sometimes be lonesome, the participation in the everyday social life has been important in keeping me (somewhat) sane. It was particularly in the final straining stretches of this project that I came to experience the power of collegial support that helped me bring this project to completion. I am particularly thankful for my close colleagues and friends Kirsi Korpiaho, Hanna-Mari Aula, Sari Yli-Kauhaluoma, Nina Granqvist, Hanna Päiviö, and Kaija Karjalainen. Special thanks to Markku “Tango” Anttonen for checking on me to make sure I eat and laugh.

I doubt whether I had ever considered doctoral studies if I had not worked at VTT's Group for Technology Studies in my early career. Thanks to Tarmo

Lemola for his support and encouragement and to Sirkku Kivisaari whose wisdom and mindfulness I appreciate and admire.

I would like to thank Christine Coupland (Hull University) and Tuomo Peltonen (Tampere University of Technology) for their efforts in pre-examining this study. I am grateful for the cooperation with the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates (SEFE) and Päivi Koivu, in particular, who was very helpful in finding participants in this project among her career counseling clients. I truly appreciate the time of all the wonderful people who participated in this research and reflected on their life and career with me. I wish you all meaningful careers! Thanks also to James Collins for language editing this report.

This research has been made financially possible with the support I received from the following institutions: HSE Foundation, Foundation for Economic Education, Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, NASTA (a research and education development project on women's leadership funded by the Ministry of Education), and GRAMIS (the Finnish Graduate School of Management and Information System Studies).

Sometimes people wonder how I have managed to balance doing research, teaching, raising three small children and all other life projects that have been going on. Well, I haven't achieved balance but I have managed. For this I am indebted to my close friends and family. Most importantly, I am grateful for my dear husband Darren who has made every effort to see that I have had the time and space to pursue my academic interests. If my faith in this project had ever faltered, his would not have. He has also shown his support and interest in my work by eagerly reading and language editing this and many other manuscripts. My little darlings Inka, Luka, and Leo have made sure that I have not wasted time worrying about my work at home. They have the amazing ability to sense if I am distracted and to bring me back to the present moment, whether it's in the form of spilled milk or an irresistible smile. I would also like to thank my parents for always believing in me and never questioning my choices, no matter how strange some of them may have seemed. At least I finally know what I want to do when I grow up!

And thanks to all my wonderful friends who have been there for me - listening, caring and making me laugh. In particular, I would like to thank Päivi Ruoste, my long-time confidante for rejuvenating, bubbly trips to Paris and NYC during this project and for being with me through thick and thin all these years regardless of our physical distance; Päivi Heinilä, for ensuring I take time to enjoy arts, culture and long conversations over a cup of coffee; and Pia Arhio-Lehto without whose phone therapy I would not have made it here. Now, let's have some champagne!

Helsinki, April 1st, 2011

Kirsi LaPointe

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 BEGINNINGS	5
1.1 THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY	8
<i>A life-time quest</i>	8
<i>A scholarly quest</i>	10
1.2 BOUNDARYLESS CAREERS AND PROTEAN HEROES?	14
1.3 IDENTITY WORK IN THE LIMINALITY OF CAREER TRANSITIONS	18
1.4 SITUATING AND PLOTTING THE STUDY	20
<i>Aims and approaches</i>	20
<i>Research design</i>	24
<i>The plot of the report</i>	25
2 CAREER IDENTITIES: A NARRATIVE PRACTICE VIEW	27
2.1 CAREER IDENTITIES AS INTERNAL CONSTRUCTS	28
2.2 DISCOURSE, SUBJECT POSITIONS AND POWER IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CAREER IDENTITIES	30
2.2.1 The turn to language	30
2.2.2 Discourses and subject positions	32
2.3 CAREER DISCOURSES AND IDENTITIES AS GENDERED	35
2.4 STORYING IDENTITIES: FROM IDENTITY AS A NARRATIVE TO IDENTITIES AS NARRATIVE PRACTICE	39
2.4.1 Narrative ordering of life	39
2.4.2 Identity as a narrative	42
2.4.3 Identity as narrative practice	44
2.5 THE AGENCY OF THE NARRATING SUBJECT: IDENTITY WORK AS EMBODIED POSITIONING IN INTERACTION	45
2.5.1 Prior conceptualizations of identity work	46
2.5.2 Identity work as positioning	48
2.6 SUMMARY: CAREER IDENTITY AS NARRATIVE PRACTICE	51
3 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES	55
3.1 A PRACTICE APPROACH TO NARRATIVE INQUIRY	57
3.2 INTERVIEWS AS DIALOGIC CONTEXTS FOR IDENTITY WORK	61
3.3 CONSTRUCTING AND ANALYZING NARRATIVES IN THIS STUDY	65
3.3.1 Choosing and finding participants	65
3.3.2 Conducting the interviews	69
3.3.3 Analyzing the transcripts	72
3.3.4 From the analysis to the findings	78
4 NARRATIVE PRACTICES AND RESOURCES OF IDENTITY WORK IN THE MIDDLE OF CAREER TRANSITION	83
4.1 POSITIONING AS THE MAIN CHARACTER OF A CAREER CHANGE NARRATIVE	85
4.1.1 Disruption, mismatch and life renewal narratives	86
4.1.2 Identity work in positioning as the main character of a career change narrative	92
4.2 TEMPORAL ORDERING OF MULTIPLE IDENTITY POSITIONS	95

5 MORAL STRUGGLES: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY CONFLICTS IN CAREER TRANSITION	110
5.1 IDENTITY CONFLICTS IN THE DISRUPTION NARRATIVES	111
<i>The ambitious hotel businesswoman loses her self</i>	111
<i>A hard-core capitalist, a Mensa wimp or an idealist inventor?</i>	112
<i>Collisions of the wise woman: an expert on, or the victim of, prejudices?</i>	116
<i>Too old to be re-employed? Mother's struggles with competence and age</i>	120
<i>The stockbroker's time-out</i>	122
<i>Carrying the wrong yoke?</i>	124
5.2 IDENTITY CONFLICTS IN THE MISMATCH NARRATIVES	127
<i>Trapped: inner needs or a career in business?</i>	127
<i>A divine blessing for a woman over 50</i>	130
<i>From the paved road to an open sea</i>	133
5.3 IDENTITY CONFLICTS IN THE LIFE RENEWAL NARRATIVES	135
<i>Mom's life of her own</i>	135
<i>Keeping up the career, gasping for air</i>	138
<i>It's time for my career</i>	141
5.4 IDENTITY WORK IN CAREER TRANSITIONS: MORAL NEGOTIATION AND STRUGGLE	145
6 SHIFTING IDENTITIES: FOUR YEARS LATER	147
6.1 PRACTICES OF IDENTITY WORK IN CAREER TRANSITION OVER TIME	148
6.1.1 Adopting a new identity position: " <i>finding my path, coming home</i> "	148
6.1.2 Modifying existing identity positions: " <i>work is work</i> "	158
6.1.3 Repositioning identity conflicts: " <i>looking for a new framework</i> "	165
6.2 CHANGING CAREERS, REPOSITIONING IDENTITIES: RESOURCES, CONSTRAINTS, ACTIONS	173
7 ENDINGS AND NEW BEGINNINGS	180
7.1 FINDINGS: SUMMARY AND EVALUATION	180
7.2 CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	185
7.3 TOWARDS NEW BEGINNINGS	193
REFERENCES	196
APPENDIX 1	208
APPENDIX 2	209

1 Beginnings

*“I want to find balance between myself and my work”*¹
Sanna, 40, marketing manager

“It is not right to carry the wrong yoke all your life”
Tiina, 42, researcher

“You need some air. Or if it was possible to have shorter days and a less hectic life. Perhaps it’s something like that you are looking for. So that you could do something you can be excited about”
Johanna, 45, controller

“I have about 15 years of effective game time left... perhaps the purpose of life is not to gather a tremendous amount of money but rather to have a good life”
Risto, 48, stockbroker

“I have been more or less aware that this is not what I am supposed to be doing in my life or what I would really want to do”
Sari, 38, researcher

“I have been so exhausted that I have not managed to look for other jobs... and I don’t know what I would even want to do anymore”
Kati, 37, sales manager

“My ambitions have emerged only now that the kids have grown... back then I didn’t I have time to think what to do when I grow up”
Taina, 39, IT controller

This is a narrative study of identity work in the context of career transition among Finnish business graduates looking for a career change. By narrative, I refer not only to the key theoretical concepts of identity and career, the methodological approach, the form of empirical material but also to the format of this report. In other words, this report is a narrative of the research process and its sequences. Structurally speaking, the bare minimum for any piece of text to count as a narrative is to have a beginning, a middle and an end (Polkinghorne, 1988). As the heading shows, I have already departed from this rule and claimed several beginnings for this research. Recent studies on narrative have in fact shown that narratives are rarely self-contained, fully coherent units, but always co-constructed and

¹ The quotes at the beginning of the sections in this chapter are from my interviews.

crafted to the purposes at hand. They may even include a variety of conflicting voices or points of view. While they may systematically order experiences by constructing coherence, continuity and logic, they also allow space for particularities, ambiguity and contradictions. Unlike the narrative research report at hand, the mundane narratives are often small stories: short, non-linear, open-ended, and involving multiple tellers (Georgakopoulou, 2006ba; Ochs & Capps, 2001). They do not necessarily follow the canonical, coherent structure with all the necessary parts either. Although this written narrative of my research follows the expected structure of a research monograph for the most part, I twist it slightly and begin with more than one beginning that I see it has.

Situating a beginning to a story is no trivial matter. It influences how the narrative will evolve, what counts as relevant material and what the point of the narrative will be. The observation that initially spurred this research was the sense I had that career changes were not only a typical mid-life career event but a more ubiquitous phenomenon. More specifically, it seemed to me that *talk* about the need to change careers had become very common and that career change presented itself as a personal solution and contemporary ideal to all sorts of problems at workplaces. As Siltala (2004) has pointed out, career changes have apparently become the heroic stories of the contemporary world of work as a way to survive and protect one's integrity. From this perspective, career change talk may tell us more about our culture and working conditions than the psychological and developmental issues of the individuals. Therefore, although the empirical material for this study came to focus on some particular people, namely Finnish business graduates wanting a career change, my aim has been to understand the cultural conditions of such experiences.

Identity was another starting point for this study. Identity and career issues have always been intertwined but as I later found, identity has been given increasing attention in the contemporary literature. Yet, studies on career identity were rare and the concept itself seemed under-theorized in the career context. As it turned out, identity became the actual object of my study and career changes and transitions its context. This is a choice I have made based on personal interest and upon finding lively scholarly discussions on identity in organization and management studies. Regardless of the challenges of the concept itself, all the intriguing developments in its conceptualization made it an exciting and promising phenomenon of study. Most importantly, by focusing on identity it seemed possible to examine the nature of contemporary careers from an alternative, socio-culturally situated perspective while retaining a focus on the everyday concerns of particular people.

Finally, the beginning of this research needs to be situated within my own life and career trajectory. As this research is based on a constructionist epistemology, reflexivity is called for on the part of the researcher, me, in terms of spelling out the process behind the arguments I present here. From this perspective, my life situation, interests and the way they have influenced the choices I have made during this study need to be acknowledged. This seems all the more relevant in my case as I had many things in common with my research participants: I was a business graduate looking for a career change. Before beginning my doctoral studies, I had been devouring career literature, both popular and scholarly, and looking for resources in order to make a career change. Then, after having been laid-off from a small HR consulting company I had been working for at the time, I started making sense of all the materials by writing. Eventually, this turned into a research plan, an application to a doctoral program and finally, after quite some years, to the research narrative presented here. From this perspective, this research was spurred by my personal attempt to make sense of career change experiences that I hoped would serve many others to better understand the complexities of our work lives. Along the way, I have delved into scholarly discussions, theoretical ideas and listened to the experiences of the people in this study all of which helped me see the original problems of everyday work life in a different light and connect them to wider social and cultural issues. This is what I wish to offer to my readers as well.

In the remaining sections of the introduction, I situate my research in the relevant literatures and build up the rationale for this study. In my work, I operate in the intersection of two, previously largely separate areas of research: discursive identity/identity work and career transitions. As a result of a dynamic re-conceptualization of career identities as situated narrative practice, I have been able to develop new insights into the nature of identity work as well as career transitions. The main contribution of the study, however, is towards the emerging discussion on the role of identity work in career transitions (e.g. Ashforth, 2001; Coupland, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006). Pertaining particularly to non-institutionalized transitions, the main argument of my study is that *identity work in career transitions is locally and culturally situated narrative practice that involves a negotiation between conflicting moral identity positions*. In other words, career identities emerge and are negotiated in local interactions through moral positioning within the cultural resources (narratives and discourses) available. Although identity work refers to the individual narrative activities of positioning, this work is nevertheless

thoroughly conditioned by situated interaction, the cultural resources available and one's habitual ways of positioning at a given time and space in one's enfolding career. Hence, this view problematizes not only the dominant view of identities as stable entities residing within the individual but also the understanding of careers and identity work in transitions as an individualized endeavor. Instead, it points to a more dynamic, situated and moral understanding of identities and careers as social constructions.

1.1 The quest for identity

A life-time quest

Identity is a perplexing and slippery concept. It may be given many meanings, both in everyday life and in theoretical formulations. It may be one, or many. It may be an object, or a subject. It may be inside, or outside. It may be a mental entity, or a narrative, or a practice. Perhaps most puzzlingly, it may be a mere imaginary construction and not a definable entity, as seen within a Lacanian, psychoanalytical framework (Driver, 2009). Moreover, it is often used interchangeably with similar concepts such as self, self-concept, self-understanding and subjectivity. In this report, I primarily use the term identity and sometimes 'self' as a synonym and give it a specific meaning and definition as a social and cultural phenomenon. However, outlining a theoretical approach to that which I claim to be empirically examining proved the most challenging yet also the most fascinating aspect of my research journey. To begin with, I simply define identity as defining the particularity of a person by the person herself (self-understanding) or ascribed by others. In the following, I first consider why identity has become such a concern and why it needs to be worked on in contemporary life. Second, I outline how and why it has become a scholarly preoccupation if not a fashion in social sciences. I provide a brief overview of its history as a theoretical construct particularly in the social sciences, in order to pave the way for the theoretical approach that I develop in the section 2.

Why is identity an issue? To claim an identity may be considered a necessity of social life in order to be considered a fully functioning member of society. One needs to be able to create and convey an identity that has continuity, is distinguishable from others and can be reflected on and morally evaluated (Linde, 1993). Identity can also provide a source of ontological security for the inherent insecurities and existential concerns in life (Collinson, 2003; Giddens, 1991) and a sense of coherence that is demanded by social life (Linde, 1993). Moreover, by attaching a person to

specific contexts, social practices and their associated frameworks of meaning, identity guides thinking and action. In this sense, identities can reduce uncertainty by grounding one in the world and helping to know how to act. It can also make participation in various practices, such as forms of work, meaningful (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Since identities are always socially embedded, there is also a need for identity to be acknowledged and valued (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). As Snow & Anderson's (1987) ethnographic studies of homeless street people in Texas have illustrated, this need for moral selves exists even at the most rudimentary level of human existence.

Identities are not stable and self-evident, however. They call for identity work which refers to the activities individuals engage with in order to create, present and sustain identities (Snow & Anderson, 1987). While one's identity was once ascribed by birth to a certain class, religion and family status, in modern meritocratic, capitalist societies it became a matter of achievement and individualistic pursuit for status and valued identities. This creed of meritocracy is epitomized in the US ideology and the American dream that overlooks class, gender and other inequalities while emphasizing the achievement of valued selves as a matter of character and choice (Collinson, 2003). Work, career and employing organizations have offered an important context for achieving identities – traditionally particularly for men (Hearn, 1992) – and validating them via career success or material accumulation (Collinson, 2003). These processes are supported by organizational and professional career practices, such as performance reviews (Townley, 1993), that function as a disciplinary mechanism to regulate appropriate identities via the self-management of employees (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Fournier, 1998). Hence, careers are not simply structured work trajectories in and across organizations but they become projects of the self that also encompass life's non-work aspects (Grey, 1994). Identity work is thus required to conform to the demands of the profession or organization and to achieve desired selves. Moreover, this identity work is on-going since selves in the achievement-oriented culture are never stabilized. The saying that "salesmen are only as good as their last sale" now reverberates across many professions and work contexts (Collinson, 2003).

In addition to the achievement culture, the need for on-going identity work is also a result of the fragmentation or unsettling of traditional sources of certainty and meaning. Which identities are valued is dependent on the conditions of a given time and place and hence, the changes in these conditions can unsettle the basis of identities. If the rules of the game are changing all the time, what may once have been a secure and well-

established identity may become a liability (Bauman, 1995). Moreover, there is an increasing variety of alternative identities available in today's society. As (Bauman, 1995) argues, identity becomes problem that one thinks of when one is not sure of how to place oneself among the variety of styles and patterns of life and of whether others accept one's placement. Hence, identity cannot be taken for granted but is something one needs to work on (Giddens, 1991; C. Taylor, 1989). Such identity work is a way of assigning meaning to life and reducing the uncertainties and insecurities that are an inseparable part of life (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

With the increasing instability, turbulence and ambiguities of working life, the precariousness of identities is evident in organizational contexts (Sennett, 1998). Various organizational changes, including delayering, restructuring, downsizing, and mergers, have unsettled the previously more stable bases of identity at work, such as identification with a single organization or upward managerial careers (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Although identity work may become more active and conscious at times of crisis and transition, it is also argued to be an on-going process in complex and fragmented work contexts, fuelled by multiple, conflicting discourses available in organizations (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, regardless of the fragmentation and change, some identities are always more valued and validated. While managerial and organizational discourses are powerful and even oppressive in regulating desired identities at work, there are possibilities for resistance and variety through alternative identities, such as professions and occupations (Ashforth et al., 2008; Duberley, Cohen, & Mallon, 2006; Fine, 1996), gender (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006; Thomas & Linstead, 2002), age, or family. It is in this diversity of possible identities that the need for identity work seems to stem. Therein may also lay its promise for resisting the constraining identities or for crafting alternatives.

A scholarly quest

Although identity has become a concept used in everyday language (in some contexts) this has not always been the case. In fact, in feudalistic societies the modern conception of self did not even exist as people were not considered individuals but as representatives of their social class (Collinson, 2003). Our understanding of identity is a product of historic development and over time has been given a variety of meanings both in everyday contexts as well as in the disciplines and theoretical approaches within which it has been examined. Although there is no unified answer to what identity is, I focus here on its theoretical formulations by outlining some of the broad developments and viewpoints.

To begin with a dictionary definition, the concept of identity refers to “*the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality*” (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). In other words, identity is about the particularity of something/somebody and the continuity of this particularity over time. This definition conforms to the everyday (Western) understanding of identity as an essentialist construct that is internal to the individual, rather stable and unitary. This self is assumed to exist prior to, and irrespective of, its public displays or linguistic expressions in specific contexts (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). It locates identity in inner depths, inside our minds. This kind of understanding of identity is based on philosophical articulations of the nature of self, such as the 16th century humanism and the 17th century rationalism culminating in the Enlightenment (C. Taylor, 1989; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). As a result of these developments, identity was conceived as a cognitive, transcendental self that exists prior to experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), guides a person’s actions and acts as a source of morals (C. Taylor, 1989). The Romantic Movement retained this focus but conceptualized identity as an innate, true and authentic self that required discovery and expression (ibid.). This notion of inwardness is still very much relevant in popular understandings, particularly in the area of occupational choice. Accordingly, individuals are assumed to have essential qualities lurking somewhere inside that are just waiting to be found, expressed and matched to an ideal environment. This has also been the basic assumption in much of career counseling, as critiqued by Ibarra (Ibarra & Lineback, 2005).

However, as Charles Taylor (1989) has argued, self is not a universal entity and feature of human existence, but a historic mode of self-interpretation that depends on the resources available for constructing such a self in a given context. It was the 20th century sociological and social psychological scholars who began formulating a social and empirical understanding of the emergence and existence of selves. Starting with the American pragmatists, most notably George Herbert Mead (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), the self was no longer seen as an entity deriving from the internal depths of an autonomous individual, but a product of the social, situated within social interaction. In other words, it is experience, participation in everyday life and interactions with others that give the meanings through which self emerges (ibid.). This perspective was further developed in symbolic interactionism which showed the crucial role of language in the development of such social selves.

The concept of identity itself, which still tends to be used interchangeably with self, emerged in the social sciences, psychology and public discourse in

the 1960s with the works of Erik Erikson in psychology, and of Anselm Strauss and Erving Goffman in sociology (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). While the psychological views of identity, such as those of Erikson, chart its normative development as a process of individuation, the social identity theories focus on the mechanisms and sources of its social production. The most influential of such theories have been identity theory (IT) and social identity theory (SIT). Both theories address the social nature of the self and regard it as differentiated into multiple identities. Whereas in IT identities derive from social interaction and the roles one plays in the society, in SIT they stem from group processes and one's category memberships in social groups (Ashforth, 2001). Moreover, as a micro-sociological theory strongly associated with symbolic interactionism, IT focuses on social interaction while the social psychological SIT emphasizes socio-cognitive processes of categorizing oneself and others and the internalization of identities (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). In organization studies, SIT has been popular since its theoretical application to organizational identification by Ashforth & Mael (1989). Both theories define identities, whether focusing on roles or group memberships, as essentialist, unified and pre-discursive objects one may adopt and internalize (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). In other words, while the self may consist of multiple identities depending on the context, the characteristics of particular identities are seen as stable and coherent.

While the social and interactionist views of identity are still widely used, in the latter part of the 20th century alternative approaches to identity began to emerge in European philosophy, social theory and psychology (Burr, 2003). Various feminist, poststructuralist, cultural and social constructionist analyses (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1972; K. J. Gergen, 1991; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Kondo, 1990) have critiqued the traditional ideas of identities to the extent that Stuart Hall (S. Hall, 1992) has called it a discursive explosion. The main critique questions the idea of an essentialist, unified or rational self that guides our actions across all contexts. Instead, identities are seen as always *multiple, temporary and fragmented as well as socially constructed, negotiated, and performed*. It is the symbolic structures of knowledge, language and discourses that constitute identity and explain agency and action. In other words, knowledge of anything, including knowledge of a self, is socially constructed and a result of the cultural forms and social practices in a particular context. Language is given a center stage as a pre-condition for thought and knowledge, and as a form of social action (Burr, 2003). Hence, identity is not a pre-discursive entity – whether seen as deriving from roles (roles) or membership categories (SIT) – but is constructed according to the

cultural forms such as discourses, in a given social, cultural and historical context. It is a discursive practice (Butler, 1990) that comes to being, for example, through the use of the signifier “I” as a linguistic marker to point to a self. What this “I” entails, however, is never the same, but it is situated in the interaction and social practices that provide the available vocabularies for its articulation. I outline this constructionist, discursive view of identity further in section 2.

The promise and power of identity, whether understood from the classic sociological or discursive perspective, has been ascribed to its ability to link the individual and society (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Ybema et al., 2009), macro and micro levels of analysis (Alvesson et al., 2008), or the personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations (Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998). In poststructuralist and discursive approaches, identity also promises to overcome the dualism of autonomous individuals as separate from society, and offers new understandings of action and agency (Holland et al., 1998; Somers, 1994). In other words, we act the way we do because of who we come to be in a given context (Somers, 1994). Furthermore, who we understand ourselves to be, is a result of the symbolic structures of knowledge in our culture and social practices. In other words, we come to know and interpret the world according to cultural forms of knowledge, which are shared and largely implicit and unconscious. This discursive view of identity adopted in this study can be broadly classified as a cultural-theoretical approach (Reckwitz, 2002). By focusing on the symbolic structures of knowledge (such as language), cultural approaches are in contrast to such sociological theories that view action as a product of rational beings and their individual purposes, interests and intentions or as a product of collective norms and values that individuals then comply with (ibid.). Moreover, they differ from psychological approaches that see action as behaviors guided by internal mechanisms and attributes (personality, motivation) (Burr, 2003).

In organization and management studies, identity has also become a popular topic and lens for studying a variety of phenomena, as recent special issues devoted to this theme indicate (Human Relations, 2009, 62:3; Organization, 2008, 15:1; International Journal of Public Administration, 2008, 31:9). The attractiveness of the concept is often ascribed to its ability to bridge micro and macro levels of analysis and to provide a useful lens into a variety of phenomena in work settings (Alvesson et al., 2008). The reasons and orientations to studies of identity vary, however. Whereas in functionalist approaches, often drawing on social identity theory, identity is seen as an intermediary variable to important managerial and organizational outcomes, in interpretive studies the focus is

on understanding people's experiences and the relationship between identity, work and organization. Critical approaches in turn focus on power relations that constrain agency and on the relationship between identity and organizational control (ibid.). I come back to these orientations in section 1.4 when I situate my study more specifically.

1.2 Boundaryless careers and protean² heroes?

"As a topic, this is very relevant. I mean all the changes in the world of work and work well-being and all"

Timo, 45

"People should be given different examples of career paths... they are so different and we all grow and develop at a different rhythm... we need to learn to listen to our own feelings and to practice our own virtues"

Eeva, 51

"It is wonderful that attitudes have changed so one can make such changes... that life does not need to be lived like one was in a tube"

Riitta, 51

"Perhaps work will become more unpredictable now, not always paid work or the same comfortable bunch of colleagues but voluntary work, studies, projects"

Eila, 52

While this study is based on the assumption that identity work is an on-going process, it focuses on such work in a specific context: careers and in particular, career transitions. But what is a career? Even though it may be a taken-for-granted concept in everyday language, career can be given many meanings not only theoretically but across different everyday contexts as well. In this section, I offer a brief overview of such meanings and their changes.

Deriving from the Latin meaning as a carriage-road, racecourse or the path followed by a horse, the word 'career' has from the start taken on figurative meanings such as rapid and continuous course of action or uninterrupted procedure. It was not until the 19th century that it was used to refer to working careers and gradually it came to mean "a course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). This definition narrows the definition to pertain to only those careers that unfold within a profession, such as a doctor's career, and makes the normative assumption about their expected development in terms of advancement (Gunz & Peiperl, 2007). In some everyday contexts this meaning is still

² The word "protean" refers to flexibility, versatility and adaptability. The idea of protean careers is based on Greek mythology and the sea-god Proteus who was capable of changing shape at will. See Arnold & Cohen (2008) for a critical analysis of this metaphor.

common. However, in most career studies career is given a broader definition as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989: 8). This definition is applicable to wider populations as it is not restricted to paid employment or institutional careers, neither is it assigned any prior assumptions about its normative development.

A further distinction commonly made in career studies refers to the subjective and objective career, where the former refers to a subjectively experienced process, whereas the latter refers to a series of objective, institutional roles (Hughes, 1937). This conceptualization is based on the studies of the Chicago school scholars who defined careers even more broadly: referring to any aspect of a person’s life history. Hence, they focused their research on the careers of drug users and taxi dancers, for example (Barley, 1989). The conceptualization of career in this study is more aligned with the subjective career as “the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of the various attributes, actions and things that happen to him” (Hughes, 1937: 413). However, this traditional distinction will be blurred as this moving perspective, although informed by the lived history of the person, will be seen as discursively constructed and thus socio-culturally constituted. In contrast to the dominant sociological (careers as social structures and a form of social control and reproduction), psychological (individual differences in career choice/fit or developmental stages) or management approaches (organization of work, learning), this view takes a cultural, discursive approach to careers. In this sense, I understand *career as a socially and culturally conditioned perspective on experiences of work over time*. Although experiences are always particular to a given life trajectory, they are articulated, understood, and ordered within the available discourses. And, as career is a temporal concept, I see narrative as the primary discursive genre for this meaning making, as I argue later in section 2.

The conceptualizations of career began to shift along the increased uncertainties and blurring of career boundaries as the traditional, stable careers began losing ground since the 1990s (Arthur, 2008). As a result of changing organizational structures and practices, the responsibility for career development has been redirected from employers onto employees who are expected to show resilience and self-manage while employers provide them opportunities for enhancing their employability (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Kanter, 1989). According to this *new career discourse*, which refers to organizational practices and the academic literature within management and organization studies (Coupland, 2004;

Fournier, 1998; Pringle & Mallon, 2003), individuals are required to become fluid and adaptable (Fugate et al., 2004) in order to negotiate a greater variety and number of role transitions (Ashforth, 2001) in their careers. From this perspective, careers are no longer as orderly structured as the full-time organizational careers of continuous involvement in the workforce. Rather, such careers are becoming more customized (Valcour, Bailyn, & Quijada, 2007).

Attempts to capture these changing patterns have resulted in multiple new conceptualizations or models of career: 'boundaryless' (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), 'intelligent' (Arthur, Claman, & Defillippi, 1995), 'protean' (D. T. Hall, 1976; D. T. Hall, 2004), 'portfolio' (Handy, 1989) or simply 'new' (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). Of these, the boundaryless career concept has gained the strongest foothold. It refers to the increased physical and psychological mobility across various boundaries of organizational careers, such as in multi-employer careers or careers not focused on hierarchical advancement. Later, it has been noted that this mobility refers to crossing other boundaries as well, such as occupational and cultural (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Another frequently used concept in the context of new careers is that of protean careers, which had been already introduced by Douglas Hall in 1976, but became a popular concept in the 1990s. Although it builds on similar assumptions about the demise of traditional, organizational career ladders, the protean career refers more to an orientation, while the boundaryless career refers to career patterns. The protean career is "a mindset" or "an attitude towards the career that reflects freedom, self-direction, and making choices based on one's personal values" (Briscoe & Hall, 2006: 6). It emphasizes an individualistic approach to careers and psychological success, in contrast to the traditional extrinsic rewards such as pay, rank and power (D. T. Hall, 2002).

In some ways, this new career discourse has been a welcome change to the organizational careers literature. In de-emphasizing the traditionally dominant norm of hierarchical progress, and favoring more versatile career patterns and integration of work and home, it promises to offer more inclusive career practices and norms (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). For example, traditional career theories have for a long time been criticized for being based on men's experiences and neglecting the experiences and patterns of (some) women's careers (Sullivan, 1999). From this perspective, new career discourse and the so-called feminization of careers have been argued to offer new opportunities for women (Fondas, 1996). Increased flexibility has also been called for with regard to other groups, such as ethnic minorities and blue-collar workers, traditionally seen as deviations from dominant career patterns (Pringle & Mallon, 2003).

There are several problems with the concepts of boundaryless and protean careers, however. Firstly, labeling careers as boundaryless seems more like a misnomer (Sullivan, 1999), even as a metaphor (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). As boundaries are an essential aspect of ordering social life, the issue should not be whether they exist but rather, where the (possible) new boundaries are drawn (Barley & Kunda, 2001). Boundaries are not necessarily only constraining either: they are needed in making sense of one's experiences and self (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000; Sullivan, 1999). Secondly, the changes in careers may have been exaggerated; there is ample evidence of traditional career jobs and hierarchical structures (Dany, 2003; Jacoby, 1999), even though such careers may have lost some of their predictability. Moreover, the basis of the traditional norms and career theories has been based on a limited elite group of professionals, usually white middle-class men (Mavin, 2001). From this perspective, the changes may only concern a limited few whose careers could be expected to evolve in such orderly patterns.

Thirdly, in neglecting the structural and cultural constraints and boundaries in careers, the new career discourse seems to over-emphasize career freedom and individual agency (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Dany, 2003; Dyer & Humphries, 2002). It reproduces the individualistic career ideology that assumes a view of careers as a product of individual effort and talent and paid employment as a primary source of one's identity (Richardson, 2000). By emphasizing individual agency and mobility, it constructs new taken-for-granted assumptions about what is desirable and valued in careers (Dyer & Humphries, 2002). Everyone is assumed to be self-sufficient, resilient, entrepreneurial and responsible for career success (Richardson, 2000). Although personal values are seen as a new necessity in guiding one's career, it is only agential values such as self-expression and autonomy that are favored whereas competing values of security and comfortable lifestyle, for example, are not recognized (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). As a result, the traditional norms are simply replaced with the new that may be as constraining and exclusive, only available to a very limited, elite group of employees that meet the normative criteria of protean characteristics (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Hence, the new career discourse results in a view that is theoretically under-socialized and depoliticized (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). More critical views, however, have paid attention to how the new career discourse normalizes changes in the working place by making them seem natural and inevitable, and by shifting the responsibility to individuals and their adjustment (Dyer & Humphries, 2002). In constructing new understandings and norms, it represents a new

power/knowledge regime that governs and disciplines employees (Fournier, 1998).

In this study, I share this critical stance to boundaryless/protean career discourse although at the same time I find attempts to unsettle constraining and exclusionary career ideologies and practices appealing. The focus here is not to examine any potential changes in career patterns, or assume careers to have become entirely boundaryless. However, the starting point is that these boundaries may have become blurred (Pringle & Mallon, 2003) and more difficult to make sense of as a result of frequent changes and multiple discourses. If single organizations or even occupations are no longer the primary boundary markers for careers, how are the meanings attached and boundaries set to the sequences of career trajectories (Barley & Kunda, 2001)? Studying the practices of identity can illuminate this boundary work and the “psychological” boundaries (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), although in the context of this study these boundaries are conceptualized as discursive and socio-cultural.

1.3 Identity work in the liminality of career transitions

“Somehow I feel like I have lost my self, who I am in that job in all that work exhaustion and the career not progressing.. my own self if lost”

Kati, 37, sales manager

“You lose your status in a way and might get the image of a loser and all, having given up the career”

Timo, 45, stockbroker

“I feel like I am trapped... it is difficult to think what would be the right thing to do”

Maria, 33, business development manager

Irrespective of the extent of change in careers, identity work can be seen as an on-going necessity in the contemporary context of work and intensified at times of major change, crisis and transition (Ashforth, 2001). While such transitions may have become more common nowadays, they have always been a part of careers. In fact, as Trice and Morand (1989) have argued, a work career could be conceptualized as a series of transitions from one role to another. The concept of transition itself may refer both to actual role change (Nicholson, 1984) and the period that precedes and follows it (Louis, 1980). In addition to the movements from one role to another (inter-role), either between simultaneous (micro) or sequential roles (macro), transition may also refer changes in orientation toward a role already held (intra-role) (Ashforth, 2001; Louis, 1980).

Regardless of the nature of transition, identity changes have for long been argued to accompany such transitions (D. T. Hall, 1971; Strauss, 1959).

Prior research has focused on modeling the antecedents and consequences of such adjustment processes, such as in Nicholson's (1984) theory of work role transitions, or the individual qualities and competences required to strengthen one's identity, such as in Hall's (D. T. Hall, 1971) theoretical model of career sub-identity development. In this line of work, the processes of identity construction have received less attention (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Recently, however, there has been an emerging stream of literature that studies the processes of identity construction/work in role transitions (Ashforth, 2001; Coupland, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Deshpande, 2007; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Pratt et al., 2006). Although the theoretical basis of identity conceptualization has not always been clearly spelled out, most of this work builds on interactionist identity theory and/or social identity theory.

Of these studies, Ibarra's (1999) work and that of Pratt et al.'s (2006) focused on identity work in professional socialization, the former among investment bankers and management consultants transitioning into more senior roles, and the latter among medical residents transitioning from students to professionals. Ibarra's study showed how adaptation included, among other things, the identification of potential identities and experimenting with provisional selves. Furthermore, it showed how this process is shaped by the repertoires of possibilities, dependent on organizational practices and individual characteristics. In Pratt et al.'s study (2006), the medical residents were not engaged with such experimentation, but customized their professional identities learned during studies through enriching, splinting or patching to deal with the mismatch between the work and their prior expectations. In this study, identity work tasks were more homogenous and differences were more dependent on the specialization and the differences in actual work.

The role of narratives in identity work during transitions has also been previously acknowledged (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). These approaches build on the idea that a narrative is a vehicle for expressing the self and that some narratives are more successful for adjustment than others. For example, the model of narrative identity work in transitions developed by Ibarra & Barbulescu (2010) assumes a view of identity as stable and coherent both prior to and after the transition period and focuses on the process of individual adjustment and its functionality. It proposes narrative mechanisms, such as attributes of narratives (coherence of plot, agentive protagonist, use of cultural archetypes), and narrative repertoires one has available for identity work and the nature of the narrating process as means to deal with the transition. However, as a

normative model, it is not very suitable for studies that aim to capture the lived experience of transitions and the contextual conditions and particularities of identity work. As the studies of Laurie Cohen & Mary Mallon (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Mallon, 1998; Mallon, 1999) have shown, contemporary career transitions are characterized by complexity and ambiguity. Moreover, narrative research on identity has shown how identities are rarely in the form of full, coherent narratives but instead performed through situated narrative practices. These insights call for approaches that can better capture actual practices as well as the cultural resources and constraints of identity work. Towards this end, I develop an interpretative, discursive approach to identity work in the context of career in section 2.

With regard to the empirical basis of prior research on identity work career transitions, the focus has been primarily on institutionalized, structured work role transitions involving clear rites of passage, such as socialization, promotion or retirement. However, in the contemporary work context, transitions are often unpredictable and non-institutionalized without clear guidelines on how to act (Mayrhofer & Ieallatchitch, 2005). In these transitions, the experience of liminality (Turner, 1967; Van Gennep, 1960) is heightened, referring to the indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a person's life. It has been characterized as an unstructured state of limbo where one experiences a state of not being in the old role or in the one toward which one may be heading (Trice & Morand, 1989). Moreover, unpredictable transitions may never result in changes from one role to another. Hence, many of such transitions, while they might very common, remain largely hidden and difficult to examine. Yet, it is important to understand what happens in these transitions and what the resources or constraints for dealing with such liminality are. In addition to illuminating processes of adjustment, studying such transitions can tell us about the changes in society and organizations (Nicholson, 1984), and reveal underlying assumptions and norms about work and careers.

1.4 Situating and plotting the study

Aims and approaches

The aims of this study are twofold. First, I seek **to increase our understanding of the nature, resources and constraints of identity work in non-institutionalized career transitions**. Although such work can be assumed to be fairly common in contemporary (work)

contexts (1.1), it may be intensified in light of changing career discourses (1.2) and at times of increasingly frequent career transitions (1.3). Yet, empirical studies of identity work in such unpredictable transitions are rare. Hence, this research contributes towards filling that gap. Second, my aim is **to problematize the individualistic assumptions in much of the contemporary career literature**. In order to achieve this aim, I have adopted an alternative, discursive approach that recognizes the cultural and social contexts empowering and constraining embodied beings and their agency. Following this, my theoretical research question focuses on *how to understand career identities as cultural, discursive phenomena*. After addressing this question in section 2, I elaborate my empirical research questions relating to these aims at the beginning of section 2. In the following, I describe the meta-theoretical orientations and approaches that have informed my study and these aims.

From the start it was clear that I was going to use *qualitative* methodology that captures the point of view of people and the meanings they give to their and other's actions. In career studies qualitative approaches seem to be still marginal as most research is quantitative, marked by standardized and abstracted modes of data analysis and collection (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Koskinen et al., 2005). As a specific form of qualitative research, early on I adopted a *narrative* approach to which I was introduced with in my research community. It was not only a personally inspiring approach but one that seemed a promising alternative in the area of career studies. While qualitative studies, including some narrative approaches, can also rely on a postpositivist research philosophy and realist ontology to find regularities or causal explanations, I have adopted an *interpretative* approach which is based on the philosophical traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Interpretivism is concerned with contextualized description, understanding and interpretation of the meanings given to social reality (Kakkuri-Knuuttila & Heinlahti, 2006).

Furthermore, this study is *social constructionist*, which is perhaps the most common form of interpretivism today (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). It is not only a philosophical³ but theoretical orientation to knowledge and social life (Burr, 2003). This orientation has been the most influential for

³ As a research philosophy, it is most commonly referred to as social constructivism (e.g. Koskinen, Alasuutari, & Peltonen, 2005). The use of this terminology (social constructionism vs. constructivism) is blurred across different disciplines. I prefer using the term constructionism as I build on many of its main tenets even though I do not subscribe to its more relativist forms. Moreover, I want to differentiate my approach from constructivist approaches in psychology and education that privilege cognitive processes of the individual in knowledge construction (Young & Collin, 2004).

my thinking as it is also converges with my critical and feminist orientations (see below). According to social constructionism, the sense of the real and knowledge about the world is socially constructed in everyday interaction and practices. Language plays a key role in this construction process through categories and discourses: it is the basis of our thinking and forms the objects that we speak of, rather than being a neutral vessel for conveying pre-existing, objective reality. Moreover, knowledge is also seen to be culturally and historically situated and therefore, understandings of the world change across spatial and temporal contexts. This applies to knowledge of oneself as well: instead of residing in the individual minds, the origin of experiences and understandings of oneself as a particular person is socially and culturally situated. In constructing particular versions of the world, language is also a form of action with practical consequences to our lives (Burr, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008).

As a research approach, constructionism is focused on critically examining how the objects of our knowledge are given an objectified reality through shared language and meanings. In the context of this study, it means that I do not take careers and identities as stable, given categories but examine how such notions become constructed via available narratives and related discursive practices (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004). As we are situated in particular times, places, and social practices along our life trajectory, so are the ways we can think and enact career and identities. Conceptions of what constitutes a good career are always situated in specific contexts and have implications for desired and possible identities. Hence, I look at how cultural discourses and narratives contribute to, empower, and constrain identity construction among the business graduates I have studied. As I will argue, awareness of how our careers and identities are situated can also point to the possibilities of agency and change.

As research is one kind of practice of knowledge construction, constructionist studies also call for reflexivity on the part of the researcher and her role (Cunliffe, 2003). Since social constructionism is not a unified approach, I specify my theoretical assumptions further in developing the theoretical framework in section 2. Nevertheless, most orientations are deeply concerned with surfacing the tacit assumptions in our ways of talking and understanding the world, and the habitual ways we act and respond based on them. One of the enduring debates in social constructionist theorizing is between the relativist and realist stances on the relationship between reality, language and knowledge. Although I lean towards a more relativist position of social construction, this stance does not imply that realities are merely imaginary or mental constructs, neither

does it deny the existence of a material reality (Burr, 2003; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

In the context of career studies, the constructionist orientation also means taking a critical look at the dominant, underlying assumptions about careers. I join a small group of scholars who have adopted a critical stance to the individualistic, new career discourse (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Cohen et al., 2004; Dany, 2003; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). In contrast to the traditional structural or psychological views, I take a cultural understanding of careers that takes into account the various constraints at the level of knowledge and thinking. Narrative approaches in career studies are not new (Bujold, 2004; Cochran, 1990), yet they are rare. A notable exception is the narrative, constructionist studies and approach developed by Laurie Cohen and her colleagues (Cohen & Mallon, 2001; Cohen et al., 2004; Cohen, 2006). The approach I develop here complements theirs in theorizing identity as the key mediating concept between careers, narratives, and individuals, and in adopting dialogical/interactional methods of narrative analysis. My aim has been to develop an approach to understanding identity in careers that exposes its embeddedness in social, historic and cultural contexts while also addressing the agency and particularities of the person.

In combining two broad areas of literature, namely career studies/transitions and identity work, this study joins a recent stream of contributions in this intersection (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Pratt et al., 2006). To this discussion, I offer a complementary way of looking at identity work in transitions by developing a constructionist and discursive approach. Instead of modeling universal processes and tasks of identity work, this study offers a situated conceptualization of such work as narrative practice and specifies its resources and practices in the empirical context of this study. Moreover, in contrast to prior empirical work, this research focuses on non-institutionalized career transitions that are not a predictable, well structured, socially scripted, or a necessary part of a formal career trajectory.

My critical stance towards knowledge and identity construction in the context of career transitions is also informed by a *feminist approach*. Gender is one of those taken-for-granted constructions, and a fundamental, pervasive aspect of our everyday lives that often goes unnoticed. In some ways, this was also the case with my study. Although I claimed my research project as feminist from the start, it was not until I really put on my gender lenses, in other words began asking questions using gender as an analytical category, that I was able to see how exactly gender figured in my study.

Therefore, from the perspective of gender, *one aim of the study is to make visible the taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and beliefs about careers that operate at the level of identity*. In other words, I look at how career discourses, career change narratives and the identity positions available are gendered in their assumptions and values (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006). This should not be understood narrowly as a women's issue, but as an attempt to reveal some of the normative conceptions of career, values and goals – some of which are empowering and some of which are constraining to both men and women. It is from this perspective that I have also come to take a critical view of the new career discourse and the ideal of a protean identity.

While much gender research has already been done in analyzing the role of gender as a variable in careers, I take a discursive, practice-based view of gender that conceptualizes gender as something that is discursively constructed and done in interactions. To avoid reproducing differences between men and women, I do not engage in gendered “body-counting”, in other words comparisons across genders. Yet, bodies do count in my study. It is embodied beings who engage in identity work and who bring to each encounter their lived histories of identity positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; S. Taylor, 2005; S. Taylor, 2006). These histories of having been positioned or having positioned oneself as a certain kind of a person are gendered and influence the experiences and identity positions one can claim.

Finally, as a broader purpose of my research, I hope to enable an understanding of how career transitions as personal predicaments are related to their broader circumstances (Mills, 1959). Although I study individual people and their identity work, I seek to connect them to more general, shared conditions. While the resources and constraints of identity work cannot be generalized, how they are used in these transitions could have relevance for others as well. In this sense, I aim to offer insights to individuals who may be struggling with similar needs to change careers as those of the business graduates in this study.

Research design

The empirical study focuses on Finnish business graduates who are looking for a career change. I have interviewed 12 people of varying ages and professions who all (but one) had met with the SEFE (the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates) career counselor. When I interviewed these people the first time, they were all in the middle of a career transition. Most of the interviews were conducted in 2005, one in 2003 and two in 2009. In addition, I made follow-up interviews with eight

of the nine people I had interviewed in 2005. These interviews were carried out in 2009, four years after the first interviews. I describe the various phases of the research process, including this choice of research design, in more detail in section 3.3.

The plot of the report

In chapter 2, I develop my theoretical approach to studying career identity and identity work in career transitions. Taking an alternative, discursive orientation to re-conceptualize career identity has served my aim of problematizing some of the dominant assumptions in career studies. The research question that has guided this investigation is: *how can career identities be understood as cultural, discursive phenomena?* While the answers that I have developed could be applied to identities across many contexts, I have been concerned specifically with identities that are relevant for careers. Thus, I begin with the dominant view of career identities as internal, essential constructs (2.1) and proceed to discursive theories of identity and the role of power (2.2) with a particular interest in the role of gender (2.3). Next, I introduce narrative as a relevant genre of discourse in the career context and argue for a practice view of narrative identity; something that is done in local interactional and wider socio-cultural contexts (2.4). To account for the role of the person and agency, I have drawn on the concept of identity positioning to specify the scope for identity work (2.5). I conclude the section by summarizing the main assumptions in a re-conceptualization of career identity as narrative practice of positioning within the local context of narrating and the narratives and discourses available (2.6).

In chapter 3, I specify the methodological choices I have made in this study. I discuss the rationale, in line with the theoretical framework, for a practice-oriented view of narratives as embodied performances rather than as independent, self-contained units (3.1). I also consider the particularities and limits of interviews as a method of data collection. I take a view of interviews as “the reality” to be studied, as a particular discursive environment where knowledge and identities are constructed rather than represented (3.2). In section 3.3, I describe in detail how the research process evolved, how I conducted the narrative interviews and how I analyzed them in the form of transcribed texts via dialogic methods of narrative analysis.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I describe the empirical findings of my study. First, in chapter 4, I give an overview of the practices, resources and constraints of identity work in a middle of career transition. As a result of my research, I have identified three practices of identity work specific to this context: 1)

positioning as the main character of a career change narrative, 2) temporal ordering of multiple identity positions, and 3) negotiating identity conflicts. In addition, I identified three types of career change master narratives, those of *disruption, mismatch, and life renewal* that served to account for career change and to position identities. I also show how gender figures in this identity work in the way career change narratives, professional discourses and identities are gendered. In addition to the overview of the findings, I describe the first two of the practices in more detail as well as the features of the master narratives in chapter 4. Chapter 5 is devoted to the practice of negotiating identity conflicts. As these conflicts are always situated within the particularities of a given life, I describe the conflicts of each of the research participant here in more detail. This is the section where the people I studied are given center stage. In concluding on these negotiations (5.4), I argue that from the perspective of identity work career transitions can be seen as moral, gendered struggles between conflicting positions of identity.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from the follow-up interviews I conducted with eight women business graduates four years after the first interview. I focus on examining changes in their identities/identity work and the resources for such changes and identify three types of identity work practices over time. I argue that even in the most radical career identity changes the process has been gradual, requiring subtle shifts of repositioning and acquiring new resources for identity through such activities as career counseling, CV writing, education, and participation in new communities (e.g. hobbies).

Finally, in chapter 7, I offer a summary of the findings, an evaluation of the knowledge produced, and the contributions of this study. I conclude with suggestions for new beginnings in terms of research and career practice.

2 Career identities: a narrative practice view

In this section, I situate the theoretical approach and concepts I have developed to studying identity in the context of careers. The question that I am examining here is: *how can career identities be conceptualized as cultural, discursive phenomena?* In contrast to the common depiction of identities as an internalized product – something we have – I am proposing a view of identities as something we do within the local and cultural contexts that we find ourselves. I start with the traditional views of career identity that define it as a property of individuals (2.1), and begin to challenge them in section 2.2 by introducing the discursive approach and showing how language constructs rather than represents meanings that are never fixed. Moreover, I show how discourses regulate identities via the subject positions they make available, and provide examples of career discourses and organizational practices. In section 2.3, I delve deeper into the regulatory power of career discourses and show how they are gendered. In section 2.4, I present narrative as a distinct and relevant genre of discourse for construction of career identities. I argue for a practice view of narrative identity as something that we do in contrast to narratives as independent, self-contained, and coherent representations of identity. Finally, in section 2.5 I consider the role of the individual subject in identity construction by drawing on the concepts of identity work and positioning. I also address issues that discursive studies often ignore, such as continuity in identities or the differences between individuals. Section 2.6 concludes my theoretical framework by summarizing the main ideas and by presenting a conceptualization of career identities as narrative practice.

2.1 Career identities as internal constructs

In career studies, it is psychological theories in particular that have been the basis for understanding identity. For example, Erikson's psychoanalytical theory on the stages of psychosocial development has informed many theories of career development (Sullivan & Crocitto, 2007). In Erikson's view, the establishment of a coherent sense of identity and its continuity are a necessary condition for well-being. He identified eight stages of development, determined by age and social demands, that the ego needs to address in order to develop an integrated identity and have a healthy adulthood. Work and career were central to the process of identity formation. Erikson's theory has been influential in later stage-based theories of adult and career development such as Super's career stage model (Super, 1957), Daniel Levinson's life-stage model (Levinson, 1978) and Edgar Schein's career stages (Schein, 1978). Although none of these theories use the concept of career identity, Super's self-concept and Schein's career anchors share similar features. Super's self-concept refers to professional identity that represents an understanding of interests, values, abilities and goals based on the feedback from others. In addition there is a subjective element, self career concept which refers to the subjective meanings this professional identity has for the individual (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Schein defines career anchors also as self-concepts, which consist of self-perceived talents and abilities, basic values as well as motives and needs pertaining to career (Schein, 1996).

In both Super's and Schein's conceptualizations, career identity is understood as consisting of individual attributes. From this perspective, career identity is a cognitive and psychological construct that represents various individual dispositions. In later research, career identity is often operationalized and used interchangeably with the concept of professional identity, defined as the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences through which people define themselves in a professional role (Schein, 1978; Ibarra, 1999). Another approach to career identity, albeit quite specific, is taken by London (1983) who defines career identity as the importance of career to one's overall identity. It consists of work identity as well as desire for upward mobility.

In the more recent literature on careers, career identity has received renewed interest along the views of its growing importance over organizational, work and professional identities due to the changes in careers (Fugate et al., 2004; D. T. Hall, 2002). In contrast to meanings of career derived within a profession or organization, it is argued that

individual values, personal meaning, and motivation, 'knowing-why' (Arthur et al., 1995) should guide career action. This knowing-why is considered a necessary competence in adapting to turbulent career environments. As the term also indicates, identity awareness or the clarity and strength of career identity are considered functional or instrumental to various career outcomes, such as success from the individual point of view. Although the value of career identity is often emphasized, empirical research on its role is less common. One such study explored the role of the clarity of career identity as a factor in employability (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007). In McArdle et al.'s study (2007), career identity was measured by identity awareness and self-efficacy scale that does not say anything about what career identity is. Its contents are assumed to be individual dispositions that drive one's career actions. Although Fugate et al. (2004) note that career identities are often articulated in narratives, it remains unclear what they entail.

Overall, the conceptualization of career identity in previous studies has been predominantly psychological. It is a taken-for-granted, cognitive construct that can be used as an individual level factor to explain various career phenomena, such as career success. These approaches build on the psychological conceptualization of not only identity but of individuals in the modern sense of the word. In other words, individuals are considered as autonomous, rational subjects whose personalities, motivations and other assumed internal, psychological structures can be used to explain their actions. Moreover, the definitions of career identity are more aligned with the notions of personal identity – which refers to personal and character traits – rather than with social identity, which is based on social roles and group memberships (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). More recently, however, the role of relationships (Kram, 1996) and various networks (Ibarra & Deshpande, 2007) in career and identity development has received more interest.

In the following sections, I challenge this traditional, largely individualistic understanding of identity in career studies, and develop an alternative approach to identity that takes into account the crucial role of language and social interaction in the construction of identities. Since this view builds on a constructionist understanding of social reality, I also argue that a purpose of this kind of an approach is not to predict actions, but to understand and critically examine the processes and conditions of career and identity construction. As to studies of career identity, it re-focuses them to the processes of career identity construction or enactment, and emphasizes their situatedness in a variety of contexts.

2.2 Discourse, subject positions and power in the construction of career identities

“Identity is not a fixed ‘thing’, it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambitious, the result of culturally available meanings and open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings in everyday situations.”

Dorinne K. Kondo (1990, p. 24)

In contrast to psychological views of identity, the sociological self – or selves – and group-based accounts of identity are seen to be emerging products of the social (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Yet, they still assume a subject with an inner core or essence (S. Hall, 1996). In the latter part of the 20th century, various poststructuralist and constructionist theories (K. J. Gergen, 1991), feminist theories in particular (Butler, 1990; Kondo, 1990), refuted both the individualistic and social notions of identities as essentialist and pre-discursive. They claimed that identity and the categories used to make the distinctions among them are not predetermined or stable. The meanings attached to these categories are never fixed but discursively constructed and negotiated in specific historic, socio-cultural contexts. These arguments are based on the so-called linguistic turn in the social sciences that challenged the still common sense view of language and its role as a transparent medium that represents the pre-existing world, people, or their thoughts. Instead, language is seen as active in constructing the social reality to which it refers. As the new understanding of the role of language is so fundamental to the discursive view of identity, I first briefly present arguments about the relationship of language and thought.

2.2.1 The turn to language

In Saussurian structuralism, language is considered a structural system that functions as a framework for social reality. Signs are the essential elements of this system, and consist of two parts, the signifier (the word, the spoken sound) and the signified (the concept it refers to). Even though the signified could be something with a concrete physical presence (e.g. computer) the sign does not refer to particular objects but to a concept of what the signified means. Saussure’s important point was that the system of how certain signifiers become to refer to certain signified meanings was arbitrary. Not only is there nothing intrinsic about a signifier that would link it with the signified concepts, but also the concepts themselves are arbitrary divisions and categorizations of experience. Thus, it is language that creates the categories in our social world instead of representing pre-

30

existing categories. However, this does not mean that the meanings given to concepts are random. Rather they get their meanings from the rules of a particular social world and from differences between other concepts. (Burr, 2003)

From the perspective of identity, this turn to language implies that what it means to be a person and have an identity is a product of language. The everyday understanding of persons as having personalities, for instance, is an effect of language and concepts given to us by psychology – a social practice focusing on elaborating this concept to describe human experience and action. Personality is not a pre-existing entity lurking in our minds, but a set of linguistic concepts used to understand particular phenomena. This is the anti-essentialism that discursive approaches share: there is no essential nature or personhood at the core of an individual wherein experiences and actions originate. However a person is defined by, or the kinds of thoughts or experiences are ascribed to him/her, are a result of linguistic practices and meanings. Whereas in Saussurian structuralism the meanings of concepts are assumed to become fixed over time, the poststructuralist argument emphasizes that meanings are never fixed. For example, the same concept or expression may come to mean different things across the contexts of its use. In other words, language use is situated and hence, what a concept means depends on who is saying it, when, to whom and for what purpose (Burr, 2003). As a result, there is no essential, unified self; identities are always temporary and shifting.

This turn to language has been the basis of discursive approaches which can be categorized into two broad approaches: micro and macro level. The micro level approaches examine discourse as situated talk-in-interaction and pay attention to the immediate contexts of interaction in determining meanings and constructing reality (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Wortham, 2001). These include conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, and discursive psychology. In turn, the macro level approaches, such as poststructuralist, Foucauldian and critical discourse analysis, focus on Discourses as systems of knowledge. They examine the wider social and institutional contexts and their role in constituting, regulating or controlling social reality. From the perspective of identity, these discursive views can result in two approaches: one focused on a discursive construction of identity in interaction, and the other on historical structures with regulatory power on identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

In the remainder of this section, I outline more specifically a poststructuralist or discourse-based understanding of identity before I consider the role of narrative as a specific genre of discourse and work

towards an approach to identity that combines macro and micro views of discourse/narrative and identity construction.

2.2.2 Discourses and subject positions

A Foucauldian understanding of discourse defines them as ‘practices which form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972: 49). Discourses are systems of knowledge that consists of statements that represent the world in a particular way. In constructing our knowledge of various topics, discourses pre-exist individuals and regulate the way they can think about something and act based on this knowledge. These discourses are also historic in the sense that our ways of perceiving, thinking and acting change over time. Things mean something only within a specific historic and cultural context. To use Foucault’s example, ‘mental illness’ is not an objective fact but it is given different meanings in different contexts and did not even exist until it came about as a result of historic developments.

The most radical consequence of the Foucauldian approach is the way it de-centers the person or the subject (S. Hall, 1992). In other words, the traditional conception of the subject and the common-sense understanding of personhood are questioned. From the discursive point of view, there is no essential, pre-discursive identity or true, authentic self residing in the inner depths of our being. Subjects or persons do not exist outside of discourse but are produced within discourse. They are products of the socio-cultural and socio-historical (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) and come into being only through the attachment of meanings that vary across time, place and cultures. Instead of the common sense view of the person as the primary producer of meaning and the location of identity, it is the discourses of a given context that are the origin of knowledge and meanings. For example in children, the sense of self develops only through participation in various discursive practices and the learning of language where the first step is to learn the use of linguistic markers that differentiate a person from others. Identities and experiences exist and can be known only through the range of discourses one has been subjected to as part of the life trajectory (Burr, 2003). As a result, identities are always temporary, multiple, negotiated or performed (Butler, 1990) within the social practices we are part of.

More specifically, the way discourses construct identity is via the subject positions they make available. This concept derives from the work of Foucault and has been further developed within discursive and narrative approaches to identity, as I show in section 2.5 (Bamberg, 2004; Davies & Harré, 1990; Mishler, 1999). Subject positions offer a conceptual repertoire and a location for the person to speak from and thus determine the rights,

obligations and possibilities for action. Once having occupied such a position, a person comes to experience the world from that vantage point and uses the particular categories, meanings and storylines relevant in that discourse. These positions frame the possibilities and limitations of what one can be and how one can act within a particular discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990). For example, when we understand ourselves as particular type professionals, we can only come to know ourselves as such people as a result of having been subjected to that professional discourse. The knowledge we have about the profession is situated within the professional discourse and determines how we can understand, think, and act within that discourse.

The concept of subject positions points to a central aspect of poststructuralist theorizing, namely the relationship between discourses, identity, knowledge and power. Discourses both empower and restrict agency. Any version of reality that becomes taken-for-granted or common sense (a particular discourse) always favors certain interpretations and ways of acting and simultaneously, marginalizes others. Power is not, therefore, something an individual has but it is in the discourses and discursive practices. From this perspective, discourses regulate identities and discipline individuals by constructing subject positions that govern their thoughts and actions. This view, however, results in a very bleak and problematic picture of the agential subject that many have sought to change. Some poststructuralist views have given the subject space for agency within the discourses via the possibility of performing identity differently in the very repetition of its expressions (Butler, 1990). Yet, these views leave unexplained the issue of why it is that some people occupy certain subject positions rather than others (S. Hall, 1996). I return to this issue in section 2.5 when I consider the role of the individual subject and agency.

Let us take an example of the discursive production of identities from the career context. In a study on Finnish engineers and managers of a multinational firm, Peltonen (1998) identified three career discourses that act as structures of meaning to career and its development: bureaucratic, occupational, and enterprising. Each discourse constructs a particular version of career and orders the career actors' experiences and constructs identity. The bureaucratic discourse is focused on career development along hierarchical levels. This discourse is traditionally seen as the primary meaning of the concept of career itself. As a discourse, it also constructs the subject position of career-focused individuals who are expected to rise in the hierarchy along the development of experience and competence. The occupational discourse of engineering structures careers as trajectories of

knowledge and expertise development. The engineering discourse in turn constructs subject positions for engineers as agents of technological progress. Whereas the organization or occupation is the primary source of identity, in the enterprising discourse the individual is put in center place. Career is primarily an ideal match between one's self and work. This discourse has also been called the new career discourse (Fournier, 1998; Pringle & Mallon, 2003) to differentiate it particularly from the bureaucratic career discourse. This new career discourse constructs careers as opportunities for personal achievement and realization of one's potential and positions individuals as enterprising, goal-oriented, and adaptable (Fournier, 1998).

An example of another study on the structures of meaning in careers is that of Duberley, Cohen and Mallon (2006) on research scientists in the UK and New Zealand. Instead of discourse, however, they use the concept of career scripts, which refer to "the interpretive schemes people use to make sense of their developing careers" (p. 1136). Although this concept emphasizes interaction between individuals and the institutionally coded scripts, scripts are similar to discourses in their focus on basic assumptions that frame how people can understand their career and enact them. Moreover, the scripts construct different identities and agency for the scientists. In their research, Duberley et al. (2006) found four scripts that the scientists used to account for their careers: the organizational careerist, the impassioned scientist, the strategic opportunist, and the balance seeker. The organizational careerist and the strategic opportunist align with the above-mentioned bureaucratic discourse in their focus on hierarchical progression in the organization, whereas the impassioned scientist script is embedded in the professional discourse, and the balance seeker in the family/private life context. All of these scripts position the scientists in a particular way, and thus determine the appropriate ways of understanding, valuing and developing their careers. This research shows how career meaning-making is embedded in multiple contexts and that there are competing scripts available.

Similar conclusions can be made from Fine's (1996) study on restaurant cooks. He studied the occupational identity of restaurant cooks and used the concept of occupational rhetorics for the variety of resources the cooks used to define their work and identity. The rhetorics of profession, art, business, and labor he identified show the diversity in the resources cooks draw on, and the situated nature of identity. They illustrate how the cooks approach and do their daily work, but they also have implication for how their work evolves over time, in other words their careers. As Fine argues, the rhetorics may change across career stages. From a discursive

perspective, these rhetorics may also point to agency in their careers by allowing the cooks a variety of positions and alternative directions of development. As the rhetorics are contingent on the conditions of work, Fine's study also illustrates how the context restricts the range of available identity positions.

Although the discourses constructing career identities extend across a variety of contexts, organizations play an important role in their regulation through various practices. Regulation may operate through socialization, career (Grey, 1994), management development (Gagnon, 2008), and surveillance practices that construct appropriate identities and subjectivities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). For example, developmental and performance appraisals have become forms of measuring not only work-related behavior, but also dispositions and competences that go beyond the workplace (Townley, 1993). Organizational careers can be seen as one of the discursive practices which regulate identities. In fact, in many organizational settings career has become a project of the self, and one of the most important sites where one's self can be constructed and developed to become what it desires (Grey, 1994). Organizations can provide the tools and paths that support these projects. In contrast to work, career as a source of identity offers a temporal organizing principle to one's experiences that constructs identity via change from past and projected future development. In organizations, identity regulation can function as a form of organizational control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) in regulating employees' behavior through their self-understandings and self-discipline. For example, it has been argued that the new career discourse supports entrepreneurial cultures and also changes the psychological contract between employers and employees. As a result, new careers have become an inevitable outcome of the restructuring and ways of doing business in the global economy. Hence, the responsibility for career development and employment has been shifted to the individual (Fournier, 1998).

As an example of the regulatory power of discourses I next consider the gendering of careers via discourse and identity before turning into narrative as a specific genre of discourse.

2.3 Career discourses and identities as gendered

The fundamental way that career discourses order career agency is through their gendered nature. In her theory of gendered organizations, Joan Acker (1990) outlines the assumed ideal worker in organizations whose characteristics (e.g. full-time availability, centrality of work) are considered

abstract and gender neutral. Yet, in practice they are gendered as masculine. In a similar fashion, career identities embedded in career discourses and practices are often considered gender neutral, although they often construct gendered meanings to these abstract workers and careerists. By claiming discourses as gendered, I do not assume differences between men and women in their careers to be essential nor “natural”. Gendering of career discourses means that careers – and as a result, career identities and career patterns – are given meanings along the distinction and binary of men/masculinity and women/femininity.

My understanding of gender is based on theorizing of gender as practice, something that is actively done (Butler, 1990; Gherardi, 1994; Henttonen, 2010; Martin, 2003; Poggio, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In the approach that I have taken, doing gender refers both to ethnomethodological understandings of gender as an interactional accomplishment, as well as poststructuralist and discursive views (Kelan, 2010). It means that gender is something that is done to define particular aspects of reality as relating to men/masculinities or women/femininities (Gherardi, 1994). In our everyday actions, assigning gender to persons is a routine accomplishment based on the automatic process of placing bodies within a sex category of a female or male. This gendering process depends on the identificatory markers expected from that category (West & Zimmerman, 1987). These markers refer to the set of characteristics, gestures, speech, behaviors, and practices interpreted as masculine/feminine, and ascribed or considered “natural” to the categories of men and women in a given context (Alvesson, 1998; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Gherardi, 1994; Rolin, 2002). These gendered meanings are learned in childhood and then reproduced by repetition across social contexts so that they become taken-for-granted assumptions. Thus gender becomes an embodied practice that is quickly and often non-reflexively done in interaction with others, experienced and observed, but harder to describe and pin down (Martin, 2003).

In addition to doing gender in interaction, gendering takes places at the level of discourses and practices. In the case of career discourses, this means that the assumptions and subject positions they construct are not neutral, but are given gendered meanings. This does not mean that masculinities/femininities are restricted to the respective sex categories, men and women (Lupton, 2000), nor are all meanings given to careers gendered. However, some gendered meanings may become hegemonic, in other words, dominant modes of being that construct difference to femininities as well as to other forms of masculinities. For example, as work is central to hegemonic masculinity, such masculinity gets reproduced in organizational contexts, and in management in particular. The pervasive

and privileged forms of masculinities in organizations include authoritarianism, paternalism, competitive entrepreneurialism, informal networks on the basis of shared masculine interests and values, and careerism in terms of competition and upward mobility (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). Considering these masculinities, one can see how traditional discourses of career draw on masculinities in defining the subject as someone focused on work, competition, and career advancement.

Feminist studies have paid attention to the exclusionary effects of hegemonic career discourses such as the traditional, bureaucratic career discourse, discourse of professionalism, entrepreneurialism, or discourses of specific gendered occupations. For example, Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio (2004) argue that the discourse of entrepreneurialism is a form of masculinity that is historically and symbolically located in the male domain via the meanings of initiative-taking, accomplishment and risk. It assumes a subject who is naturally competitive and has the ability to work constantly and be geographically mobile (Fournier & Grey, 1999). The gendered nature of entrepreneurialism is very relevant in the new career discourse since it is defined in entrepreneurial terms (Fournier, 1998). Although heralded as more inclusive and as a broader conceptualization in contrast to the traditional bureaucratic career, it nevertheless assumes another ideal - a de-contextualized worker who is mobile, entrepreneurial, self-employed, and competent. Hence, it does not question the competitive values of getting ahead, increasing status, or the emphasis of paid work over other life interests (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). The discourse of professionalism in general is also overlaid by masculinity (Kerfoot, 2002). The predominant conceptions of what counts as professional practice in given contexts reproduce and sustain a masculine mode of engaging with the world that builds on the separation of competence and care, as well as the public and private. Hence, the discourse of professionalism articulates specific masculinities such as control, discipline, impersonality, individual autonomy (separation from others), and rationality (Muzio & Bolton, 2006).

Similarly, occupational identities are a key to understanding the creation of gendered difference at work as they specify who “naturally” belongs to certain kinds of work and what kind of value it is given (Ashcraft, 2006). Studies in different occupational and professional settings, such as higher education (Barry, Berg, & Chandler, 2006; Katila & Meriläinen, 2002), management (Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Thomas & Linstead, 2002), engineering (Faulkner, 2007; Jorgenson, 2002), and IT and computing (Guerrier, Evans, Glover, & Wilson, 2009), have contributed to our knowledge of the gendering of identities in work settings. In these studies,

the valued subject positions offered in the discourses of the occupational/professional practices are largely masculine. For example, in Faulkner's (2007) study on building design engineering, regardless of the actual heterogeneity of the work, the "hard", technicist engineering identities prevailed over the more heterogeneous engineering identities that included "soft" people skills. In Faulkner's argument, this was made possible with the converging forms of masculinities in engineering as hands-on 'nuts and bolts' work and as work that makes engineers powerful in being able to make buildings function. Also, there was a gendered dualism between the technical and the social. Hence, the achievement of the position of a real engineer, regardless of the heterogeneity of the work, was not considered gender authentic for women and was thus a source of a constant struggle.

This gendering of career/professional/occupational discourses via the identities they offer, is problematic for those who it excludes. In management and organizations, this gendering often involves the devaluing of the feminine. As a result, the consequences are suffered by those who would prefer a better balance between the public/private or work/family divide, more relational ways of working, or cyclical career patterns, for example. This may be the case for both men and women. However, as the discourses are taken-for-granted and considered neutral, the consequences they have for careers are commonly seen as an individual level problem. Even in the cases where one adopts and accepts the professional identities available, their careers may suffer as a result of the gendering that takes place. As an embodied being, one is always positioned by others (co-workers, supervisors) automatically as belonging to one of the sex categories and thus, expected to act from that position. A typical example is when women are stereotyped as women and assumed to be potential mothers, whether they ever will have children or not, and hence, considered less ambitious and committed to a career (Sools, Van Engen, & Baerveldt, 2007). Even when the women themselves are ambitious they may be caught in the double bind of being positioned as women and professionals/careerist/managers when the positions are seen as conflicting and exclusionary.

Having considered the role of discourses and gender in career identity construction, I now turn to narrative as a specific genre of discourse relevant in the career context.

2.4 Storying identities: from identity as a narrative to identities as narrative practice

Narratives are a distinct genre of discourse and, as narrative identity scholars argue, particularly relevant for identity construction (MacIntyre, 1981; McAdams, 1993; Sarbin, 1986). These arguments are based on the claim that narratives are a fundamental mode of thought and form of knowledge by which human beings assign meaning to their actions and understand experience and temporality (Abbott, 2002; Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988). What I argue here is that narrative is the most significant means for career identity construction. This argument is based on the shared features of both concepts: just as careers are defined as a sequence of work experiences over time, the defining characteristics of narratives are sequence and temporality. Narrative is what connects single moments and episodes in our lives into a whole and through these connections constructs meaning to them over time. In this section, I first discuss what is so special about narratives as a form of discourse for identity construction. Second, I present two main approaches to narrative identity: identity as a narrative and identity as narrative practice that takes into account their local production in interaction.

2.4.1 Narrative ordering of life

The basic definition of a narrative is a representation of an event or a series of events (Abbott, 2002; Czarniawska, 2004). The word ‘event’ can also be replaced with action. Oftentimes the concepts of narrative and story are used interchangeably in social sciences. However, there is a difference between them, and it is important in the context of this study. Story (in Finnish, *tarina*) refers to the events or sequences of events whereas narrative (in Finnish, *kertomus*) refers to the situated representation of those events (Abbott, 2002). There can be many representations of the same events (story) and how they are plotted. From the perspective of identity, and the approach I outline in this section, it is particularly important how the story is constructed – when, where, to whom, and with what kind of linguistic means. Hence, the term narrative is adopted throughout the study except in the cases where the concept of story has been used in the original source (as is the case with life stories, for example).

The distinctness of narratives as a form of meaning-making lies in the principle of narrative ordering (Linde, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988). Narratives organize events and actions into a whole by linking them temporally, and thus give individual events meaning as part of a whole

(Polkinghorne, 1990). Moreover, this principle of narrative ordering is based on narrative presupposition – an assumption that the order of clauses in a narrative matches the actual occurrence and order of events. The way this ordering is accomplished is through emplotment, in other words the process of connecting past events and experiences in a particular way (ibid.). Emplotment, in turn, is influenced by the function of the narrative, or its point. Each narrative is constructed to make a point about something and the events included in the story are selected based on this endpoint (K. J. Gergen, 1994). Hence, there is never just one story to tell. The events can be told from different viewpoints and come to mean different things as part of another narrative.

Not every sequence of events counts as a narrative, either. Canonical events that consist of routine behaviors in a given situation do not warrant a telling. In order for sequences to function as a narrative they need to be reportable. In other words, the event needs to be unusual or run counter to expectations or norms (Labov, 1972), or as Bruner (1991) puts it, there needs to be a breach. Narratives require canonical scripts of expected course of action, but in order to be tellable, this script needs to be broken or violated. As a result of the narrative ordering, causality is constructed between the sequences attached with cultural assumptions as to why the sequence took place as it did (Linde, 1993). What counts as an acceptable causal explanation, however, is dependent on the historical and cultural context (K. J. Gergen, 1994).

But why are narratives so fundamental in the construction of identity? In the case of life stories and other stories about the self, narratives accomplish the main (Western) cultural expectations of what it means to have a self (Linde, 1993). Firstly, we expect selves to have continuity through time. This is what narratives do by relying on the principle of narrative order and presupposition. They construct causality between events and hence, the relevance of past selves to the present one. Secondly, a self needs to be distinguished as separate from, but still related to, others. At the most basic level, this distinction is linguistically achieved by linguistic markers such as pronouns. Hence, we can say that to position oneself as an “I” in the story accomplishes a sense of self. Moreover, the narratives further construct this “I” by assigning certain actions and characteristics to this self through the positions of the narrator and the protagonist in the story. Thirdly, the distinction between the narrator and the protagonist creates space for moral evaluation and reflexivity, a key aspect of selves. To have a self at all is to have a specific and moral self. One of the most important functions of narratives is, in fact, to establish moral value to the self. As the master narratives reflect the cultural expectations of

a given context, they include a social evaluation of actions and hence the actor. Are the actions expected, proper and correct or not? This can be established by the evaluative parts of the narrative, as well as in the negotiation of the narrative in the interaction.

The prototypical, canonical narratives that accomplish such requirements of identity construction include the life story (Linde, 1993) and the so-called short-range narrative that gives an account of key events or episodes in one's life (Georgakopoulou, 2006b). Career narratives fall between these two types in the sense that, depending on the context of narration, they can cover large segments of one's life, or focus more specifically on specific events, such as career transitions. These narratives are oral units of discourse, as opposed to written autobiography, for example, and offer a major linguistic resource for constructing an identity and meaning to one's life in Western societies. According to Linde (1993), their defining feature, as opposed to other genres of narrative, is that their primary evaluation concerns the teller: the purpose of the narrative is to make a point about the narrator. In adopting a particular storyline one's self is always evaluated and morally positioned. Moreover, the stories and discourse units that make a life story need to have an extended reportability. It is particularly the landmark events, such as a choice of occupation, marriage, childbirths, and career changes that have the expected extended reportability that counts as worth telling. The reportability of events is not restricted to such landmark events, however: any event can be included as long as it contributes to making a point about the speaker.

These canonical narratives of identity, often elicited in interviews, are characterized as being highly tellable narratives about personal past events that progress temporally in a coherent manner with a clear plotline (Ochs & Capps, 2001). In contrast to these 'big stories' (Bamberg, 2004), some recent theorizing of narrative identity has shifted attention to the so-called 'small stories' that occur in everyday life and are products of situated language use (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006b; C. Watson, 2007). These narratives are not necessarily about the narrator, yet they construct the narrator's identity. From this perspective, any narrative always positions the narrator and constructs identity even when the narrator is not necessarily accounting for her own actions.

This difference between 'big' and 'small' stories is not just a question of the genre of identity narratives, but points to a larger debate about the links between narrative, identity and the role of the individual (the subject)⁴. This

⁴ The concept of individual, although commonly used, is in fact incommensurate with social constructionist and discursive approaches as it refers to the Cartesian notion of a rational, autonomous subject and a self separate from the world. Within

debate is due to the many theoretical approaches and different academic disciplines that have been involved in developing these ideas⁵. For the purposes of my study, it suffices to divide these approaches in two broad camps, which I label as “identity as a narrative” and “identity as narrative practice”. This is similar to the distinctions made by Freeman (2003; 2006) and Georgakopoulou (2006b), except that I make a further distinction between constructivist and constructionist forms of identity as a narrative.

2.4.2 Identity as a narrative

First, there are the mentalist approaches to identity as a narrative that Freeman (2003) labels the “expressivists” and Georgakopoulou (2006b) as “narrative inquiry scholars”. These approaches view subjects and individual minds as the location and producers of narratives and identities: they mentally construct experiences by imposing a narrative structure on them. In this view, narratives are psychological, cognitive structures in the mind or a mode of thought that imposes a narrative structure on the world outside (Bruner, 1991). It follows the linguistic turn in that there is no way of understanding the world outside the linguistic structures of the mind. Epistemologically, the narratives people tell can be understood as referential, in other words, they represent the internal structures or qualities of the minds, such as identity. As symbolic structures, they guide our thinking and acting without our full awareness (Reckwitz, 2002). In addition to these constructivist views, there are also those that could be labeled as social constructivist in that these individual constructions are seen to be largely influenced by social relationships (Young & Collin, 2004). Either way, these approaches have a rather static view of the narratives as products of the mind and privilege the individual as the source of meaning. Methodologically, this approach to narrative and identities has drawn on the biographic and life history traditions, and been particularly widely used within psychology.

The constructionist view of identities as a narrative, in turn, locates the narratives in the social realm. In other words, the local and “personal” stories are not considered to be representations of individual thoughts nor

the discursive view, we become individuals as a result of discourses that produce our knowledge of ourselves as such beings. The philosophical term “subject” is the concept used when referring to the individual agents. I will return to the conceptualization of the subject in section 2.6.

⁵ Many scholars have attempted to make sense of the different approaches to discursive identities (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006); narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005), and narrative identity (Freeman, 2003; Georgakopoulou, 2006b). I am drawing on all these in order to situate my own approach.

identity, but they are seen as products of the discursive and narrative resources available in a given historic, socio-cultural context. The cultural narratives structure the way stories are told, and assign meanings to single events as part of a whole. Experience is problematized in the sense that there is no pure experience, as such, but something can count as an experience only within a cultural framework. These narrative structures are often called master narratives or masterplots (Abbott, 2002) that impose a coherence structure on experiences with particular themes and plot lines (Linde, 1993). Moreover, they construct an understanding of what those experiences mean, who one is, and also, how one is supposed to act. At the broadest level of culture, we can identify canonical master narratives such as the classic typology of the Aristotelian plots of romance, satire, comedy, and tragedy in the Western world (Boje, 2001; Hänninen, 1999; Murray, 1989). Narratives have also been classified in just two basic forms with respect to their endpoint: in progressive narratives – in which the endpoint is positive – and regressive ones, with a negative endpoint (K. J. Gergen & Gergen, 1986).

In addition to cultural master narratives, institutional, organizational and other local cultural contexts have their own master narratives. Concerning careers, many of the career discourses discussed in section 2.2 can be conceived as career master narratives, since the concept of career always refers to its temporal formation. From this perspective, a single episode can be given different meanings depending on the discourse/master narrative in use. It is the narrative form that determines which events are important, rather than the events influencing the story form. For example, a promotion can be considered as a meaningful step in one's career from a bureaucratic perspective, whereas within a professional discourse it may be attached meanings that challenge professional expertise and call for identity work.

In this social view of identities as a narrative, it is the master narratives along other forms of discourses that construct identities by the subject or identity positions they offer (Davies & Harré, 1990). In telling a particular narrative, the narrator positions his/her identity by adopting the subject position it offers. Similar to the constructivist approaches, the focus in the social approaches is on the narratives as rather static units, and on their role in empowering or contrasting particular identity positions. While in the constructivist approaches the narrator is given a key role in constructing the narrative, the social constructionist approaches focus on identifying the master narratives and neglects the individual narrator.

2.4.3 Identity as narrative practice

The other camp of narrative identity scholars, which Freeman (2003) calls the “productivists” and Georgakopoulou (2006b) the “narrative analysts”, I have labeled as an approach to identity as narrative practice. This is also a social constructionist approach, but rather than seeing narrative identities as given, self-contained products they are understood as *discursive action, dynamic and always situated in a given context of their production*. In other words, identities are not entities, be it individual or social, that represent who we are, but on-going practice, something we do. The focus is on how narratives are told and negotiated in concrete occasions, what they do and how these situated narrative practices result in temporary constellations that come to be understood as identities (De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006).

While some approaches, such as discursive psychology focus only on the local context and specifics of language use or “talk-in-interaction”, most scholars in this camp tend to link the immediate contexts of interaction to wider cultural-historical contexts that regulate identity construction (e.g. Bamberg, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Mishler, 1999). In other words, narratives and the identity positions they make available, are embedded in, and ordered by, the multiple discursive practices and existing relations of knowledge and power (Peterson & Langellier, 2006). However, in contrast to the social approaches to identity as a narrative, these approaches also emphasize the local context and the performative nature of narrating. Narratives are embedded in interaction and are locally accomplished, co-constructed, and negotiated. These views build on research on conversational storytelling and the methods of conversation analysis that has showed how “the audience” is an active participant in the narrative event through resisting, modifying, and supporting the narration. Whether emerging in everyday conversations or research interviews, narratives and identities are always conditioned by the interactional accomplishment of their situated, discursive production (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). The idea of identity as practice refers exactly to this: it is not only a local activity of interaction but it is governed by wider narratives and discourses. As Holstein & Gubrium (2000) put it, this practice consists of both the situated *hows* and *whats* of narrating. The *hows* refer to the activities of narrating and the *whats* to the resources used to tell narratives as well as the local context. It is in their interplay that identities get constructed and worked on.

Whereas in the constructivist approaches to identity as a narrative, narrators are individual, autonomous subjects and active interpreters of

their lived experiences, in approaches to identity as socially constructed, the role of the subject and agency is less clear. Many social scientists have been troubled by the loss, or at the very least the serious diminishment of individual agency, but it is to discursive and narrative psychologists that this issue has been a source of a more fundamental theoretical challenge (Burr, 2003; Crossley, 2003; Day Sclater, 2003). Namely, in view of the fluid, non-essentialist and temporary accounts of subjectivity and identity, how is our personhood, a sense of distinct subjectivity and psychic realities to be understood? Are the narrators simply the products of discursive practices, performing the identity positions available? If so, how do we explain the differences between individuals in the positions they become attached to? What about the seeming continuity in the identities – or the sense of such continuity? While these questions have by no means been solved and continue to spur debate, I address this issue in the next section via the concepts that I have found most fruitful in my study: identity work and more specifically, positioning. This also further specifies what I mean by identity as narrative practice.

2.5 The agency of the narrating subject: identity work as embodied positioning in interaction

In the previous sections I have examined the role of discourses and narratives in mediating the wider socio-cultural and historic contexts, as well as the role of the local, interactional contexts in the narrative construction of identities. What remains unclear with this practice-view of identity is the role of the individual subject. If we take the poststructuralist view, the agency of the person is theorized via the ability to adopt and resist subject positions. In micro level studies, in turn, the subject is given the role of an active language user in bringing about these positions. My aim in this section is to specify a role for the subject and agency. I have chosen to do this via the concepts of identity work and discursive positioning. The question about the subject and its agency continues to be a source of debate in constructionist research and I certainly do not claim to have resolved it here either. By bringing together various arguments, I simply wish to carve an acceptable space for the subject to explain the continuities and possibilities for change at the level of identity. I do this by relying on those constructionist scholars, working mostly within discursive psychology, who do not deny materiality or embodiment in their theorizing (e.g. Burr, 2003; Davies & Harré 1990; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Peterson & Langellier, 2006).

2.5.1 Prior conceptualizations of identity work

The concept of *identity work* refers to the agential aspect of identity construction. In organization and management studies it has been commonly used vis-à-vis organizational, managerial and professional identities. However, it has often been used in a rather informal manner, as Watson (T. J. Watson, 2008) points out. Snow & Anderson (1987) define it as the activities individuals engage with in order to create, present and sustain identities. Although identity work can involve the arrangement of physical settings, personal appearance, and association with specific people, they focus on identity talk – as seems to be the case with most research on identity work. Another widely used definition is that proposed by Sveningsson & Alvesson: “the acts and processes of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1165; see also Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). In contrast to more fixed and static approaches to identity, such as social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), studies of identity work focus more on the processes and activities of becoming rather than being (Alvesson et al., 2008). Identity work is seen as more or less continuous although it can be intensified in the fragmented conditions of late modernity. It becomes an issue particularly at times of organizational changes (Down & Reveley, 2009; Garcia & Hardy, 2007; Thomas & Linstead, 2002), various crises and problems at work, such as bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), or during various transitions along one’s career (Coupland, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Riach & Loretto, 2009).

Within the various approaches to identity work there are differences as to how identity, and the role of the person, has been defined and in some cases the theoretical assumptions are not explicated. Some approaches, such as Pratt et al.’s (2006) model of professional identity construction, are based on identity theories that draw on a conceptualization of identity as an essentialist and unified category. Their model theorizes identity work as a process of customization the individuals engage with when they are faced with violations to the identities formed during prior socialization into the profession. In other words, individual *have* a prior professional identity that needs to be customized in order to develop a new identity congruent with the identities expected in a given work context. Although Pratt et al.’s model focuses on identity work as an incremental, contextualized process, it assumes a unified and rather stable identity both prior to and after such process.

The role of the context for the specific processes of identity work is also evident in Snow & Anderson's (1987) study on homeless street people in Texas. In contrast to Pratt et al. (2006), they did not attempt to explain identity change but looked at identity work as an on-going activity. As a result, they identified three activities of identity work: distancing from social identities related to negatively valued categories of associates, roles and institutions; embracement of social identities associated with roles, associates and ideologies; and fictive storytelling. Although Snow & Anderson's interactionist study (1987) focused on structurally-based roles as sources of identity, they argued for a more processual view and a role of agency in the social negotiating of identities. However, in their essentialist conceptualization of identity these aspects are integrated within a more permanent and stable self-concept.

Although interactionist views of identity work seem to take the active role of the person as an identity worker for granted, the constructionist scholars have had to grapple with the poststructuralist claim of de-centered subjects and non-essential, temporary identities. Many draw on Giddens (1991) and his notion of identity as a reflexive project (Riach & Loretto, 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; T. J. Watson, 2008; T. J. Watson, 2009), where the individual has an active role via self-identity. The view of stable and standard social identity categories as sources of identity are challenged and identity work is depicted as dynamic and multi-faceted. For example, Sveningsson & Alvesson's (2003) in-depth case study on the identity work of one senior manager at a global high-tech company identified several organizational and personal discursive resources in use. They argued for a view of identity work as an ongoing negotiation between several contradictory and changing identity positions – or a struggle. They differentiate managerial sources of identity from the personal and see the latter as representing a more stable “narrative self-identity” (p. 1166). Similar to Snow & Anderson's (1987) self-concept, they theorize self-identity as an integrative capacity in identity work. Similarly, Watson (2008, 2009) differentiates between self-identity and social identities, by which he means the various social categories, cultural stereotypes, role-based identities and more local personal or organizational identity categorizations. Even Beech (Beech, MacIntosh, & McInnes, 2008) who theorizes identity work as dialogue between the utterances of others, contextual resources and the meaning construction of the actors, retains a role for the self-concept as representing the “insides” of the person.

2.5.2 Identity work as positioning

I share the interest with the identity work scholars in creating a space and possibility for agency while retaining the critical view of the power of discursive resources. However, as Down & Reveley (2009) have argued, the performativity of identity work has been largely neglected. In other words, identity work is always situated in interaction. Unlike Down & Reveley (2009), however, I do not theorize self-narration as internal reflection and as such, separate from talk and action. Rather, I see that identity work can only exist in interaction even when there is no actual embodied audience present. And whereas Down & Reveley (2009) draw on Goffman in theorizing the interactive nature of identity work, my focus is on the situatedness of identity work and the nature of narratives as practices rather than as self-contained units we carry across time.

In my search for an appropriate theoretical approach to identity work, I have found the concept of discursive positioning to be most fruitful. It builds on a growing body of work that – although not all building towards an integrated theory – shares an interest in narrative identity as a dialogical and performative practice (Bamberg, 2004; Bamberg, 2004; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999b; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; S. Taylor, 2005; S. Taylor, 2006; Wetherell, 1998; Wortham, 2000). While the concept of positioning is also used in the more macro oriented discursive analyses, these works pay more attention to the linguistic and interactional detail in the emergence of the positions. In the following, I describe this concept in more detail.

The concept of positioning refers to a linguistically oriented approach with which to analyze the dynamics of identity construction in the context of situated language use. It refers to the discursive processes “*whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines*” (Davies & Harré, 1990: 48). The concept of position, first introduced by Hollway (1984b) in her study on the construction of gendered subjectivities, refers to a cluster of generic personal attributes that are assigned particular rights, duties and obligations within a given situation (speech act/social episode) and storyline (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999a). It is the discourses or storylines available in a given situation that construct positions that individuals occupy. In participating in various discursive practices, one learns categories that are used to differentiate people and the meanings given to them as subject positions within storylines (Davies & Harré, 1990). These positions are then used to position others and oneself. In comparison with

roles (cf. identity theory), positions are more flexible, always local and may be momentary and ephemeral (Harré, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). Whereas roles are more static, positioning points to a degree of indeterminacy as a result of prior positioning (history of interactions) and the specifics of a given episode (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

Agency in positioning is theorized as bi-directional (De Fina et al., 2006). Firstly, the social discourses and narratives position individual subjects in the situation of their use. Positioning always takes space within the context of a specific moral order that assigns rights, duties and obligations to individuals (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). These moral orders define what is considered to be good, right, desirable and valued in a given position, local interaction or community (Harré, 1983). Once positioned within a particular discursive practice, a person comes to interpret the world from that vantage point in terms of the values, patterns of thought and concepts it involves (Davies & Harré, 1990). In other words, one develops a sense of belonging to the world in certain ways by positioning in particular storylines and categories. This process always involves a development of a moral system of what is right and good for a given position (Davies & Harré, 1999).

Secondly, as a result of the many and contradictory discursive practices available to a person, there is a possibility of choice and hence, individual agency and change in identity work. People are considered to be reflexive subjects that bring with them their lived histories and the discursive resources they have learned. In addition to the knowledge of social structures, such as roles and the associated expectations and norms, one's encounters with others are mediated by lived histories of positioning, which provide resources for choice (Davies & Harré, 1999). In other words, the narrating subjects have the power to agentively construct their situated positions, rather than to simply adopt a pre-established one (Bamberg, 2004). Detailed analyses of talk-as-interaction, such as studies using conversations analysis, have provided further evidence of how speakers actively negotiate the taking up of the positions (Wetherell, 1998).

Identity work and positioning is part of our everyday lives, an on-going performance. Whenever one is engaged in interaction or narrating, the narratives are always indexical to the speaker and hence position the speaker in particular ways vis-à-vis the audience. We position ourselves and others in the small stories emerging in our mundane, everyday activities. However, such identity work is often unselfconscious and automatic - a practice that we engage with in a routine-like fashion in our everyday lives (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Giddens, 1991). Positioning is tacit and not necessarily intentional (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Yet, it can also be

reflexive, particularly at times when we have been negatively positioned in ways that we want to resist or when the habitual positions are no longer tenable or accepted by our audience.

But what significance do the positions adopted have beyond the situated interactions? If our positions are always modified and crafted to specific contexts, how do we get a sense of coherence and continuity in our identities? And how do we explain that we adopt certain positions and not others? As Hall (S. Hall, 1996) has argued on discursive identities, in most discursive studies the reasons why some subjects occupy certain positions remain unclear. In Davies & Harré's (1990) view, this is a result of the emotional attachment to certain positions as a result of "*one's cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography*" (p. 49), in other words the experiences of being located in such positions. Hollway (1984b) has also argued that this attachment can be explained in terms of *investment* (p. 238) in some positions, although this investment is not necessarily rational or even conscious. She draws on psychoanalytic theories and explains these investments as a product of the histories of the individuals and their uniqueness at the level of their psyches. We invest in some positions because they are beneficial for us, even though they may be in contradiction with other feelings. These investments result in the continuities of identity as well as individual differences (ibid.).

It is not necessary, however, to resort to psyche as a pre-discursive structure in order to account for the continuities and individual differences in identity positioning. The continuities that can be empirically discerned may also be conceived as a result of rehearsal and repetition (S. Taylor, 2005). Via memory, our biographic particulars (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) and the instances of our prior positioning function as resources and constraints across contexts and so we never start narrating afresh (S. Taylor, 2006). In terms of the narratives we tell, life stories in particular, this can be understood as a process of producing new versions of our life, not new narratives all together. As a result of repetition, some positions – although always articulated towards the purposed of a given situation – become habitual and routine-like. In this view, it is routines or discursive styles that explain the patterning and order in an individual's actions, instead of psychological structures such as personality or motivation (Wetherell, 2003).

As a result of the history of positioning, we can also craft a space for the agentive subject or individual without resorting to ideas about essentialist identities, psychological structures (motivation, personality) or unitary rational subjects – including even the Giddensian view of self-identity as the on-going self-narrative. When identity is conceptualized as narrative

practice, it is firmly placed within the interpretative activities of embodied agents (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). It is bodies that do or perform the narrating (Peterson & Langellier, 2006), and it is embodied agents that move across time and space, and position identities. Having participated in various communities of practice, we have been exposed to a variety of practices and associated identity positions (Dreier, 2009; Handley, Sturdy, Finchman, & Clark, 2006). Some of these positions may be more situational, some may be rehearsed and reproduced across different practices and contexts over time and hence work as resources and constraints (S. Taylor, 2005). The person, then, could be understood as a unique crossing-point of different social practices, or bodily-mental routines (Reckwitz, 2002) – such as particular identity positions. Therefore, in a given context our mode of participation is always a particular one as a result of the past positioning across other contexts.

The existence of a variety of discourses informing identity work may result in tensions between a plurality of sometimes conflicting positions – a typical example from organization and management being the conflict between being placed in a feminine identity position and a managerial identity position marked masculine. These tensions do not need to be understood as dichotomies of real selves and fake selves (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005), however, but as conflicts between our habitual and meaningful yet contradictory positions; or conflicts between positions we adopt and those in which we are unfavorably positioned. The role of narratives we produce about our lives in this kind of identity work can be seen, not so much as integrative mechanisms or products we carry with us, but as something we routinely do to position ourselves. Moreover, such narrating also allows space for reflexivity and negotiation among varied and conflicting positions and always involves a moral positioning of identities vis-à-vis the changing situations of our everyday lives. According to this view, change becomes possible via recognizing and resisting the discourses and narratives that are shaping one's identity at a given point of time. However, this does not mean that changes in positioning were easy to accomplish due to the constraining discursive practices (Burr, 2003). I will address this issue in section 6 within the empirical context of this study.

2.6 Summary: career identity as narrative practice

In the previous sections I have described a discursive view of identity as narrative practice. I began with the essentialist view of identity that is dominant in career studies and our everyday talk, and moved towards

socially situated, poststructuralist and discursive views. Within the narrative identity studies, I situated this view within the camp of practice-oriented scholars who pay attention to narratives as everyday actions and performances. Finally, I considered the possible role and space the individual subject might have by choosing to use the concepts of identity work and positioning that defines agency as bi-directional. In this section, I summarize these ideas by applying them to a redefinition of career identity as narrative practice.

I suggest a conceptualization of career identity as narrative practice that refers to the activities of articulating, performing and negotiating a variety of identity positions in narrating our careers (LaPointe, 2010). The term practice refers to the interplay of the activities of narrating the career (the hows), the resources used to tell the narratives (such as discourses, narratives and biographic particulars) and the local, interactional context of narrating (the whats). In other words, as a result of articulation, performance, and negotiation in a given moment, career identities emerge as a temporary constellation of various identity positions. Although the discursive resources include specific discourses of career that position people, for example, as dedicated to hierarchical progression or accumulation of expertise, these are not the only resources/constraints that come into play. Identity positions may also be situated in a variety of discourses such as gender, profession, occupation, work, family, ideology, or organization. Some of these positions may be more dominant as could be the case of a professional who has worked within the same organization most of his/her career. For others, a variety of positions could be evoked.

Since career identity is closely associated with the concepts of professional or occupational identity, it is necessary to consider their difference. While, in practice, these concepts are intertwined, there is an analytical difference in the scope of the resources used for their construction. Firstly, career identity is concerned with meanings assigned to the sequences of work experiences over time. It is therefore broader in scope as it may surpass the boundaries of one or more professions/occupations. In some cases, career identity and professional identity may in fact coincide. In other words, when narrating one's career, the meanings attached to the sequences of one's career are situated in a professional discourse and identity. However, as I have argued in this section, careers are often assigned meanings derived from the organization, the nature of the work or non-work spheres of life such as family, gender, or ideologies. This is the second difference of scope: in addition to temporality it also encompasses meanings beyond the professional and occupational discourses. This is perhaps also the greatest promise of career identity in making sense of contemporary careers: there

is a variety of resources to assign meanings to our careers and make them meaningful. Finally, while professional and occupational identities could be performed by practices such as dress, career identity relies mainly on temporal, narrative forms of construction.

Another question that needs clarification concerns the nature of career identity as a temporary performance. What significance does career identity play in our lives beyond those rather rare moments when we engage with narrating our careers? While the specific constellation of positions articulated is always embedded in the interactional context of its emergence, we do not start from scratch each time we narrate our careers. Some of these positions are habitual via our embodied experiences and rehearsed across instances of narration. Hence, each time we assign meanings to our past, present or future careers, we either reproduce habitual/dominant meanings or attempt to resist and perhaps change them via reflexive identity work. Identities play a role in how we participate in the everyday activities at work and the kind of actions and decisions we make that, in turn, have career-relevance over time. In fact, career identity work may be ongoing in some of the most mundane activities and influences our careers and lives whether we are reflexive about them or not. It is often only at times of trouble and conflict that we become aware of our habitual identity positioning, such as in career transitions examined in this study.

I do not wish to reify career identity as something that we have, or should have. It is not an entity or product, neither is it necessarily coherent or distinct. Rather it is something we inevitably do when we are engaged with the temporal aspect of our work. This view of career identity as narrative practice also differs from interactionist or constructivist understandings of narrative identity (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) that emphasize the role of language but view identity narratives as something individuals construct and have. In the conceptualization of career identity as narrative practice, career identity narratives are not assumed to pre-exist their discursive construction. In other words, narratives do not reside in the back of an individual's mind prior to articulation in a local setting (Alasuutari, 1997). They change across time and space as new experiences can be claimed, social discourses shift and the purposes of storytelling change. And when they do get articulated or performed, these narratives, or any of the life themes they may construct (Savickas, 2002), are never individual constructions but always co-constructed within the discursive resources available. The co-construction refers not only to the socially shared meanings (discursive resources) but also to the local interactional contexts where the narratives are produced. The narrator is a co-author whose agency resides in the possibility to choose among alternative

positions available within the boundaries of given historic and social contexts. The individuality of the narratives, in turn, is a result of the idiosyncratic experiences (biographic particulars) used to construct the narrative as well as the conditions in which the narrative is told. As to the seeming persistence of some positions (although their articulation is always situated), it is a result of habit and repetition as well as the reproduction of practices.

Finally, what are the implications of the approach to career identity that I have proposed here? Based on conceptualizations of career identity as a rather stable property of the individual, previous research has looked for the dispositions it is made of – the mentalist or individualist **what** of identity. Such research has resulted in various descriptions of career identity types, as in Schein's (Schein, 1978) career anchors. Moreover, as the dominant interest has been largely functionalist, career identity has been examined as an intervening factor to various desired career outcomes, such as employability, career success, etc. Such research has often focused on the awareness and clarity of identity, commonly relying on positivist research philosophy and quantitative methodology. In contrast, approaching career identity as narrative practice departs from the notion of identity as an entity. It is ongoing construction and work via socially available discursive practices, discourses and narratives. In research, it is not a given category and variable to be measured, but rather, its existence is problematized and its emergence in discourse an object of research per se. Therefore, this approach allows us to ask questions as to ***how identities are done and what are the practices involved?*** Moreover, it shifts the attention to the embeddedness of identities and calls for an examination of ***what social and cultural resources are available for identity work in a given context.*** This helps us understand **why** identities come to take the forms they do. Yet, the embodied person is not lost into a product of discourse but his/her **agency** can be studied as part of the process of positioning. In order to answer these kinds of questions, we need a methodological approach that captures the doing of identity in action while paying attention to the wider contexts of such doing. In other words, we need an approach that combines the micro and macro levels of narrative identity analysis. I now turn to consider the narrative methods that I have chosen for this study that meet these requirements.

3 Methodological choices

The theoretical approach to career identities outlined in the previous section presented my answer to the question relating to how career identities can be conceptualized as socio-culturally situated without losing individual agency and particularities of the person. It also contributes to answering the question as to how identity work is done in career transitions by defining it as a narrative practice of positioning. In the context of this study, answering the question calls for more specific answers with regard to what this narrative practice entails in this given context. Hence, the questions that have guided my empirical work on identity work among business graduates looking for a career change are as follows:

How do business graduates do identity work in narrating their career transition?

What are the resources and constraints - discourses, narratives and identity positions - available for their identity work? How are they gendered?

How does identity positioning in career transitions change over time? What are the practices, resources and constraints for such change?

To answer these questions, I have chosen a narrative approach for this study. This choice is primarily a result of the theoretical and epistemological assumptions of identity that I elaborated in Section 2. Based on the view of identity as narrative practice, I needed methods that create an occasion for narrative identity work, take the local context of narrating into account, and acknowledge my role as a co-constructor of narrative and identity. Narrative inquiry accomplishes this. Moreover, I believe it allows knowledge construction where the research participants are subjects, not objects of the study. As opposed to variable-based and positivist approaches, methods of narrative inquiry restore agency of the individuals and respects them as subjects with histories and intentions (Mishler, 1999). This is also a feminist interest based on the critique of the

relations of power that come into play in traditional, objectivist research (Roberts, 1981). While particularities and narrator's view are privileged, this is not to say that narratives would offer an authentic gaze into the soul of another (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997).

A narrative approach is well suited to studying persons in their social and historical context (Chase, 2005), and to examining the richness and ambiguities of lived experiences (Riessman, 2008). In the career context, the benefits of a narrative approach have also been noted (Bujold, 2004; Cochran, 1990; Cohen & Mallon, 2001), since "to describe a person's career is to tell a story" (Cochran, 1990: 71). Yet, narratives not only describe and represent careers in a realist fashion, they are a way to understand, explain and assign meanings to careers. Despite the relatedness of career and narrative as temporal concepts, empirical research using narrative methodology has been scarce. Research has tended to focus on the social structures as objective entities or individual differences, decision-making and development in isolation from their social circumstances. Furthermore, based on positivist epistemology, research has been reductionist using precise categories to generalize and to predict human behavior (Cochran, 1990; Cohen & Mallon, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1990). A narrative approach, in turn, constructs knowledge that will look like the object of its inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1990). It can offer less fragmented and contextualized views of careers, fusing the traditional dichotomies such as subjective and objective careers (Cochran, 1990). In other words, it offers a way to study careers as deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, while also recognizing the agency and intentions of the person (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). In this sense, a narrative approach can illuminate how the socio-cultural assumptions and norms become reproduced and reconstructed in the context of a person's life. Moreover, by focusing on individual cases, it can provide rich, multifaceted accounts of lived careers and show their particularities, complexities and inconsistencies (*ibid.*).

In the remainder of this section, I elaborate on the kind of narrative inquiry and methods I have adopted in this study. I differentiate between referential and performative forms of inquiry and show why the view of narratives as practices has been considered fruitful in the recent debates on the methods of studying identity construction. In the second section, I examine the role of interviews in knowledge production – is the knowledge elicited and hence artificial or may it have significance across other contexts? Finally, in the third section I describe how I have acquired and analyzed my research materials and present my interviewees.

3.1 A practice approach to narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry builds on the rich tradition of life history research in sociology, second-wave feminist interest in personal narratives, and sociolinguistic studies of everyday oral narratives (Chase, 2005). However, it does not refer to a distinct or specific method. Rather, it is an interdisciplinary subtype of qualitative research that involves multiple analytic lenses, diverse theoretical approaches, and a variety of methods (ibid.). In Table 1, I have made my own classification of various approaches to help me situate my study. It draws on other similar classifications, such as Riessman's (2008) forms of narrative analysis and Chase's (2005) approaches that are differentiated on a disciplinary and/or theoretical basis. I have compiled mine in order to make the distinctions between different theoretical assumptions of identity, and the corresponding role of narrative in knowledge construction, attention to context, and methods of analysis.

Forms of narrative inquiry	Identity	Narrative	Attention to contexts	Methods
<i>Narratives as a format of research material and/or their presentation</i>	Pre-given non-narrative categorizations	Neutral medium of representation	Varies	Non-narrative qualitative methods (e.g. grounded analysis)
<i>Narratives as representations</i>	Pre-given narrative identity	Neutral portal	Varies	Biographic, thematic
<i>Narratives as constructions</i> <i>Constructivist</i>	Individually constructed		-	Thematic, structural
<i>Narratives as constructions</i> <i>Social constructionist</i>	Socially constructed via master narratives & discourses		Societal	Thematic, structural
<i>Narratives-in-interaction</i>	Co-construction in interaction		Local	Conversation analysis, ethno-methodology
<i>Narratives as practices</i>	Co-construction in interaction drawing on wider discourses and narratives		Local and societal	Dialogic/ performance/ social- interactional

Table 1. Forms of narrative inquiry in identity research

Sometimes the narrative label simply refers to the format of the research material and their presentation in the research report. The data analysis, however, is based on non-narrative qualitative methods. Within grounded theory, for example, thematic segments are coded across narratives, while in narrative analysis the sequences of each case (narrative) are preserved and cases are analyzed before comparing them (Riessman, 2008). In these

cases, narratives may enliven the descriptions of research results, but their analytical potential remains unexplored.

Perhaps the most common form of narrative inquiry is an approach to narratives as self-contained units of texts. In this kind of traditional approach, such as in life history research, narratives are approached as end products that give us information about the reality “outside” the narrative – narrative identities, career patterns or personalities of the narrators (Alasuutari, 1997). In other words, language and narratives are understood as unproblematically referential to the objects of study. This has also been called as the portal approach (Linde, 1993). In the context of an identity study, such an understanding of narratives would mean that the narrative simply conveys to us what pre-existing narrative identities are like. Such studies focus on analyzing themes as representing the issues to be studied, such as identity. Compared to early life history approaches, later studies shifted the attention to the structural properties of the narratives. The classic model of such analysis is that described by Labov & Wiletsky (1967), which defines narrative in terms of its structural properties, namely the narrative components, temporal ordering and evaluation. Yet, the positivist assumption of a one-to-one correspondence between narratives and the events they referred to remained (Chase, 2005).

A different epistemological approach to narratives, and the one taken here, views them as a distinct form of discourse with specific functions of meaning making (Chase, 2005). From this perspective, the function of language is not referential and hence, narratives are seen to construct the objects they are about. They are a form of discursive action: they construct, do, or accomplish something – such as identities. For example, narratives can be seen as a way of ordering and making connections between experiences to create a particular understanding of reality with consequences for action. The analysis of narratives involves an understanding of their special functions and role in knowledge construction and hence, requires its own methods of analysis.

As to the source of meaning in these approaches, there is a distinction between those who place the narrator as the main source of meaning (the constructivist position), and those who view narratives as socially constructed (the constructionist position). The constructivists are interested in individual meaning making, the subjective view and focus on the teller and his/her subjective meanings, while the constructionists emphasize the social contexts and resources of such narratives.⁶ The meanings conveyed by the narrator are not his/her own, but discursively

⁶ I have already discussed similar differences in section 2.4 in reference to narrative identity.

constructed with the narrative resources in a given context. Hence, the researcher's interest is in the master narratives informing the narration that can tell us something about the social context. Methodologically, such research focuses on the themes and structures of narratives as self-contained units.

Within constructionist approaches, however, there is a further difference with regard to the degree they take the interactional context of narrating into consideration. Traditionally, the approach to narratives as constructions has focused on canonical narratives or big stories (cf. section 2.4) that are self-contained, reportable, and well structured units (Ochs & Capps, 2001). In studies of identity, this has meant privileging life stories and short range narratives, as their primary point is to tell something about the narrator (Linde, 1993). More recent approaches to narrative, however, have shifted the attention to the local, interactional contexts of narrating. Such approaches are based on the critiques by ethnomethodologists who focus on how social order is carried out in interaction, and by conversation analysts who focus on the regularities of conversations structured by interactional patterns. These studies have pointed to the importance of the context in which narratives emerge, and their role in the construction of the narrative.

As a result of these critiques, narratives have been redefined as interactional practices that emerge in everyday embodied experience (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). They always involve both the narrator and the audience as co-constructors of the narrative. Narratives are not assumed to pre-exist their articulation, but always require some *body* to perform it. In other words, they are embodied practices that require bodily participation (listening, talking, reading, writing, etc.) (Peterson & Langellier, 2006). Furthermore, the specifics of the setting and the purposes of the encounter influence what genre of narrative is to be expected. The genre, in turn, refers to the habitual, routine ways of narrating according to the socio-cultural expectations of a given situation (De Fina, 2009). Hence, the activities of narrating, narratives and the meanings they construct are always different depending on whether they are constructed in the midst of an everyday conversation between two friends or in a research interview.

Narrative approaches that take the local, interactional context of narrative construction into account differ in terms of the role of the wider social contexts. Here, I have labeled these two approaches as narratives-in-interaction and narratives as practices, using De Fina & Georgakopoulou's (2008) terminology. The problem with the narratives-in-interaction approach is that it may focus too much on the hows of interactional process

at the expense of the *whats* – the lived experiences of the interviewees, as well as the *whys* – the larger conditions of their making (Wetherell, 1998). Narratives are not only local interactional practices but also social practices connecting the local narration to wider social contexts (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). From the perspective of narratives as practices, we are not only interested in what the meanings are and how they are constructed within a narrative, but we ask: why is the narrative told this way? What are the conditions that produce such a narrative? Answering these kinds of questions calls for dialogic/performance (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Mishler, 1999; Riessman, 2008), or social-interactional methods of analysis (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Wortham, 2001) which consist of a pluralist use of narrative methods.

But how can we make the interpretive moves from an utterance in text to wider discourses? The contextualization of specific cases of interaction has been a lively source of debate, especially within discursive psychology. Conversation analysts, in their focus on the turn-by-turn interaction, have accused the critical discursive psychologist approaches of going beyond the data without any clear method (Schegloff, 1997). Wetherell (1998), in turn, has argued in favor of a synthetic approach that combines poststructuralist and ethnomethodological or interactional analysis. In a similar vein, narrative identity researchers have combined these micro and macro levels of analysis (Bamberg, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; S. Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Nevertheless, the question remains how exactly these wider contexts are brought into analysis.

On a broader level, the interpretation of context relies on the notion of indexicality. In other words, certain utterances and signs in text are used to index identities. They point to certain understandings that are connected to particular wider contexts. More specifically, Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach & Liebllich (2008), in their analysis of the different spheres of context, have looked for ways to analyze the larger context in narratives, namely the social field and meta-narratives, in addition to interactional context. In their model, the social field refers to the socio-historical conditions within which life has been lived or referred to – the concrete and collective events and figures, such as institutions and historical events. The meta-narratives, in turn, refer to the cultural norms, expectations that give meaning to the narrative. While the social field is explicit in the content of talk/text, the meta-narratives are usually implicit and thus need to be extricated by the researcher through interpretative moves. The researcher can do this by drawing on existing knowledge of various master narratives in specific contexts, or by comparing the narratives in one's own research material.

The contextualization of narratives is an issue of an interpretation, and I return to this in the section 3.3, where I discuss more specifically the methods I have used to analyze the research materials in this study. Before turning to the specific methods of acquiring, analyzing, and contextualizing the data, I next consider what kind of knowledge we can expect to gain from narratives produced in research interviews.

3.2 Interviews as dialogic contexts for identity work

Interviews have been the privileged mode of data collection in narrative inquiry. In qualitative research, interviews are commonly considered to be a way to acquire information about human experience and to understand the social world from the subject's point of view (Kvale, 2006). In other words, the interviewees are viewed as transmitting knowledge of their reality beyond the interview situation. It is assumed that true facts or feelings reside in people, and hence the aim of the interview is to capture these without interfering with the "data". The interviewer is supposed to remain as neutral and objective as possible so as not to damage the data. The research subjects, in turn, are considered as vessels of answers (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). In research on identity, this would mean that the self-categorizations and descriptions would be taken as facts about the speaker and his/her internal reality (cf. Coupland, 2008)

Whereas the conventional view of an interview is to see it as a means to transmit knowledge from the interviewees to the researcher, the constructionist view taken in this study emphasizes interviews as an occasion of knowledge construction. Interviews are interactional events where the end products, be they short answers or extensive narratives of one's life, are a product of talk between the participants (De Fina, 2009). The meanings constructed in the interview are not considered as products of individual minds or as expressions of the inner self or soul, but as discursively constructed out of the cultural and social resources available (Tanggaard, 2009). Moreover, the meanings are actively negotiated and assembled in the light of the interactional occasion. Hence, instead of minimizing interaction, the active nature of interviewing as an interactional event is emphasized (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). From the perspective of identity studies this translates to a focus on how identity categories are co-constructed in the interview interaction (Coupland, 2008).

In this study, I have collected my research materials by narrative interviews, which aim to generate detailed accounts rather than short answers to pre-determined questions, as in structured interviews

(Riessman, 2008). Mishler (1986) has argued that narrative interviews can best be described as unstructured conversations that provide an occasion for narrating experiences and accomplishing actions, such as identity work. In order to establish the conditions conducive to such storytelling, however, requires changes in research practice. As Riessman (2008) has proposed, during these occasions the rules of everyday conversation apply and greater equality is encouraged. Hence, the active role of the researcher as part of this interactional accomplishment is acknowledged (Mishler, 1986). In addition, the researcher is required to give up control and be attentive in order to invite detailed accounts (Riessman, 2008).

These principles of narrative interviewing are in line with feminist critiques of positivist interviewing practices that objectify the interviewee while assigning the interviewer authority and requiring objectivity and impersonality (Oakley, 1981). Hence, feminist researchers have attempted to avoid reproducing hierarchical relationships in the interview, and to foster an equal relationship and informal, relaxed atmosphere. The interviewees are seen as active participants who decide what and how they want to share their experiences (Oinas, 2004). Sometimes the reciprocal nature of the encounter can be enhanced by the interviewer by sharing her own experiences (Oakley, 1981). Although I find it important to reduce the hierarchical relationship, I agree with Essers (2009) that power differences always remain in interviews. This is a result of the initial setup of the interviewer eliciting the interview for specific purposes. Yet, it is important to note that the interviewees do have power to decide what and how they talk about the experiences they own. They have agency that may even result in reversing the traditional hierarchical relationship when they take control of the interview (*ibid.*). Instead of seeing the interview as a neutral knowledge exchange, I think it can be best understood as a social encounter to which both parties bring various resources. As a result, it can influence both participants. For example, interviewees may gain more insight into their own lives as a result of their reflection, or the interviewer may also be personally inspired and touched – as was the case with me in many of the interviews I conducted. Hence, a good, non-hierarchical interview, while acknowledging the working of power and the role of emotions, may even become a form of communion (Ezzy, 2010).

Interviews as a form of data collection have come under attack particularly by scholars working with the ethnomethodological approach or the methods of conversation analysis. As they are concerned with how social reality and knowledge are produced in interaction, in their view interview data is elicited and hence artificial, as compared to naturally occurring data. Interviews are always staged and serve the purposes of the

interviewer. The question posed is whether such knowledge would ever be produced under “normal” circumstances? Considering life stories in particular the occasions when one would link various life experiences into a coherent grand story are rather rare (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). For example, had I not elicited the career change narratives in this study would such stories ever have emerged? And hence, if I had not elicited such narratives where would such storied identity work otherwise naturally occur? Another camp of narrative scholars, the proponents of the small story approach also criticizes, if not interviews, the typical format of narratives they produce. In other words, interviews usually produce lengthy narratives that produce knowledge about non-shared personal experience (Georgakopoulou, 2006b). Yet, narratives told outside such research interviews often depart from these canonical narratives. Such small stories, or non-canonical narratives, take place as part of everyday life and are often short, non-linear, and involve multiple tellers. Yet, they also construct identity and are sites of identity work.

Rather than give up on interviews altogether, it is necessary to take a contextualized approach. Interviews need to be analyzed as one type of interactional genre (De Fina, 2009) focusing on how knowledge is co-constructed in interviews as a dialogic accomplishment. In this study I take the view that interviews are interactional events, and thus no less artificial than social encounters in “naturally” occurring conversations. They are simply a different genre of interaction, and hence, interactional rules and social relationships are different (*ibid.*). The idea of a genre refers to the expectations regarding the communicative activity and not the properties of the narrative emerging as a result of it. As Holstein & Gubrium (1997) have argued, various types of interviews have become an increasingly commonplace genre and a natural occasion for articulating experience. We live in an interview society (Silverman, 1997) wherein everyone is expected to know what happens in an interview. Also everyday conversations are “staged” in the sense that someone always initiates the discussion and defines the initial setting of the interaction.

Since my empirical materials are tellable, lengthy accounts about non-shared personal experience, they can be classified as so-called big stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006b). As a genre of narrative, they are accounts of past experience as a response to the interviewer’s inquiry about why or how a specific experience has taken place (in this case, career transition). As I discussed in section 2.4, big stories have been contrasted with small stories, which refer to short narratives on any topic co-constructed in everyday interactions and constructing identities for the narrators. My take on the debate between big and small stories (Freeman, 2006 vs. Bamberg, 2006)

is one that attempts to combine them for the analytical purposes of the study. In other words, I examine the lengthy accounts produced in interviews as dialogical, resulting from interaction. In this sense, there is no pre-existing structure or point to the story, but it is co-constructed as a result of negotiation within the interview (De Fina, 2009). Hence, this type of analysis pays close attention to the role of the interviewer in setting the expectations and rules of interaction prior to the actual interview, and in interacting with the interviewee. The interviewer always performs communicative acts even when trying to let the narrator speak. These include displays of attention, understanding, acceptance, and empathy through back-channeling and non-verbal reactions. All the comments and questions also direct and influence the meanings constructed (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). Moreover, the way the interviewee positions the interviewer and directs the story can be based on the assumed research interest, the interviewee's gender, age, and profession/educational background, for example.

Although the interviews in this research are not part of the everyday life of the participants, I do not consider the identity work and positioning that takes place in them to be only a product of the interactional situation. First, what is said in the interviews is mediated by the discursive resources available. In other words, experiences in this perspective are not understood to be playback of life events (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), unmediated, and authentic, but shaped by the conditions of their making. Hence, the focus of the analysis needs to be placed on how and why it is these particular narratives and identity positions that emerged in the interview. This, in turn, helps us to interpret what the practices of narrating and identity work can tell us about the larger socio-cultural contexts and modes of understanding on a given occasion. In this sense, I seek to combine constructionist and poststructuralist perspectives on interviews (Coupland, 2008).

Second, narrating and identity work depend on the biographic particulars (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), in other words the cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography (Davies & Harré, 1990). We do not start from a clean slate but use resources available to us (such as life events) as material for the narratives and identities. While identity positioning is always situational, we rely on our habitual positions when engaged in accounting for our life. Moreover, although the type of reflexive, big story accounting that takes place in interviews is not an everyday phenomenon, it is a common, contemporary Western practice to construct such "big story selves" (Freeman, 2006: 135). It takes place in narrating, reflecting on and assigning meaning to our lives. While we may not engage with such

reflection all the time, construction of big story selves is just as much a form of discursive action and site for identity work than other instances. Moreover, in the repeated tellings of life stories some positions are rehearsed and may become habitual resources for identity (S. Taylor, 2005). Hence, identity work within big stories bears at least some relationship to our practices of identity across situations. Whereas identities constructed in small stories are certainly part of everyday life, what relevance do they have for individual lives across space and time?

While I agree with the assumptions of the small story approach in analyzing identity, interviews and the elicitation of traditional, lengthy narratives seemed appropriate in the context of my study. Although such full accounts of past career are rarely provided, they allow for the kind of reflexive identity work career transitions often invoke. It would have been more difficult to gain access to this kind of reflection as part of everyday lives or conversation. Some topics are often not even discussed in the course of normal life. In addition to interviews, such narratives may be constructed in conversations with friends or in career counseling. Such occasions employ different narrative genres but the wider socio-cultural and biographic resources used for identity positioning are likely to be rather similar. Moreover, the analytical interest in this study is not only on the specifics of the local conditions (interaction) but on the resources and constraints of identity work.

3.3 Constructing and analyzing narratives in this study

3.3.1 Choosing and finding participants

In the initial phases of this research project, I was interested in the career change narratives one reads in the media. Studying such different genre of texts would have allowed an analysis of the master narratives for successful career change stories. However, I suspected early on that such success stories were far more common than the various attempts or transitions that never reach such happy endings. As I was interested in knowing how people experience such transitions, I began to look for suitable participants for my study. The first people I interviewed in 2003 were my fellow post-graduate students that were in a similar situation as I was, having worked outside the academia after their Master's degree. The three people had very varied backgrounds and, as I found out, accounted for the choice of doctoral studies in a different fashion. Moreover, each person came up with multiple causes for their transition.

Then, it was suggested that I interview a person who had made a rather radical career change, leaving a university career to work for an NGO (see “Tiina”). When I interviewed this individual in the fall of 2003, she was in the middle of a new career transition having quit the NGO and begun studies in theology. Her interview came to be a turning point in defining the empirical setting of my study. As it turned out, the way she accounted for her transition seemed to be contradictory. On one hand, she was saying that she had been very pleased with her university career and would never have left it had the working conditions not deteriorated. On the other hand, she claimed that the decision to begin studies for a Master’s degree in a whole new field was more in congruence with how she defines herself in comparison with the inauthenticity of the past career. I found her account puzzling and in my analyses saw that there were contradictions and ambiguities in her narration. This was not due to any incoherence on her part, *per se*, but it seemed, it was part of the process of making sense of the transition. I began to sense that the success stories in the media, as retrospective accounts, gloss over the difficulties and offer a limited view of the meaning-making processes involved. This is how I became interested in finding out more about the process of transition rather than the factors predicting or explaining it. So I began to investigate how I could reach people who were in a similar phase to that of this woman.

In the fall of 2004, I contacted a career counselor at SEFE, the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates. Career counseling is one of the services provided by SEFE for their members to support them in various phases of their career. I met with one of the counselors and discussed the nature of her clientele. For the most part, the clients were business graduates who were looking for a new job, either because they had been laid-off or they just wanted to change jobs. However, some of the people were considering a more radical career change. Radical career change in this phase was defined rather loosely as a change that would involve re-education, a new field or profession. Since I was interested in the career changer’s point of view, the radical nature of the change had more to do with the person’s definition than that of the researcher. This group interested me and so we agreed to approach these people and invite them to participate in my research.

In December 2004, SEFE’s career counselor sent an email to 19 members that had been her clients and potential candidates for the research. These were personalized messages from the counselor to the client, including a set piece written by me about the overall purposes of my research and an invitation to take part in the study (see Appendix 1). Nine people contacted me and agreed to participate in the study. All the participants held a degree

in business and were looking for a career change. Some were working, some were unemployed, and some were studying. They all lived in the Greater Helsinki area and had been/were in professional roles. Otherwise their backgrounds were different in terms of age (ranging from 33 to 53), gender, profession, fields and types of organizations they had worked for.

After I had conducted interviews with these nine people in the spring of 2005, my research process was interrupted for about 2 ½ years because I went on maternity leave. When I resumed my research in the fall of 2007 I began analyzing the interview materials and working on the theoretical framework. Towards the end of 2008, I started to consider whether I should make this a longitudinal study. Whenever I shared some of the stories of the research participants people were interested in knowing what had happened to them. At first, a follow-up study did not make any sense within the scope of this research, because I was not trying to model career change process but to understand the identity work it spurred. However, in researching about identity work the question of agency and change became an increasingly interesting question in light of the constructionist debates (cf. Burr, 2003). As the conceptualization of identity as narrative practice assumes, positioning is, of course, always situated and would thus change from one context, time and place to another. Yet, as I have argued in section 2.5, some positions may be more enduring and difficult to resist and change. This is also a practical question, very much of interest to anyone entertaining similar thoughts as the research participants in this study: how does career identity positioning change and if so, where might discursive resources for such change originate?

Therefore, in the spring of 2009 I decided to make another round of interviews, four years after the first one. I had to contact SEFE again as none of the initial contact information was valid, and Google offered little help either. In the end, I managed to get a hold of eight of the nine people and all agreed to participate (see Appendix 2 for my email). Furthermore, I carried out interviews with two new people that had recently seen the career counselor. I wanted to see if they could bring any new perspectives to the findings I had gotten so far. As it turned out, they did not change my interpretations, but nevertheless were very interesting cases in their particularities so I decided to include their cases in the study as well. As to the second round of interviews with the eight participants, I had a chance to share my initial results and interpretations with them. This was a way to give back to them and also to include them in the process. Often this served as an inspiration for further reflection on their part.

The results that I am reporting in this study have been informed by all the interviews that I conducted during this process, including those with post-

graduate students. Yet, it is the 12 business graduates (one of them who had not been in Sefe's career counseling) that I employ in reporting. The basic information and times of the interviews are listed in Table 2. All names are pseudonyms. To select the names, I used the name service of the Population Register Center of Finland, and picked one of the first names that had been the most popular at the time period close to their year of birth.

Participant	Age	Position prior to /during transition	Family	Interviewed
<i>Timo</i>	45	stockbroker	married, one child	11.1.2005
<i>Eila</i>	52	finance specialist	married, 2 children	10.1.2005 18.2.2009
<i>Kati</i>	35	sales manager	single	3.2.2005 25.2.2009
<i>Eeva</i>	51	business development specialist	single	10.2.2005 19.2.2009
<i>Tiina</i>	42	researcher, NGO executive	single, one child	23.9.2003
<i>Risto</i>	48	stockbroker	married , 3 children	17.2.2009
<i>Maria</i>	33	business development manager	engaged	12.1.2005 3.3.2009
<i>Riitta</i>	51	PR specialist	married, 4 children	19.1.2005 5.2.2009
<i>Sari</i>	38	researcher	married, 3 children	22.1.2005 5.3.2009
<i>Johanna</i>	45	controller	single	17.1.2005 13.3.2009
<i>Taina</i>	39	IT controller	divorced, 2 children	18.1.2005 20.8.2009
<i>Sanna</i>	40	marketing manager	married, 3 children	2.3.2009

Table 2. Research participants

There is a possibility that the case of the person who had not been in counseling could be different from the others but in the analysis I did not notice any such difference. In a discursive study, individual differences in terms of personalities and other such psychological attributed are not considered relevant. It is the resources that people have available that are of interest. In this sense, one difference between her and the others could be the kind of resources the others had acquired in the counseling process. For example, various tests, exercises, and discussions with the counselor construct particular interpretations of career and offer vocabularies with which to make sense of it. Although there was evidence of the influence of the counseling process in the interview materials, the nature of the identity work between the counseling clients did not differ in any significant way from the non-client. It seems that the cultural resources for identity work in

such transitions are not specific to such settings but are more widely available. The role of the media is certainly important here. However, the counseling process was evident in cases where the participants had been able to identify something that resonated with their sense of self. Most importantly, counseling may work in offering a practical process of activities that can support identity work and the making of change.

3.3.2 Conducting the interviews

The interview as a communicative event begins well before the tape recorder is turned on (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). In fact, some of the most important settings for the interview are made before it takes place. In this study, the initial expectations for the meeting were set when the career counselor of SEFE sent an email to potential research participants in December 2004. The interview interaction was further pre-shaped when I emailed those who had agreed to be interviewed. Prior to our meeting, the participants were expecting to take part in a research interview that provided the main orientation towards our interaction: the purpose was to give an account of their career transition in a research interview. Interview account is one type of narrative genre (De Fina, 2009), which broadly defines the task at hand, the roles and relationships in the activity, its organizations, and resources. Another pre-shaping, and important from the perspective of identity, was that they had been called upon as business graduates and potential career changers. This is how I have positioned them in the interview and what they needed to respond to in their narration.

As I wanted to have a relaxed atmosphere in the interviews I suggested the participant's home or a café for the location of the interview – whichever they found most comfortable and convenient. Although I wanted to learn as much as I could about the career transitions, lives, and careers of the participants, I did not attempt to establish especially friendly relationships in order to elicit more material. As I argued in the previous section, power imbalances are unavoidable in research interviews. Hence, I find attempts to influence the relationship in order to gain “deeper” knowledge unethical. However, I did attempt to make these interviews as equal as possible, by giving the interviewees the power to direct it. In the spirit of everyday conversation, I also allowed myself to engage with their narratives personally and emotionally (Ezzy, 2010). Sometimes I was able to infer that a similar experience had occurred to me (for example, graduating in the midst of the deep recession of the 90s) as a form of acknowledgement and support. Most often, I provided support with my frequent mmm's and non-

verbal reactions. While the purpose of the interview was of course to produce material for my research, it was also an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their life. This opportunity was, in fact, acknowledged by some of them. One of the women in the second round of interviews even said she had been looking forward to this opportunity to make sense of her experiences since the last time we had met.

It is also necessary to point out that my connection with the business school as a post-graduate student established a common ground and assumed some shared knowledge about the world of work from this educational perspective. Furthermore, my gender played a role in many cases, e.g. in the way some women specifically talked about issues from a gender perspective, perhaps assuming similar values and experiences.

In the invitation I had referred to the interviews as “biographic interviews”. In fact, the interviews were not systematic biographic interviews but unstructured narrative interviews that in some cases resulted in a life story, and in the majority a middle-range account of the career transition. At the beginning of the interview, I invited them to talk about their career and the current transition in the manner they found appropriate. Since I specifically said that I was interested in their overall career this probably resulted in longer career stories that would have been the case if I had asked them to simply tell me about their transition. The choice of where to begin was often negotiated at the beginning of the interview which also shows how the narration is influenced by the expectations:

X: So let's see how to best begin this .

K: Well . yes . in fact-

X: So that I won't go over or tell-

K: Well my recommendation at the beginning has been that the emphasis is on your own story...

The above excerpt is a good example of a negotiation that takes place at the beginning. Here, my interviewee acknowledges that I may have a specific interest in mind, and so not everything he could tell would be relevant. Most of the interviewees decided to start with their choice of business school, while some made comments about their childhood/youth as it pertained to their career choices. If necessary, I made short questions for clarification while they were narrating their career. Otherwise, I reserved the complementary questions for the end. Most of these questions were geared to the particular narrative just told, asking for further information on the different developments. I had also prepared a few

questions to help them consider their narrative from other angles such as questions asking them to evaluate the transitional experience, or their career altogether. I also asked about the meaning of business education if it was not apparent in the narrative itself.

The follow-up interviews conducted in 2009 were also carried out in a similar fashion. Most of the contact information had become outdated but with the help of Sefe's career counselor I was able to get in touch with eight of the nine people I had interviewed in 2005. At this time, I also got two additional interviewees for first round interviews. I contacted all the participants by email (see Appendix 2) and set up interviews in their homes and cafes, as I had the last time. The purpose of the interview was to generate their accounts for the past four years. Since I had positioned them as potential career changers the previous times, the implicit expectation in the interview was to see how they had realized their previous intentions. This could be understood as the cultural expectation that influences the type of accounts and also identity positioning we can expect to produce in this particular context.

Finally, while the interpretations of the narratives and identity work are my own, guided by the theoretical and methodological choices I have made, I have attempted to include the interviewees as full subjects in this research. As I mentioned before, one of the advantages of a narrative approach and interviews is that the interviewees are given the power to craft their narrative in the manner they see appropriate within the constraints of the interview situation. In some of the interviews, I shared my knowledge of career transitions as a resource for further reflection. I did not feel it necessary to disclose any personal information, although I was prepared to do so if that was helpful to make sense of the transition and enhance equality. As Essers (2009) has argued, interviewees do not necessarily gain anything from the interviewer's personal information. Moreover, the purpose of the interview is to hear about their experiences and give them the opportunity to reflect on them and get their voice heard. This does not mean, however, that I would think that my interviewees would need me to tell their stories to a wider audience. Yet, in light of prior research, I do believe that these narratives need to be heard as they broaden the traditional and often gendered understandings of careers as well as some of the stereotypical images of business graduates.

In the interest of giving back to the interviewees, I used the second interview with the eight women as an opportunity to share preliminary results of my analysis for them to reflect upon. I also offered them the possibility to read and comment on the earlier transcripts but only one or two was interested in doing so. In the second interviews, I was also able to

bring to their attention some of the issues they had raised the previous time, and invited them to comment on these if they wanted. However, this was a power-laden situation that I had to be careful about, because I had detailed knowledge from transcripts that they no longer even remembered or might have contradicted in the second interview. I realized that I needed to acknowledge their authority on their life and make sure I did not challenge their accounts in a disrespectful manner by acting as if I was the expert on their life. Finally, I have also shared the final texts in this report with all of the participants. They were all given the opportunity to comment and also to request changes in the interest of protecting their anonymity. All of the participants read the texts but only a couple of them asked to make some changes.

3.3.3 Analyzing the transcripts

The interviews lasted from one to two hours, were tape recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Six of the total 23 interviews conducted as part of this study were transcribed by a research assistant. At a later stage, I returned to the tapes and re-transcribed parts of the text in each transcript that I had found particularly interesting in terms of identity work. During this round of transcription, I marked pauses in seconds, emphasis, sometimes intonation, overlapping utterances, and non-linguistic expressions such as laughter, throat clearing, and sighs. In the transcription, I have used the following conventions, adapted from Löyttyniemi (2001):

.	denotes a pause
(2s)	denotes a longer pause in seconds
-	denotes a false start
// //	denotes short utterances by the interviewer
<u>word</u>	stress is underlined
[denotes overlapping utterances

The original transcripts are in Finnish. I translated the excerpts used in this report. Translation is not a straightforward activity and calls for a careful interpretation of the meaning of the words in their given context. This is particularly the case in this study that has focused on situated language use. Although I am not an authorized translator I felt I was in the best position to spot the nuances in the texts having been present in the interviews. Moreover, as I am a member of a bilingual (English-Finnish) family and have lived a few years in an English speaking country, I considered myself qualified enough for the job. In translating direct quotes,

I have also frequently consulted a dictionary and thesaurus to choose the most appropriate equivalents.

In line with the approach to narratives as practices, I have used methods of analysis that Riessman (2008) calls *dialogic/performance* analysis methods. Similar approaches, emphasizing narratives as socially situated practices, include Mishler's (1999) *narrative as praxis* and De Fina & Georgakopoulou's (2008) *social interactional approach*. In addition to focusing on what is said in the narrative, as thematic analysis does, and how the content is delivered by particular language use, as structural analysis does, dialogic and performance analyses examine to whom the narrative is directed, when, and for what purposes. In this sense, the analysis requires close examination of various contexts, including the researcher, the immediate research setting, and wider socio-cultural contexts setting the stage for interaction (Riessman, 2008). However, using such an approach to narrative analysis does not entail a specific method, but requires a pluralistic use of narrative analysis methods (Frost, 2009). Therefore, I have also used different methods to analyze themes, structure (e.g. Labovian analysis), key episodes, interaction, linguistic choices, and metaphors. In attending to content, form and context in the interview texts I have been able to analyze the material systematically and to better ground my interpretations (Zilber et al., 2008). Such multi-faceted analysis contributes to the trustworthiness of the findings.

More specifically, when I have read and examined the interview texts I have had to ask myself: *how do I recognize identity positioning when I see it?* I have used several analytical moves and methods to accomplish this. Perhaps the most obvious indicators are the *direct descriptions and categorizations* that the narrator uses to characterize him/herself in the past, present, or future, such as "I am not a quitter", "I want to be a wise woman", "I have always been ambitious". These types of remarks I have not used referentially, however, but as linguistic practices that position the speaker. However, such descriptions, found also in non-narrative discourse, are perhaps the rarest form of how identities are constructed in talk. Hence, in line with the theoretical rationale of this study, my main focus has been to look at how identity is constructed through positioning in the narrative (Davies & Harré, 1990; Wetherell, 1998). This kind of identity construction takes place more or less implicitly compared to direct statements about one's characteristics. Analytically this may involve a variety of moves, of which I have used the following.

First of all, I have looked at how *the structure of the narrative and its evaluative aspects* position the narrator. Similar to thematic analyses of narratives, this kind of analysis is concerned with the content but goes

beyond these referential meanings by paying attention to the organization of the narrative in order to make its point (Riessman, 2008). The Labovian model (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972) is the most widely used for such structural analysis. It is more suitable to analyzing shorter accounts than entire life stories, but nevertheless it helps to break the utterances in interview accounts down to narrative elements. The main parts of the narrative include the following:

Abstract	Summarizes point of the narrative
Orientation	Provides time, place, situation, participants
Complicating Action	Describes sequence of actions, turning point, crisis, problem
Evaluation	Narrator's commentary on complicating action
Resolution	Resolves plot
Coda	Ends narrative, returns listener to present

The abstract may be given by somebody else, such as the interviewer. In my study, many interviewees simply started telling about their past career, so my interest in their career transition was the abstract. Some, however, worded the abstract in their own words. Eeva, for example started her account as follows:

- 01 E: And so this is in fact about how to make sense of the change about where the change comes from.
- 02 K: Yes well I am interested in hearing all- of course if you would like to start from the present moment or from the very beginning I am interested in hearing about all the stages //E: yes// but whether we start from your childhood or high school or university times or- you can decide what makes the most sense to you
- 03 E: well I don't know . I could start with the high school years perhaps because...

Eeva explicitly frames the narrative as an explanation of why she was in a career transition. Many others took this assumption for granted which reflects the cultural expectations referring to experiences of transitions. A transition is not part of the expected course of events and hence it calls for a narrative to explain it. While the abstract may be optional, narratives usually involve an orientation to the time, place and circumstances of the narrative (Linde, 1993). Here, in Eeva's case, the statement in line 03 sets the time and context of the beginning of the narrative, while this obviously changes along the episodes of the life/career story. After the orienting clauses, it is the narrative clauses (complicating actions) that structure the core of the narrative and establish the sequences. They are simple past tense clauses that order the actions taking place (ibid.). These include clauses that indicate a turning point in the narrative as well as its

resolution. A coda may be used to signify the end or to describe the effects of the events in the narrative.

In life stories, or any stories that are about the self, it is the sequences of events reported within the narrative that construct identity simply because it is assumed that in order to have an identity requires continuity of existence through time (Linde, 1993). Thus, in positioning as the protagonist of a narrative the narrator constructs his/her identity. Moreover, the particularities of the experiences one can or does claim also function as resources for identity construction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Wortham & Gadsden, 2006). For example, to talk about studying and working in accounting, positions the narrator as an accountant and to talk about the decisions to look for greater responsibility and getting a position as a controller, positions the narrator as a career-oriented accountant. Similarly, in a study of African-American men who had become fathers as teenagers, Wortham and Gadsden (2006) give an example of an urban father who describes the sequence of events to get his daughter ready to school, and by doing so, positions himself as a responsible and accommodating father. Although the nature and order of the events reported is certainly important, the question whether they took place exactly as told is not relevant for the purposes of studying identity positioning.

Narrative construction of the self does not, however, rely only on reporting actions and events, but most importantly on the evaluative parts of the narrative. As Labov (1972) has pointed out, the evaluative parts form a different type of structure than the narrative clauses that construct sequence. The evaluation establishes the point of the story and the reason why it is worth telling. In the case of life stories, or any stories about the self, the evaluation serves to establish reportability of the events and to make a point about the teller. In terms of reportability, the events reported in the narrative need to be unexpected in order to be worth narrating or otherwise tellable: such as the various culturally expected landmark events in life stories (career milestones, marriage, etc.) (Linde, 1993). Since these kinds of narratives always aim to make a point about the teller, the evaluative parts are crucial for analyzing how the narrator wants to be understood. The evaluation also establishes the moral value of the person as a certain type of character, conforming to specific expectations and norms in a given social and cultural context (*ibid*). Hence, evaluation is always dependent on the context of narration and the role of the participants and needs to be negotiated.

More specifically, the linguistic forms which indicate evaluation come in a wider variety of structures and choices of words (Linde, 1993). Wortham

(2001) calls these *indexical cues* that mediate between utterances and the relevant context for identity positioning. For example, to return to Wortham & Gadsden's (2006) study of urban fathers, when the father describes "having a system" with his wife for taking care of their child, this utterance indexically presupposes that they are organized, planful, and responsible people. Instead of talking about oneself, one's own identities can also be mirrored or indexed by *descriptions of third persons and their evaluation* (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000; Wortham & Gadsden, 2006). They may be used as a form of evaluation, indicating similarity of difference with the narrator (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). For example, when Eeva talks about the "*significant impact*" her exchange study year in Canada had had on her life, she singles out the influence of her host mother. Characterizing the mother as "*a brilliant, independent, bohemian, unprejudiced and liberal*" is a way for Eeva to implicitly position herself like her host mother.

I have also paid attention to the *vocabularies and metaphors* that narrators use as indexicals to their identity positioning. For example, Timo who had been a stockbroker and was unemployed at the time we met, used the metaphor of "time-out" to describe this period in his life. As a sports term (Timo was also active in sports) it brings forth images of competition where the game refers to a career in business and hence, unemployment becomes a time to replenish before the game is resumed again. Although Timo had been exhausted in his previous job and had entertained thoughts of doing something different, such as becoming a masseur, leaving the game altogether does not seem to be an option. In my interpretation I have connected this to the forms of masculinities practiced in organizations and management. More specifically, it points to careerism, entrepreneurialism, and masculine interests (sport), which have been found to be central practices in maintaining masculinity in organizations (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). Naturally, the texts are filled with metaphors, so I have been able to focus only on those that have seemed crucial for identity work in the transition.

In reference to this indexicality, there are no direct rules establishing the connection between an utterance and its connection to a particular social context and identity positioning (Wortham, 2001). Or, on a more general level, there is no rigid correspondence between a linguistic form and its meaning in a given context (Linde, 1993). Nevertheless, to establish such meanings, some regularities need to be presupposed given the context of interaction (Wortham, 2001). This is the task of interpretation that the analyst is required to do. Although this is an indeterminate and complex process, some closure to the interpretation can be achieved hermeneutically

by comparing positioning within a case of narration and also by using theoretical resources from other contexts. I describe this in more detail when I outline the practical process of analysis towards the findings.

Finally, the role of the interaction and narrative co-construction has been embedded throughout the process of analysis. I have considered my initial role in setting up the interview and the way this positions the interviewees. Moreover, I have paid attention to how my questions and reactions serve as signs of understanding and agreement of the narrator's evaluation. My questions sometimes serve as cultural expectations the narrators need to negotiate with. The clearest instance of this is my interview with Taina whose narrative becomes a linear account of her past career only because I make it so. As Taina takes long pauses and hesitates before moving on, I help her to tell "her narrative" by asking for the next turn or requesting an explanation for a specific move.

The analysis of co-construction also takes into account the wider socio-cultural contexts. What the relevant contexts are is a result of the analysis and a matter of the interpretative moves I have made. The three types of narratives that I have constructed based on the commonalities and patterns across the individual cases of career narration are a result of this study and represent cultural context: the meta or master narratives available for understanding career change and transitions. In the analysis of discursive positioning within these narratives and in the identity struggles, I have relied primarily on prior work on the various resources for discursive identity positioning as elaborated in Chapter 2. These include discourses that construct career, professional, and gender identities, for example. I also share many discursive resources with the interviewees and have used my own knowledge of business education, careers and career change in my interpretations. As already mentioned in section 3.1, interpretation of relevant social contexts also relies on explicit utterances of the interviewees of how they situate their narrative such as the severe recession in the 1990s. Moreover, even the sequences in the narrative imply the relevant context in relying on the normative expectations of expected life course or career development. In the case of Taina, for example, the narrative does not fulfill the conditions of adequate causality (Linde, 1993) and the expectations of normative career development among business graduates. As a result, it situates her career and identity in a different context, marked by a deep recession and embedded in family life.

3.3.4 From the analysis to the findings

In practice, how did I develop the findings of my study? In reading and rereading the interview texts, I first began to work on the point of each story. Hence, I analyzed the content (themes) and structural properties of the narratives produced. I went through the texts and marked clauses as either complicating events or evaluation. However, this type of detailed analysis of the lengthy narratives did not seem fruitful. Although examining the sequences of career was certainly important in analyzing the texts, it seemed sufficient to list the main events or episodes in each narrative in order to see how the career had evolved. Moreover, this analytical work proved how thematic and structural analyses do indeed result in different interpretations. In two of the cases, losing one's job was an important turning point leading towards the career transition. Yet, the place of this episode among other sequences was different, and hence it did not gain a similar meaning in the narrative. In one case, unemployment was the real source of identity struggle and the narrated cause for the transition, whereas in the other it was narrated as one episode among many leading towards a mismatch between one's career and identity.

Since the focus of my analysis was not on career development but identity, I began to look for ways to read identity in a different fashion. This is when I decided to look for *key episodes* in the texts. These are parts of the text that indicate important turning points in the narratives (Denzin, 1989). Moreover, they are often described in detail and are rich in evaluation, particularly in terms of expectations (Hyvärinen, 1994; Hyvärinen, 1998). In other words, the episode signals a breaking down of the expectations of what is supposed to take place in a given context. It is during such episodes that identity work is also particularly intensive. To identify these episodes, I looked for evidence of evaluation based on Hyvärinen's analytic model (Hyvärinen, 1994; 1998), which draws on Labov's and Tannen's ideas of evidence of evaluation and expectation (see also Komulainen, 1998; 1999 and Löyttyniemi, 2001; 2004). The indicators of expectation and evaluation include such linguistic markers as repetition, false starts, backtracks, contrastives, and modals. Let us look at the following example taken from Eila's narration:

Transcript

- 01 E: But this is really when you think about it that you have had this
kind of- that before this I didn't have any other breaks in this career
02 except when well . when Anna was born I was on maternity leave for
about a year and when Antti was born it was about two years
//I:Yes//
03 so so those were like the br- only breaks

- 04 and then I had a job to go back to //I:Right//
 05 so so like this has been like- . perhaps that has been like errr . the
 worst thing about this has been exactly that if you had been, like,
 certain that, say, within a year . (smiling) //I: Yes// you had a
 position
 06 then it wouldn't have- you could have taken it perhaps more as this
 kind of . a vacation well earned
 07 because you have worked all these years and managed the family and
 household //I: Right// that it is about time . //I: Right// to have a
 little sabbatical (smiling) //I:Yes//
 08 but then it has seemed like whether you are ever again able to get a
 new job being at this age already
 09 the age here is like //I:Mmmm// the . the problem because
 10 because the employers won't- errr they are perhaps cautious about
 hiring someone at this age
 11 because well many can be- they are getting health problems
 //I:Mmmm// go on early retirement //I: Mmm// and that gets
 expensive . //I:Right// for the company //I:Yes// so-

I have identified this excerpt as a key text evaluating Eila's identity work in career transition. It includes a variety of evaluative elements and evidence of expectation as listed above. First of all, the excerpt begins with a contrastive "*but*" which indicates something unexpected or undesirable. This is immediately enhanced with the use of negative "*didn't have any breaks*", and as a rule a negative is used only when the opposite is expected (Labov, 1972). There is also repetition. The words "*break*" (lines 01 and 03) and "*age*" (lines 08-10) that are both repeated seem to be key to the evaluation of the transition. "*Break*" in itself indicates an expectation of something not unbroken, in this case of an unbroken career. Hence, the underlying expectation of a proper career is one of continuity. The false starts (e.g. on lines 05, 06) also indicate evaluation, such as on line 05 where Eila starts twice before she comes up with an evaluation, marked by an evaluative word "*the worst*". On line 06 Eila has another false start and uses a negative ("*wouldn't have*") that is not completed, but is followed by a modal verb which indicates conditions of possibility and hence, expectations. The break could have been like a vacation but it isn't.

It is important to note that parts of texts that are rich in identity work do not always coincide with the turning points in life or career. Divorce and unemployment, for instance, may be important turning points but they are not necessarily rich with regard to identity construction or work. In my study, evaluative elements indicating identity positioning were evident throughout the text, but finding parts of texts that were particularly relevant to identity work pertaining to the on-going transition was more challenging because the transition was on-going. Often, however, this type of evaluation was at the end of the narrative. In some of the cases, (a) key episode(s) were easier to identify than in others. In my interpretation, this

reflects the intensity of identity work and tells something about how the career transition has been experienced and interpreted as well.

The analysis of key episodes turned out to be a turning point in my analysis towards answering my research questions. In fact, the way my analysis proceeded from thereon helped me reformulate the research questions. After analyzing key episodes, I went back to the full transcripts and re-examined other parts of the transcripts from this point of view. In practice, this involved constructing narratives about the cases, including a detailed analysis of excerpts that I found important identity-wise. As part of this analysis, I paid close attention to interaction and my own role in the co-construction. While I analyzed each career narration as a case, I also looked for similarities and differences across the cases to see how the narratives varied in terms of structure and their point. As I came up with some patterns in the research materials I went back to individual cases and checked how they compared with the emerging patterns. This iterative process continued to the final phases of writing this manuscript. The working and conference papers I have written along the way have also contributed to this analytical work.

As a result of this analysis, I formulated *three different types of master narratives* to account for the similarities and patterns across the cases. These master narratives represent the cultural context and function as resources, and sometimes as constraints, in identity work. Each narrative follows its own structure in terms of the main events to account for the change. Moreover, they draw on differing assumptions about what makes a good career and what is needed from a person who wants to have such a career (which I have labeled as virtues). In other words, in accounting for the career transition via a particular master narrative the narrator positions as the main character of such a story and hence, as a particular kind of a person in the context of career. This is how I found the first of the *practices of identity work* in career transition, namely the positioning as a main character at the level of the entire narrative.

Positioning as a particular kind of career changer is only one aspect of identity work in the transition, however. The interview accounts also constructed more specific identity positions within the narrative. When I looked at when and how different positions were constructed I made two observations: firstly, there were multiple identity positions from various contexts involved, and secondly, they were used in the different parts of the narrative. In other words, positioning as a particular kind of person involves temporal ordering of multiple identity positions. The nature of this kind of positioning was different across the three master narratives. Finally, the analysis of key episodes led me to identify one more practice of identity

work: the negotiation of identity conflicts. As a result of a detailed analysis of identity positions that these parts of text constructed, I could see that in each case there were conflicting positions that the narrators were trying to deal with. I did not find any pattern in the positions that were negotiated with that would have been consistent with the master narratives. In each case the positions were different and reflected the particularities of each life.

As to the analysis of the second interviews with the eight women, I used the same methods to make sense of the transcripts. I looked at the transcripts as entire narratives and selected parts of texts for more detailed analysis of identity positioning. In particular, I analyzed how they position themselves vis-à-vis the career change, and how their identity positioning is different from the previous time. What new positions are they drawing on? How do they account for the four years that had passed? The immediate context of identity work was now different, not only because time had passed but also new events could be claimed to position identity. In addition, the purpose of the interview was different as they had to position themselves against the previous positioning as someone who wanted to change careers. As a result of the analysis of each case and comparisons across the cases, I grouped the cases into three categories in terms of the changes in their identity work. These categories represent the practices of identity work over time vis-à-vis the need to change careers.

Regarding the discursive resources of identity work, I focused on analyzing what the resources were to construct new or modify previous positions. As the interviews were still about possible career change, the master narratives of career change identified in the previous round were still relevant. This was particularly evident in those cases where the narrator had made the desired change and was thus able to produce a happy ending to such a narrative. During this round of analysis I briefly departed from my main epistemological approach to the interview transcripts, using them as referential material to understand the sources of these changes. In other words, I looked at what actions they reported having taken that provided them with the discursive resources that allowed for the new positioning. In the context of this study, this was a minor part of the analysis but one that I felt was necessary in two respects. First, it was a modest attempt to empirically examine the theoretical issue of change and agency in identity positioning. This question is relevant for discursive psychologists for sure but also for organization scholars interested in understanding processes of change at the level of individual actors. Secondly, I considered this question very important to practical actors who look for changes in identity positioning. Yet, my intention has not been to

provide a list of recommended actions but to show the type of cultural resources the research participants used to construct new identity positions.

To conclude on the results of the analysis, I have identified three practices of identity work (the hows) and three master narratives (the whats) that serve as the broader cultural resources/constraints in this work. The interplay of these hows and whats represent the situated identity construction practice in the context of this study. Based on the follow-up material, I found three practices of identity work vis-à-vis career change over time and a variety of discourses that served as resources for change. So now, in the following chapters 4-6, let us have a closer look at the empirical findings through the voices of the business graduates in this study.

4 Narrative practices and resources of identity work in the middle of career transition

In this chapter, I present the findings of my analysis, namely the narrative practices and resources of identity work in career transition (see table 3 for a summary). It is through the interplay of the hows (practices) and whats (narratives and discourses) that identities get constructed in this context. While these practices and resources are always locally and socio-culturally situated, identity work and agency takes places through the practices of positioning and using the resources available. I illustrate these findings with the particular narratives of the business graduates I interviewed, in this and the following two chapters. In the first section (4.1), I present in more detail the three types of master narratives of career transition that I found based on the commonalities and patterns across the cases. I have named these as *narratives of disruption*, *mismatch*, and *life renewal*. These narratives not only function as the cultural resources with which to explain and account for the career transition, but also construct the identity of the narrator as the main character. Therefore, in drawing on a particular master narrative to account for the transition, the narrator also adopts a particular identity position. Hence, this *positioning as the main character of a career change narrative* is one of the practices of identity work I have found. This kind of identity work is closely associated with the moral of the story and the moral character of the narrator. In addition to outlining the common features of these narratives, and how they construct the identity of the narrator, I illustrate each narrative with a case example.

In section 4.2, I present the second practice of identity work, the *temporal ordering of multiple identity positions* within the narrative. This practice refers to the more specific positioning throughout the narrative using a variety of discursive resources and identity positions in terms of gender, profession, career, family, organization, special interests, and so on. The temporal ordering refers to the practice of situating these various positions across past, present, and future times to construct identity. While similar

practice most likely pertains to any instance of career narration and identity work, in the context of a transition it is closely intertwined with identity work related to the need to change careers. In other words, identity work in a transition is about experimenting and forming new identity positions or revising or strengthening the old. I illustrate this practice by giving a more in-depth description of the identity work within each type of career change narrative using the same examples as in section 4.1.

Identity work practices	Discursive resources		
	<i>Disruption narrative</i>	<i>Mismatch narrative</i>	<i>Life renewal narrative</i>
<i>Positioning as the main character of a career change narrative</i>			
<i>Plot</i>	Victim of involuntary career disruption -> need for career change	Episodes/evidence of an identity mismatch -> turning point -> need for career change	Life transition/crisis -> renewed focus on career -> need for career change
<i>Virtue</i>	Courage, self-reliance & enterprise		
	Resilience	Authenticity	Purposefulness
<i>Temporal ordering of multiple identity positions</i>			
<i>Past</i>	Constructing career/professional identity as clear and valued Positioning as a victim	Constructing past career/professional identity as ambiguous Drawing on other positions (family, age, career)	Constructing past career/professional identity acceptable Drawing on other identity positions (e.g. family)
<i>Present</i>	Emphasizing alternative sources of identity (family, age, authenticity, balance)	Awareness of the lack of authenticity	Emphasizing career development orientation
<i>Future</i>	Revising past or forming new career/professional identity	Forming a new, authentic career/professional identity	Strengthening career identity
<i>Negotiating identity conflicts</i>			
	Particular struggles between conflicting identity positions within multiple discourses (age, gender, family, profession, career, lifestyle)		

Table 3. Practices and resources of identity work in the middle of a career transition

The third practice of identity work involves *negotiating identity conflicts* among competing and conflicting positions of identity. These may be

positions a person has adopted or would like to adopt but finds incongruent in the present circumstances. Or, the negotiation may be between a favored position and another position that one has been positioned into. I describe these negotiations and identity struggles in chapter 5 by sharing the narratives of all the people I interviewed in this study. Each struggle is unique and particular to the narrator due to their differing experiences and investments in identity positions. Moreover, as I argue in section 5, the heart of this negotiation is a moral struggle between opposing identity positions and conceptions of a good career (or life).

4.1 Positioning as the main character of a career change narrative

In the interviews, the business graduates in this study were engaged in accounting for their career transition. Although I had not specifically asked them *why* they were in a transition, they all proceeded to tell a story that explains and makes sense of their transition. Based on the analysis of the cases in this study, I have identified three types of career transition narratives – *disruption*, *mismatch*, and *life renewal*. The names are not meant to refer to single causes for change, but refer to the type of account and the assumptions such accounts make about careers and identities. I do not attempt to explain what the causes or motives for these change attempts were, but rather focus on how reasons are constructed by the narrators through vocabularies of motive (Mills, 1940). Such motives do not reside in the individual but are embedded in the situation and provided by the discourses and narratives available to account for one's actions. The discursive resources offer plausible reasons based on their norms, underlying assumptions, and expectations about how careers are supposed to evolve and how one is supposed to act.

Accounting for a career transition is an integral part of identity work. As Linde (1993) has argued, establishing adequate causality to one's actions is an important way of constructing a socially acceptable self – a self that makes sense to oneself as well. Narrative constructs such a self by assigning particular sequences of actions to the main character, and by evaluating these actions. Hence, by drawing on a particular narrative with associated motives the narrator also comes to be positioned as a particular person. In attempting/making this change, what kind of a person I am or wish to be? What is the main character of this career change narrative like? In taking the position of the main character of a career change narrative, all of the narrators enacted the taken-for-granted, although contestable assumption

that it is up to them to change their careers and take charge of their destinies in order to achieve the ideal career, whatever that may be. In doing so, they build on various assumptions and norms about careers and what people enacting such careers are supposed to be like. As I demonstrate, positioning as a career changer constructs self-directed, autonomous, self-reliant and entrepreneurial career identities. In this sense, this positioning is embedded in the new career discourse that emphasizes entrepreneurial attitudes, self-direction, and independence from particular organizations (see section 2.2).

In the following, I describe the main features of the three narratives. Although my aim here is to show that the way career transitions are narrated and identity work done is situated within the culturally available master narratives, the intention was not to reduce these master narratives into generic, nameless narratives. Hence, I have illustrated the narrative types with a few specific cases from my research. After all, master narratives always come into being in their particular, embodied performances. I conclude this section by discussing how these narratives construct the identities of the narrators by positioning them as a particular kind of career changer.

4.1.1 Disruption, mismatch and life renewal narratives

Disruption narrative

In the disruption narrative, career is narrated as developing according to expectations until a turning point is reached where the narrator experiences a career interruption or obstacle. Career prior to this point is storied as something valuable that has been lost, at least temporarily. The narrator is a victim, either as a result of organizational changes and wrongdoings or wider career realities. In claiming victimhood, the disruption is legitimized as a normal part of the contemporary working life and beyond the narrator's control. A common turning point in the cases I studied was job loss as a result of downsizing or merger. There were also cases where hectic workloads or stressful situations had resulted in work exhaustion or burn out. Although in some cases many issues were brought up to account for the change, the structure of the narrative points out the turning point in the process.

The disruption narrative is based on the classic structure of a tragedy which positions the narrator as honorable victim of undefeatable forces (K. J. Gergen, 1999; McAdams, 1993). Yet, by positioning the main character as a career changer, the narrative ends with a progressive tone. This moves the narrator from the victim position to a more active role and makes identity

claims about a competent career actor. In this sense, the narrative accomplishes the identity work task of legitimizing and reinterpreting the break in the career and of re-storying career identity with possible modifications. The moral of the story is that career hurdles can be overcome and there is actually something better to be searched for elsewhere. The virtue that the main character enacts in this story is that of resilience: the ability not to be discouraged by obstacles but turn them into an advantage and opportunity. I illustrate the disruption narrative with the cases of Kati and Risto who both experienced an unwanted, albeit different disruption in their career. We go into more detail in their identity work in the sections dealing with the other practices of identity work.

Kati

When I meet Kati in February 2005, she is 35 years old, single and working as a sales manager at an international hotel chain. We meet at her home in Vantaa after work, and talk about her life and career over a cup of tea. A business school had been an obvious choice since she has “*always*” been business-oriented. A daughter of a teacher and a doctor, she grew up in a small town in Eastern Finland and showed business acumen early on as a pre-schooler by making paintings and selling them to neighbors. Her dream was to become a hotel director.

Upon graduation from high school, Kati tried to get into a business school in Helsinki. After the first failed attempt at the entrance exams, she decided to move to Helsinki anyway and worked as a cleaner before studying for the entrance exams again the following year. When she did not succeed that time either, she applied for a two-year business college. While at school, her English teacher inspired her to go study abroad and so she decided to apply and was accepted to a university in Australia. After a year of studies, she did a “*cool*” internship for year at a fashion store in an exclusive hotel.

After returning to Finland, Kati got a job at a company selling training courses where she “*really learned how to sell*”. While she was still working for the same company she decided to continue her studies and eventually got a Master’s degree in business. After graduation Kati looked for new opportunities for career progression. In the end, she had a couple of positions to choose from and decided on her current job as a sales manager at a hotel because she thought “*now I finally have to check out whether this hotel business is my thing or not*”. At the time of the interview, Kati had worked on the same job for about six years and due to various changes along the way she had also been quite pleased with the work.

However, for the preceding three years or so, she had experienced a growing sense of dissatisfaction with her work. One reason is the blocked promotion prospects: Kati had twice applied for a promotion into hotel management, but unsuccessfully. She feels she has been discriminated against, the first time due to her gender and the second time, due to nepotism. In addition, the work environment has become more hectic along the years and she has been overworking. The turning point took place in the previous fall. One day she simply “*dropped her pen*” and walked to the doctor’s office as she was so exhausted. She had met her “*physical boundaries*” and felt she could not continue working as she had.

As a result of this break, she has been considering a career change for a while. Although working in the hotel business had always seemed something she was destined to do, it no longer seems that way. She is

overworked and frustrated for not being able to progress in her career. She has not only *“lost all the inspiration”* but her *“self”*. She doesn't know who she is or where she is headed. Simply changing to another organization does not feel like a solution, and therefore she is considering a more radical career change. Although getting out of sales does not seem likely (*“everything is sales in the end”*), it is no longer enough for her to know that *“someone is contented by being able to sleep in a nice room and everything works”*. Therefore, she is trying to figure out something more meaningful to sell such as Finland as a tourist attraction or a cultural institution. In her attempt to find a more balanced lifestyle, she has also played with the idea of simply quitting her current job and getting a job selling flowers or relaxation training. The difficulty is in finding the space and energy to figure out what she would really want to do *“when she grows up”* while still working at the present, hectic job.

Risto

Risto is a 48-year old stockbroker who had been on a sabbatical that turned into unemployment due to the 2008 financial crisis. I meet Risto in February 2009 during the winter vacation week for schools at a café in Vantaa during the day while Risto's children were at the movies. According to Risto, he had a very conservative upbringing that emphasized getting a good, secure profession for oneself. After high school, Risto *“found”* himself working for the railroads where his father had made his career. The road for a career in the public sector seemed *“paved”* but a few years later Risto thought it would be too *“dangerous”* to stay or else he might find himself retiring from there. He figured he had to do something else and so he applied to the business school that he thought would provide an all round education.

Risto continued to work for the railroads all summers until he decided to quit his job. He had no idea what he was going to do next. He was studying marketing but it did not interest him that much and the studies were not going well. As he was getting stressed out about the situation, he decided that he would have to do something else and moved to Helsinki. For a few months, he was just trying to get by until he managed to get a job at one of the banks in their investment department. At the time, at the end of the 80s the stock markets were booming so Risto basically *“signed up for work”*.

Within the next two years, as the senior stock brokers left the bank, Risto was promoted as the head stockbroker. He enjoyed the work a lot although he never felt that managing other people was his strength. In the early 90s, around the same time as his children were born, his unfinished degree began to aggravate him so he completed the missing courses (over a third of the required credits) *“in little over a year, along changing diapers and working hard full-time”*. He had given up his management responsibilities in resuming his studies but was *“half forced”* to again take up the head stockbroker position when he returned. During the 15 years that Risto worked for the bank, he felt the constant need to downgrade his management responsibilities, yet he always ended up getting them back.

At the beginning of 2000, Risto realized that his compensation was not on a par with the other partners and began to look for other jobs. He switched to an analyst position at an investment bank. Risto felt working without the pressure to sell suited him better and he worked there for a couple of years until a merger. As a result of rigorous cost cutting, he was given notice being *“a good cost cutting target with a high salary”*. Soon after this, he joined another investment bank as a stockbroker again. After three years, however, he felt he needed to take time off due to the long hours and

ongoing pressure to sell more. Since he could afford it, he decided to arrange for a sabbatical in 2007.

During his sabbatical, Risto took it easy, spent time with his family, trained for a marathon and thought about career change. He was considering various ideas that would allow him to pursue his versatile interests instead of having a regular job and fixed working schedule. Risto says that he has always had a big interest and a source of enthusiasm in his life, such as his initial interest in investing. Although investing later became “*just a job*”, he has had other similar consuming interests, such as guitar playing, script writing, running, and the IT and telecom field. Some form of entrepreneurship was what he was considering, building on his existing expertise and eventually moving into other areas. This kind of option also appealed to him because it could potentially give him more independence, freedom, and ability to balance his life. However, at the end of his sabbatical, he had no new arrangements in place so he needed to get back to work for financial reasons. Then, however, the financial crisis hit, his employer went bankrupt and the job market froze.

At the time of our interview, Risto is looking for a new job but the job search has proven to be more challenging than expected. Due to his high level of expertise, there are not very many potential jobs available as internal recruitment is common and there are many “*hungry young stockbrokers*” on the market. Also, when applying for lower level jobs Risto feels he is not “*taken seriously*”. Although he feels competent and capable for many kinds of jobs, his experience is from a narrow area of expertise. That is why he is thinking of getting some additional training such as a degree in investor relations “*to strengthen his CV*”. Although he is still experimenting and working on his career change options, getting a job to provide for his family has become a more urgent need, overriding his dreams for a more balanced and entrepreneurial career.

Mismatch narrative

In the mismatch narrative, the narrator’s point is to show how the past career has not matched his/her sense of self. The structure of the narrative revolves around the process of gradual realization that one is in the wrong field or profession. For example, the career may be objectively progressing coherently within a particular profession but subjectively it is not experienced as meeting one’s expectations. These expectations have to do with a career that would match one’s sense of identity. To account for the mismatch, the development of career is explained by positioning oneself, career-wise, as driftwood, reacting to opportunities, or using non-work related identity positions, such as a mother and spouse. Most importantly, various episodes are described that indicate the growing awareness that the career does not match the narrators’ needs, values or other qualities. One of these episodes then serves as the turning point when the narrator realizes that there needs to be a radical change. As a result, the falseness of the former career path becomes revealed and a change, allowing a more authentic expression of their sense of career identity, is presented as inevitable. I illustrate this narrative with the case of Maria. Although

becoming unemployed plays a crucial role in her career transition, it is not the primary reason Maria accounts for her need to change careers.

Maria

Maria is 33 years old and unemployed at the time we meet at a downtown café in Helsinki in January 2005. Upon graduation from the business school, she did an internship in Austria and stayed there for a couple of years working in exports. As she didn't see any long-term opportunities in the company she was working for, she quit and got a job with a large telecom company. She was supposed to go back to Austria with her team but things didn't work out as she expected. She decided to stay in Finland and changed to a different unit to work as a project manager in new business development. During the five years that she worked for the company her responsibilities and work were in constant flux. There were re-organizations, changes of unit and changes of jobs within business development and business operations. The last two positions she held only for about half a year each. Although she had actively applied for some of the positions she also describes her career in the company to have been "*going with the flow*".

The turning point of Maria's career took place at the time of another wave of reorganizations in 2004. When it became obvious that big changes were along the way, she lost her motivation but was also hopeful that the changes would improve the operations and the way work was organized. In the end, it became clear that a lot of people would have to go and Maria was one of them. She describes it as an "*interesting experience*" when everyone was just waiting for their phone to ring in turn to get notice.

After the lay-off, Maria began to look for a new job and signed up for an outplacement course organized by her ex-employer. At this point, through the various self-assessments, Maria reports having questioned her prior career choices but at the time she "*was not capable of bravely voicing any thoughts*". She then signed up for a project management course arranged as part of unemployment services and got an internship in a non-profit association to raise money for their development projects. She chose a non-profit because she realized that she wanted to get away from business, particularly "*publicly traded companies operating in the quarter economy*". However, the work at the non-profit was essentially sales work, which "*didn't feel like her thing*".

At the time of the interview, Maria is trying to figure out what to do. She questions the meaningfulness of business, her own suitability for the business world and possibilities for career progress in management. She remembers her parents and friends telling her she was too "*nice*" for the business world when she had been choosing her field of study. Moreover, during her years at the telecom company she had struggled with the ambiguity in her responsibilities and doubted whether she had "*the right background*", "*competence*", or a persona that would have allowed her "*to independently manage the issues and develop something from scratch*". Also, as part of psychological testing in one of the company's HRD programs the psychologist indicated that her personality was not the managerial type. At the time, it had been easier for her to just "*follow the path she had ended up on*" instead of exploring more meaningful options.

Now Maria considers new career options, such as psychology or health care, which would be more aligned with the qualities and values that she has become aware of and finds in conflict with those of business world. Towards this end, she is taking courses in education and social psychology at the Open University. Yet, she finds making a change very difficult and feels like she is "*trapped*". Starting from the beginning and getting a new

degree is a daunting task, particularly when you can't know in advance whether you are making a right choice. Moreover, the career prospects and remuneration in the health care field, for example, are in stark contrast to that of business. Thus, she is also considering options where she could build on her past education and experience, such as HR. Yet, getting a job in that field seems also very difficult without prior experience.

Life renewal narrative

In the life renewal narrative, there is no obvious disruption in the career, neither is the career prior to the transition narrated as inauthentic. The need for a career change stems from an interest to get something more out of one's career – more fulfillment or responsibilities. The reasons for the transition are situated within a new phase in the course of one's life. All of the people adopting this narrative are in fact in mid-life and all of them at least mention their age in accounting for the transition. Most importantly, the turning point or primary reasons given for the change are situated in non-work aspects of one's life – a divorce, a new hobby, or changes in parenting responsibilities. I illustrate this narrative with the case of Taina.

Taina

Taina is a 39-year old single parent of two young daughters working as an IT controller at a healthcare firm. When I meet at her home in Espoo in January 2005, both of her daughters are at home and every now and then Taina stops her narration to respond to her children's questions. Taina had minored in accounting which is what interested her most, and which is where she also began working. She was still working on her master's thesis when she got her first full-time job as a controller in a small software development company. As this was the beginning of the 90s, it soon became apparent that the economy was slowing down and Taina decided to finish her Master's thesis to be better positioned on the job market. Then the recession⁷ hit, Taina lost her job and became unemployed. It proved impossible to find a new job so she ended up having a child and stayed home.

After maternity leave, Taina managed to get a bookkeeper's position through a friend. "*It was a job*" and she felt she had to take it although she was not interested in it. The salary was poor and she would have rather stayed home with her child. She only stayed there three months, however, when she got a more interesting job in a financial IT system development project in a government office. After a couple of years, she had another child and when she returned she was "*put to IT work*". In other words, she was transferred to an implementation project for a new financial IT system.

A few years later she decided to take another job closer to home because all the commuting between school, daycare, and her and her spouse's

⁷ The recession in the 1990s was one of the worst in Finland's economic history and more severe than in most other countries. It had long-term consequences not only for the economy but also for politics, culture, and the general atmosphere. The actual recession lasted from 1990 to 1993. During this period, the unemployment rate went up from 3.1% to 16%. Five years later in 1997, the unemployment was still over 14,6% (Kiander, 2001). Unemployment was particularly widespread among the young and recently graduated who have since been referred to as the recession generation (Alestalo, 2007).

workplaces became such a juggle. She went back to accounting work, this time in the municipal health services. Taina enjoyed this new field a lot and enrolled into an internal leadership development program as well. However, the unit was fraught with various conflicts and eventually she felt she had to change jobs and gained one in a health care company working with financial IT system development.

At the time of the interview, she is still working at the healthcare company but has grown dissatisfied with the career development opportunities. She is now considering a career change and has started studying adult education at the Open University. She sees herself as being in a life transition, "*midlife crisis*", after her divorce a couple of years previously. While family has always been more important to her, now her interest in work has grown and career ambitions emerged. At the moment, she is still "*wondering what to do, where to find it*" and considering options such as managerial and HRD work, or perhaps something to do with children.

4.1.2 Identity work in positioning as the main character of a career change narrative

In the preceding section, I presented the main features of the three master narratives I have identified based on the narrative analysis of the interview transcripts. How do these narratives serve the identity work of the narrators? What are the underlying assumptions embedded in them and what kinds of resources and constraints do they offer the identity workers?

In sharing their experiences with me, the narrators were not simply reporting about their past life/career but constructing narratives that serve the purpose of accounting for the need for a career change. An integral part of such an account is the point the narrative simultaneously makes about the narrator. Further, this point indicates the type of person the narrator wants to be understood as, his/her identity (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). There is a moral to the story and also moral evaluation of the main character. So how do the career change narratives position their main character?

All of the career change narratives build on the assumption of proactive and self-reliant career actors who manage their own careers. The individualistic ideology in the representation of the career actor is embedded in psychological and developmental career theories as well as everyday understandings of career. Yet, the positioning as a career changer also reflects the more contemporary ideal of protean (D. T. Hall, 1976; 2004) career and identity, which emphasizes adaptability, self-directedness and enterprising attitudes towards one's career. This new career discourse is connected to the discourse of enterprise that is pervasive in much of the Western world. In emphasizing individualism and freedom, it makes enterprise the core virtue of responsible individuals (Fournier, 1998). Not only careers but identities become an enterprise that calls for active self-regulation and management (Grey, 1994). Today's career heroes need to be

mobile and self-directed career actors who can change shape at will. In attempting to change their careers, the narrators can establish their worth as moral people who are taking the initiative to improve their careers and hence their selves. In addition to the virtue of enterprise, career changers also have the virtue of courage and self-reliance in taking responsibility to adapt and change difficult circumstances and aim for the betterment of one's situation. While the positioning as a career changer serves the identity work in this specific context of a transition, it is important to note that these types of meanings may contribute to the positioning of career identities at other times as well.

As is the case with the new career discourse in general (Pringle & Mallon, 2003), these master narratives of career change are also gendered. As Mary Gergen's (1992) research has shown, the typical man-stories are heroic stories of a dedicated person who ventures out in the world and conquers the obstacles, whereas the woman-stories are relational and interweaving. This does not mean, however, that masculine stories are given by men or vice versa. In fact, all the people I interviewed in this study, regardless of how their careers were otherwise gendered, engaged with this individualistic discourse of career change and enacted heroic narratives, rather than being passive victims. Positioning the main character as independent, adaptable, mobile, and enterprising, the master narratives of career change attach typically masculine characteristics to the narrator. It is a positioning that is produced by the discourses of career and by the narrators' actions to consider career change. However, the extent to which this narrative of change was empowering and helpful in dealing with transition varied across the interviews. Inhuman organizational realities or normative understandings of what careers are supposed to be like can also push one to make changes that might not otherwise be necessary at all. In many cases it is obvious that career change as an individualized strategy to deal with the problems of the working world was very difficult (consider Maria's expression of being "*trapped*").

While these three types of career change narratives share some of the assumptions of the new career discourse, each of them makes further distinctions about the main character in reference to the type of transition they are in. In the *disruption narrative*, the main character is a resilient career actor. Initially the narrative draws on tragedy, the master narrative, to make sense of negative work life experiences, such as unemployment, and places the narrator as a victim of social forces (Hänninen, 1999). As a victim, the hero thus escapes the responsibility for a tragedy (McAdams, 1993). Yet, the disruption also creates an imbalance that threatens one's identity and challenges one's status and moral worth. The positioning as a

career changer not only says something about the severity of the disruption, but also helps framing it as a victory. By not only getting a new job but also a new career, establishes the worth of the hero as a powerful actor in charge of his/her destiny. It is the new career discourse that emphasizes change and adaptability which gives this narrative its moral weight. In being able to rebound from the setback, the narrators establish the virtue of resilience. Moreover, since the narrators are looking for a new career and not only a new job, they may also enact other virtues or moral ideals in imagining new career identities, such as balance or authenticity. However, within the narrative accounts these issues emerge as secondary.

In the mismatch narratives, the moral worth of the narrator is established by the virtue of authenticity. Although these narratives may also include setbacks or disruptions in career, such as unemployment in Maria's case, these are only part of a process of realizing a long-term mismatch between their identity and career. In emphasizing authenticity, the narrators of mismatch are negotiating the contemporary moral ideal of being genuine and true to oneself (C. Taylor, 1991). The search for authenticity is constructed as a challenging journey and a moral responsibility. It calls for integrity and dedication to pursue one's own path.

In the life renewal narratives authenticity is not a primary issue as the narrators do not see an identity conflict with their past career. It has in many respects been fine, matching their needs, talents, and values. However, in their transition they have re-evaluated their life, taken stock of their career so far, and felt a need to further develop their career. While their goal and moral ideal is clearly self-fulfillment or self-development in the context of career, I found it difficult to see whether this implies any specific moral virtue other than those of courage, enterprise, and self-reliance. In the end, I think that the virtue of purposefulness best characterizes the main character in this narrative. It refers to the quality or character of having a clear purpose, intention, or focus in one's actions. In the attempts to develop and invest more in the career, the narrator takes a more intentional stance towards it. The difference between the mismatch and life renewal narrative is that the former is focused on the integrity of the intentions in terms of their authenticity, while the latter is more focused on having these intentions in the first place. To have a purpose in one's career is a moral ideal in itself.

4.2 Temporal ordering of multiple identity positions

The second practice of identity work in career transition that I have identified focuses on the more specific discursive positioning within the narrative that defines oneself in the context of career. The positions adopted are situated in multiple social discourses that construct identity positions, such as those of career, profession, organization, gender, family, and ideology. The positions are not simply generic categories of group identity but they are always crafted with the specific resources at hand, including the biographic particularities. In addition to the type of positions adopted, this work entails the temporal ordering of these positions across the sequences of the narrative. In other words, some identity positions are placed as existing or dominant in the past while some others come to be constructed as primary in the present. Moreover, imagined future identities are also relevant as they also construct identity in the present. By claiming aspirations, such as becoming a manager in the future, draws on particular career assumptions and values and thus positions a person's identity correspondingly.

One of the interesting findings related to this practice, is the multiplicity of meanings and discursive resources within which identity positioning is embedded in. First, there are the various career discourses that construct a particular understanding of career, its expected development as well as the desired characteristics of person desiring such a career (see section 2.2). This could refer to an understanding of career as one of progress in the hierarchy or development of expertise, for example. Secondly, meanings to one's career may be assigned within discourses that are specific to a profession, occupation, and organization. One may construct identity as a particular kind of manager or using characteristics that are embedded in the employing organization's culture. Thirdly, identity positioning may be situated within non-work discourses such as family, gender, or ideology. For example, one of the women in my study narrated her career as a process of crystallization, drawing on Eastern philosophy. Thus, one way of positioning her identity in the context of her career was focused on self-actualization.

Gender figures prominently in this type of identity work. Firstly, it is evident in the explicit positioning of gender identity. This refers to the practice of drawing on one's gender in accounting for the various sequences of career. It may refer to the characteristics one assigns to oneself, such as the kinds of feminine traits Maria uses, as shown below. Or, it may be expressed in the way one wishes to engage with one's career. For example, Eeva, who hopes to be a "*wise woman*" in her career would like to be able to

express femininity more in her work. Women tend to be more aware of the role of gender in their career due to the various disruptions and feelings of incongruence it may have produced as a result of work and management practices that are constructed as masculine. This is most evident in the way parenthood is gendered and how this relates to work. For the women with children, motherhood is closely intertwined with their career and assigns meanings to their identities in the context of career. The assumption that to be a good woman means to be a good mother influences the conditions for career and professional identities (Evetts, 1994).

Gender does not only figure at the level of gender identity and their differences, but also in the way career discourses themselves are gendered. Focus on career achievement, ability to put in long hours, or the privileging of work over personal/family time, are typical for masculine career discourse (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006). So, while the male business graduates in my study do not explicitly position as men, in narrating their careers they may engage with various discourses that are implicitly gendered. In the case of Risto and Timo, the only men in my study, the professional and career discourse within the financial sector is in itself masculine. However, the fact that career and professional discourses are often gendered as masculine in business (vs. those in health care, for example), does not automatically translate into differences between men and women. In contrast, most women in my study draw on career discourses and fully adopt and take for granted the implicit masculine meanings. As I show in section 4.3, however, in many of the transitions gender is an inseparable aspect of career transitions, and is related to identity struggles.

The practice of temporal positioning of multiple identities is not necessarily specific to the context of career transitions. In any instance of career narrating we can expect this type of identity positioning to take place. What is specific to this practice as a form of identity work in career transitions is the necessity to order the positions in such a way that they account for the transition. In this respect, the three types of narratives differ from each other and reflect the nature of identity work in question. In the disruption narrative, career identity is constructed as valued and coherent, evolving along clear sequences. This may draw on a career or professional discourse or the identity positions of gender and family. As this identity positioning has been threatened, an integral part of identity work is about placing this identity in the past and repairing the damage in one way or the other. Claiming or experimenting with possible new career identities (Ibarra, 1999), helps to legitimize the disruption and adjust past identity positioning. This does not necessarily result in forming a new professional identity but may refer to readjusting past career identity by drawing on

discourses of age, work-life balance, or authenticity. The identity play with possible selves often involved radical breaks with the past (from stockbroker to masseur, from hotel sales to flower shop clerk, or from accounting to social work). Instead of indicating where the narrator is headed, this kind of experimentation tells more about the struggles in the disrupted career in painting a picture of entirely different type of work assumed more human, balanced or rewarding. In this sense, it assists identity work in repairing the aspects of one's identity that have been damaged by the involuntary disruption.

In contrast, in the mismatch narrative, the narration of past career is less coherent and discontinuous. Whatever the career or profession has been like in the past it is not congruent with the narrator's sense of self. In attempting to account for this mismatch, the narrators position themselves as having been unaware of the mismatch, focused on other priorities, or simply as having gone with the flow of life. In these narratives, the emphasis is on present awareness of the mismatch, in contrast to their past self, who was not aware or at least not capable of taking charge of the career. Situating the past self as less knowledgeable thus proves their moral worth in working to reach the contemporary ideal of authenticity in career. While the main task of identity work focuses on forming an authentic career identity, defining what authenticity means in practice is difficult. Part of this work involves drawing on past episodes to claim identities congruent with various options for future career. Similar to retrospective accounts of occupational choice in life stories (Linde, 1993), identity work in the search for more authentic career options involves the establishment of adequate causality to substantiate the choice. Narratives of past episodes are thus important in this work.

In the life renewal narratives, the past career identity is not narrated as disrupted or discredited, and neither do the narrators question their past choices. At present, however, or in the near past, changes in other spheres of life have resulted in a re-assessment of their career and a renewed interest in career development primarily in terms of self-development. In accounting for this change, they draw on identity positions embedded in the discourses of family or special interests. In the case of family, this may refer to the strong past positioning as a mother, for example, and the newly emerged opportunity to invest in one's career. Or, experiences related to one's interests outside of work have allowed for expression of oneself that has not been possible at work. In terms of identity work, these narrators are engaged with strengthening the previous career identity by readjusting it or imagining whole new identities.

In the following section, I illustrate this practice of identity work by describing how the narrators introduced in the previous section position their identity in a more specific way. The focus is on how the identity positions are narratively constructed and ordered.

The disruption narrative: Kati & Risto

Let's begin with one of the disruption narratives, the 35-year old sales professional, Kati. In narrating her career, Kati is constructing a strong professional identity position in sales, and particularly in the hotel business. She is one of the few interviewees who decide to begin career narration from childhood. As Kati describes having been business-oriented early on, she manages to meet the expectation of necessary causality for an occupational choice (Linde, 1993). She makes her business-orientation all the more extraordinary by positioning herself as a daughter of a teacher and a doctor and therefore quite different from them. One gets the impression that business and the hotel industry in particular is something she is called to, as the following evidence from her old "My friends" book from school times indicates:

Transcript

- 01 K: Well I knew that I had written there in my own book in this part that what
do you want to do when you grow up
02 And I had written . hotel director
03 I: Oh
04 K: and now I am in the hotel industry at the moment

Throughout the narration of her past career Kati is positioning as ambitious, hardworking and career-oriented. The odd jobs along the way, such as temping in car sales or in a hospital department for dying patients, are given value as a source of learning and therefore not wasted. Her career is about effort and progress.

However, this career identity positioning as a sales professional is placed in the past via the turning point in her career. Vis-à-vis the ongoing transition, she is positioning as a victim of discrimination and hectic working conditions. In narrating on the discrimination she had experienced twice in applying for a management positions, she explicitly positions as a woman for the first time in her career narration. Earlier she has made no reference to her gender, neither are there any traditionally feminine meanings or orientations constructed in her narrative. However, in the on-going shift she points to how her gender, ambitions and the traditional career model are connected. When she was younger, she remembers having been thinking that "*damn – those men are ruling the world but I am going to educate myself and show them*". Still, Kati's interpretation of the current

transition is that her efforts in career competition have not paid off. The identity work this requires is combined with being a victim of poor management practices and hectic work environment at her current place of work. Kati legitimizes her experiences by showing how her exhaustion was not due to her character, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Transcript

- 01 K: There are so many factors in the work environment //I:Yes// that bother
me and have been bothering me for a long time or let's say for three years
perhaps . //I:Yes//
02 to the point that last fall I was off from work because of work exhaustion
//I:Yes//
03 only a week though . //I: Yes (laughing)//
04 but still even the fact that I go and tell my colleagues that now I practically
dropped the pen from my hand that I am not able to do anything anymore
//I:Yes// that I am going home now . //I:Yes// bye-bye I am going to the
doctor's //I:Yes// and asking for a leave because now "no thank you . no
more"
05 so it is just- I am actually a really persevering person
06 and have learned to handle almost anything and always managed to get by
on my own and the time in Australia also taught- you met all kinds- all kinds
of people and all
07 so a kind of perseverance . and resilience are very characteristic of me
//I:Mmmm//
08 but like- that is why it took me so long to say that now like- now I just can't
take it any longer

In this transcript we can see how Kati positions as a persevering person. She legitimizes her burn-out and the need to give up by drawing on the situational position of a victim. In addition to blaming the environment directly (line 1), she is constructing the conditions as extremely demanding by emphasizing how uncharacteristic it was for her to give up and to take sick leave (line 5 & 7). Quoting earlier experiences to prove her perseverance (line 6), she is working to maintain her own identity as a strong, persevering person. This positioning is further enacted through referring to the short duration of her leave (line 3) and to the long time it took before she actually did succumb.

In her identity work, Kati is placing her career identity as a ladder-climbing sales professional in the past. By doing this, she is enacting a shift in values from career development to present orientation towards balance and intrinsic meaning in work. It is not only about values per se, but who she is: someone whose ambitions have "*faded away*". Positioning as a woman is an important part of this shift. Although she positions as having been career-oriented in the past, she felt she was discriminated in promotion decisions due to her gender. In the transition, gender also figures in the new meanings of balance she is assigning to her career, meanings that are traditionally more feminine (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). Although Kati describes being totally lost she still holds on to many aspects

of her past career identity positioning. For one, she is not considering quitting sales. She shows pride over her career development and accomplishments. Also, she maintains her position as a persevering, self-managing and career-oriented person by enacting the transitional position of a career changer. Career is constructed as an important part of her identity and as a result, career change a crucial issue in constructing a good life. The imagined jobs she is considering are thus attempts to re-situate this identity in the future.

Another new identity position that emerges in the context of the transition is family. After the time of moving away from home, Kati's career narration does not include any references to family or relationships as conditioning career development. Yet, in this transition her sense-making also involves her serious relationship with a boyfriend and their plans to move in together. As Kati's remarks, she has always been free to go and do how she pleases and her work has been family. Now, however, she marks issues of balance and the ability to spend time with her partner as important. Hence, she constructs a future positioning as someone for whom the role of work and career has diminished.

Another example of identity work situated in the master narrative of disruption is **Risto** whose career narration focuses initially on explaining his career in the financial industry and positioning as a top-level expert in investments. The following key episode narrates a turning point in his career, similar to Kati's childhood dream of being a hotel director, towards a career in finance. It constructs an image of true passion, a sign of genuine engagement with one's work and an alignment of self and career.

Transcript

- 01 in the spring of 1984 it just clicked in my head and I got interested in investment issues
02 and, like, I had inherited some stocks of a medical company and .
03 then I tried to look in the newspapers how these- how- or what their value was
04 and this company was listed only at the stockbrokers list which was done only on Thursdays at the time
05 and so I was wondering why they had all these banks but I couldn't find this company anywhere
06 and so I started to look into it and one friend of mine told me that it is like this and this that there are two separate lists and he lent me a couple- this booklet on publicly traded companies and others and
07 I was still quite skeptical but I read it
08 and then all of a sudden it swept- swept me away //I:yes// and like .
09 actually I was studying those issues more than any my university subjects //I: yes//
10 so it genuinely interested- yes it interested me so damn much that it . it didn't-
11 studying marketing and all began to feel so useless

In his narrative, Risto positions himself as a particular kind of finance professional. Even though he has worked as a stockbroker most of his career he distances himself from this identity position. Whereas the others were “*bullshitter types*” who were “*pushing for a sale even without a proper case*” he positions as “*honest and conscientious*”. Risto’s way of working involved doing more conservative business with long-term clients. The moral value of this is emphasized by Risto pointing out how his clients gave him credit for this. As Risto explains, the brokers considered most successful are those who have high sales in the short-term. Hence, stock brokering is essentially a sales job requiring everyday sales performance regardless of the markets. In retrospect, and emphasizing his analytic, honest and conscientious traits, Risto thinks that a job as an analyst or a portfolio manager would have suited him better.

The episode explaining his decision to leave the bank he had worked for a long time illustrates well his positioning within the profession. I have broken the narrative apart using the Labovian method to show how this small narrative constructs its point and positions Risto:

Transcript

Abstract

01 That (job change) went like this I had- (2s) I had for the past winter been making exorbitant amounts of money (explains how)

Evaluation

02 so I made more money than any of my colleagues

03 and then it started bugging me a bit that although I was a partner and . all . I realized that I had clearly the smallest basic salary of all the partners and my share of ownership was quite insignificant

Complicating action

04 and then when I tried to talk about this to my boss for all winter that this is wrong //I:Mmm// and he refused to do anything so I- (2s)

Complicating action

05 when Investment Bank offered me a job and a 50% pay increase like without me even- like before even starting negotiations they just said that 40.000 (FIM) would be an appropriate salary for me //I:Yes// so I was like “okay where do I sign”

Evaluation

06 and and at that point I was a little- let’s say that I got a bad taste in my mouth

Result

07 because when on the week- weekend I was cleaning up my desk and sms’d my boss that I will be resigning on Monday then those wise guys had had a meeting on Sunday evening “that of course we will pay you that much here as well” //I:Yes//

Evaluation/Coda

08 so . I was so naive that I didn’t understand that you don’t ask for a pay increase by working your ass off but you should blackmail and threaten //I:Yes// that I’ll leave

As the coda of this narrative shows, the moral of the story is that it is not enough to be competent in order to be rewarded but you have to engage with rather aggressive practices to promote yourself. Identity-wise, the

episode makes a point about Risto as well and positions him as hardworking and conscientious in contrast to his boss and other partners. From Risto's perspective, his own way of working is a virtue, but a clash with company practice. Hence, the decision to leave the company shows his character and moral worth.

Another similar identity positioning within the finance profession juxtaposes managers and experts. He clearly positions himself at odds with managerial responsibilities at several points of the interview, and acknowledges not being at his best in dealing with them. He explains this by reference to his personality and traits: being shy as a child and not capable of understanding the behavior of "*ordinary people*". Both of these reasons legitimize his aversion towards managerial responsibilities while maintaining a valued positioning. The reference to his inability to understand the common person, while ironic, may be connected to his positioning as a smart expert. Moreover, the emphasis of the human relations aspect of management constructs a typically gendered distinction between social skills and technical skills (Faulkner, 2000; Faulkner, 2007; Kelan, 2008). Hence, this account may also contribute towards masculine identity positioning. At another point, explaining his failure to get a sales director position, he returns to his aversion towards managerial responsibilities and frames it also as an issue of honesty: "*it would be almost dishonest to adapt your behavior differently with each employee*".

In terms of the career transition, the temporary positions as a victim and as an entrepreneurial career changer are intertwined in his account. The positioning as a career changer, which comes first in the narrative, is accounted for by his work exhaustion and his retrospective evaluation of a mismatch between his job and his dispositions. To account for such a mismatch, Risto offers three explanations to make sense of the past. For one, he refers to a "*fatalistic driftwood theory*" according to which he has simply reacted to the opportunities. Second, due to his Lutheran work ethic that he attributes to his conservative upbringing, he has simply worked hard even when he has not exactly enjoyed the work. Within this positioning, a sense of responsibility is a virtue. Third, the choice of getting into brokerage was originally a result of genuine, consuming interest and of more deliberate action. It is an example of how he positions himself as always having been: enthusiastic, passionate, and also as a man of many interests and talents.

As Risto's career change efforts during his sabbatical had not materialized, he had to return to his old work, but ended up being unemployed due to the financial crisis. While being a victim of this crisis is certainly legitimate due to its severity, being unemployed is still a morally

dubious position for such a competent and high level expert as Risto. Hence, maintaining the position of a competent professional in his field remains a focus in his identity work, while experimenting with new career identities.

Although Risto is primarily positioning within discourses of work, he does talk about his family as well, and positions as a father and a spouse. The first time he mentions it is in the context of talking about his early career in investing. While he was working full-time in his new career he finished his Master's degree studies along with "*all the diaper changing*". This constructs an image of a hardworking and capable man but it also shows that he was not solely focused on his career. Otherwise, the family plays no role in the various turns of his career until the current transition. With regard to the necessity of going back to work for financial reasons, a very relative statement, he refers to his spouse as "*a dedicated housewife*". Although Risto mentions this with irony it still positions him as the breadwinner of the family, the traditional masculine role and identity. In addition to family, Risto also draws on his membership in various communities with shared interests. These positions construct different identity positions that have relevance for his career identities (see section 5).

In terms of his future, Risto is positioning as entrepreneurial with all the plans for setting up his own business. This is also connected to his positioning as someone with versatile, passionate interests. He points this out himself and also spends a lot of time talking about the particular interests he has had or has. During the sabbatical and current unemployment it has become more of an active concern of how he could pursue some of these interests through his work. "*The goal is that one could do many- many things like as an entrepreneur, it could be consulting and patent development, I could finalize the script, or do freelance work and so on*". In particular, he is enthusiastic about inventing new things and describes himself as the Disney character Gyro Gearloose⁸. However, in Risto's opinion, this positioning as an inventor is not necessarily aligned with that of an entrepreneur as he doubts whether has the "*aggressiveness and determination*" entrepreneurship requires.

I return to Kati's and Risto's identity work in chapter 5 in order to look in more detail at the identity conflicts they face in their transition. Next, let us look how the temporal positioning of various identity positions takes place in a mismatch narrative, that of Maria.

⁸ In Finnish: Pelle Peloton.

The mismatch narrative: Maria

In narrating the early part of her career Maria, the 33 year-old unemployed economics major, positions as a career-oriented business graduate. Her early career orientation comes forward in the evaluation of the various changes. For example, she decided to quit the company in Austria because her career was “*not moving ahead*” there, and also at the telecom company she actively pursued a managerial position. Moreover, when I directly inquire about her original career expectations she responds as follows:

Transcript

- 01 I: What if you think about your expectations at the time of your studies about the future. What were they and how have they changed now?
02 M: Well at the time I certainly was more of a careerist anyhow . I never thought I would become a managing director somewhere up there but I did expect to progress in my career differently that I actually have . and that I would get responsibility and power and these kinds of things and that I'd get to travel .

As this transcript indicates, Maria is placing this career-oriented positioning into the past. This is due to how she contrasts the characteristics she thinks are expected from someone on the higher rungs of the career ladder, and those of herself that she has gradually become aware of. One key episodes which explains this positioning and functions as evidence of her personality is a recounting of the psychological testing at the telecom company:

Transcript

Abstract

- 01 And like- but it has been like- what I have been thinking about now-or
Orientation
02 for example when I was at the telecom company I went to one of these internal training programs- or was accepted in it
03 It included this kind of- with a psychologist this kind of- there were these tests //I:Mmmm// and a meeting with the psychologist
04 the purpose of that program was that everyone would find the right place for them in the organization- some kind of a development path or- the goal was to support individuals //I: Yes// which is of course difficult and nobody actually followed up on what happened to any of us as a result of it really //I: Yes//
05 but there were some good features in it and- //I: Yes

Complicating action

- 06 but what I did at that point was I did this one test ... I got a couple of different answers in a way- it's one of those things with different letter combinations
07 I: Is it the Myers-Briggs?
08 M: I don't remember . something equivalent
Complicating action
09 And then ... based on that in fact when we were discussing the results with the psychologists-
10 And I had mentioned that I wasn't getting the same answers at all the two times I did it //K:Yes//

Complicating action

- 11 well we began to dis- we discussed it then and I told about myself and finally
we came to the conclusion that-
12 it was one of these with 16 different squares //I:Right yeah// in which you
are like placed in a way-

Resolution

- 13 finally we came to that conclusion that I am in such a square where you get
basically writers and- or typical writers and psychologists and something
else

Evaluation

- 14 so s/he commented that this is not really typical that quite a rare manager is
like this //I: yeah, yeah// (unclear)
15 not surprising surprising (laughs)

Coda

- 16 so indeed in this sense I had given up that- err that the business world is not
//I:Mmmm// it is not for me somehow //I: Right// or that I am not really at
home there after all.

The above excerpt is one of the key episodes in terms of Maria's identity work in that it works as evidence of her unsuitability to the business world, as the coda or the conclusion of the story clearly shows. This is an interesting example of how particular HR practices (assessment) work to construct knowledge about identities and their power to influence self-perceptions and careers (Hollway, 1984a; Townley, 1993). Based on a constructionist view, such assessments serve to construct (vs. represent) knowledge about the person, measured against assumed characteristics of specific jobs (in this case managers). The context of such assessments influences the results and how they are interpreted, as illustrated by the fact that Maria got different test results the two times she took them. For example, using her experiences in the context of a fast growing telecom company and the constantly changing and ambiguously defined responsibilities may influence self-evaluations. In Maria's case, "the evidence" of the test results contributed to her rather drastic conclusion about her unsuitability to the business world.

The psychometric testing episode does not go into detail about who Maria is, other than how one might imagine writers and psychologists to be. Elsewhere in her narration she uses characterizations such as "nice", "empathetic" and "honest", and talks about her desire to help other people as giving her meaning in her work. Moreover, she constructs business as being about "the numbers or the bottom line" and in order to fit in you would need to be interested in "the actual business". However, she herself is more interested in people and being able "to help others". This distinction reproduces a similar gendered dichotomy of gendered skills and qualities (social vs. technical) as was the case in Risto's narration. Maria's identity positioning is attached with typically feminine meanings that she finds to be in contrast with the business world based on her experiences. Accordingly, the future career identities she is constructing in the transition are

embedded in fields stereotyped as feminine, such as health care, social work, and HR. However, she has not placed her identity as a career-oriented person in the past entirely, as she is still concerned about making a career, assuming responsibility and getting proper compensation. I return to this issue of how she negotiates between these contradictory identity positions in chapter 5.

The life renewal narrative: Taina

As I showed in the previous chapter, Taina, the 39-year old single mother, narrates her career primarily from the position of a mother. This shows not only at the level of the story and its contents, but also in her decision to invite me to her home and have her children present while we talk about her career. Moreover, her narration is interrupted sometimes by her children, sometimes by herself. There are long pauses as if she was not certain how she was expected to proceed. Often, I helped her continue with her narrative with probing questions asking what had happened next. Her narration is more fluid than most others, which I have interpreted to be a result of her primary positioning as a mother in contrast to the career changer.

Taina's family orientation surfaces early on in her narrative, although initially she frames family as a secondary "choice" due to the recession:

Transcript

- 01 T: Then it hit, the recession //I: Oh yeah, okay// yes
02 it was like the beginning of the 90s //I:Yes// I had just completed my Master's thesis when the recession got worse- yeah so at that point I had thought that I better finish the thesis so that I can look for a job it started to look like I could lose my job //I:Yes// and I did fin- finish the thesis and then I lost my job (laughs)
03 I: Good timing
04 T: I got fired and
(pause: 5 s)
05 I: What year was it that you graduated?
06 T: Well 1990 //I:Yes// yeah or I think it was -91 that I got the notice
07 I really tried to look for a new job but the times were so difficult that no- no way //I:Yes// and then when I got unemployed-
08 just the other day I checked when I had- there was this list of how many- or to how many places applications were sent and there were like dozens . //I:Yes// perhaps within that year . //I:Yes// perhaps close to a hundred applications . //I:Yes//and then dozens of interviews //I:Right// and nothing .
09 totally desperate not only because of the times but in addition when you are under 30-something //I:Yes// and engaged and no kids it was hopeless for a woman to get a job //I:Yes//
(pause: 3s)
10 so I ended up having kids then
11 if you can't get a job so you have to start making children (laughs)

This is one of the key episodes in Taina's career that she also returns to later in the interview. She is constructing the position of a victim of the

recession that hit Finland in the early 1990s. The consequences of this recession were so severe that anyone, regardless of their education or position, can easily legitimize any career disruptions by referring to it. By backtracking on line 08 to describe her efforts, she is constructing the bleak picture of job markets and the difficulties of finding a job even with the efforts she has made. In addition, Taina depicts her situation as “*desperate*” and “*hopeless*” (line 09) due to her being a woman and engaged. In this context, Taina presents having children as something she “*ended up doing*”, the natural option for a woman since having a job was not possible.

Although in the context of her early career, Taina presents starting a family as the second best choice, elsewhere in the interview the priority she gives to family comes forward clearly. She states it directly (“*children have always been more important than working life*”), and also indirectly when explaining the sequences in her career. One example of this positioning can be seen in the following transcript that is another key episode in Taina’s narrative about a change of jobs back to accounting. While it initially draws on her positioning as strongly family-oriented, it also constructs a shift in her orientation. Prior to this excerpt in the text, Taina had described their commuting problems with the distances between their places of work, daycare, and school and with just one car.

Transcript

- 01 T: So managing all this at the time that our eldest went to school got so hard that I ended up with- when the city had some job opening //I:Yes// that I applied for that then //I:Yes//
 02 purely for the reason that it was so close to our home //I:Right, yes//
 03 because I thought that it will make our life a bit easier when you work close (to home) and you don’t have to travel so much anymore
 (pause: 20s, Taina is talking to her child)
 04 Yes so at that- that point I didn’t have very- or when the kids were small I never had any passions for working life it was like you had to go to work //I:Yes// it was all the same what it was
 05 but then . //I:Yes// working for the city it was . an interesting working environment
 06 social and health issues which I found extremely interesting . //I:Yes// and human //I:Yes// there was daycare elderly care //I:Right// and child protection
 07 I liked it a lot //I:Yes//

This is an interesting excerpt that starts from the family-oriented positioning and then shifts, for the first time in the interview, to a position where work becomes meaningful beyond financial reasons. On lines 01-04, accounting for her change of jobs she is still the family-oriented mother who is concerned about family and work-life balance. Yet, unexpectedly (indicated by “*but*” on line 05), the job turns out to be “*extremely interesting*” (line 06), and she comes to enjoy her work. She is narrating a shift between a past self who was not concerned about the content of the

work as long as she got paid, and a present self whose “*passions*” about working life are emerging. This interest is given further weight when a bit later she talks about a training program in management and leadership she enrolled in at her workplace. Her past self was not interested in these types of issues either, but at this workplace, due to some personnel problems at her work, “*it really started to interest me after all*”.

Although Taina’s career narrative constructs a shift in her orientation to work on the new job and a willingness to develop her career via training, she avoids positioning as someone who is eager to progress in her career. This is most clearly evident in the way she accounts for the change of jobs, as the earlier excerpt already showed. The jobs changed for family reasons, for economic reasons or they may not be accounted for at all. For example, when she decided to quit the municipal administration due to its problems (harassment etc.) she chose a job in a health care company to implement an IT system for accounting. As she did not account for this change in any way I asked about the reasons to which she replied: “*I don’t really know why . it just happened to be there*”. My question is built on the underlying cultural expectation that in addition to reasons for leaving a job you should have a reason for choosing the new job. Yet, narrating this change shows how, for Taina, it was simply a job change, not a career move. Called to account by my question, however, makes Taina come up with location as the primary reason for choosing the job.

As the narrative seems so fluid I had difficulty understanding what it was about. In other words, I was expecting an account that would seem “adequate” in this context. Taina talks about the organizational culture and how it is in her view surprisingly traditional, inflexible, and bureaucratic given that it is a private sector organization. But then, quite abruptly, Taina tells me she had got divorced a couple of years previously. This was followed by a long pause, which I did not interrupt because I did not want to interrogate her on such a possibly difficult and very personal issue. Taina did not go into any more detail but proceeded by telling about the part-time studies in adult education she had started at the Open University. Once again it remained unclear to me why she had made this decision, so I asked her more about how she got interested in that. First she connects it with the increasing interest in leadership issues and her experience in training as part of her work, but in response to my probing she comes up with the following account:

Transcript

- 01 I: What were your intentions when you started it? Was it just your interest in these issues or did you have some other goals?
(pause: 2 s)

02 T: Perhaps it is this personal crisis //I:Mmmm// that hit me a couple of years ago that I have had to think about—midlife crisis or whatever //I: Yes, right// divorce and everything so it's been . like . a new direction to life //I: Yes, right// I have searched a bit all over the place //I: Yes// thought about what I would really want to do when I grow up //I:Yes, yes//something totally- totally new //I:Yes// thought a lot about HR

In this excerpt, my question sets the expectation that you need to have an intention or goal to start studying. In situating it as part of a personal crisis, Taina satisfies this expectation and also accounts for the transition. It seems that her new phase in life has created a space or a need to invest in her working life in ways that was neither possible nor desirable to her past self. However, with her job, the on-going studies, and her small children she cannot see making any big changes in the immediate future. All in all, the primary positioning in Taina's career narrative is that of a family-oriented mother that serves as an explanation for how her career has unfolded. As a result, the meaning she is constructing to her career is that of a series of jobs necessary for financial reasons. Yet, the key episodes, such as the recession and the job in municipal administration, mark a shift in these meanings that has come to the foreground in Taina's transition. Although she is not positioning as an active careerist, she is now looking for more meaning in her career through change of field or career progression. It is Taina's positioning as a mother and as someone looking for more meaning and identity in her career that is at the core of her transition.

How is Taina negotiating between these two positions? The struggles it involves are described in more detail in the following section, which focuses on the final practice of identity work identified in the context of this study – the negotiation of identity conflicts. It is this practice that most tellingly shows the difficulties in career transitions in the form of culturally situated moral dilemmas.

5 Moral struggles: negotiating identity conflicts in career transition

As the previous chapter showed, there are multiple identity positions that come to play when doing identity work in narrating careers and transitions. In the liminal period of a transition, some identities are narrated to the past in order to claim new identities and to experiment with possible future identities. The practices of positioning as a main character of a career change narrative and temporal positioning serve to account for the transition and need to change careers, as well as constructing identities of the narrator. In this section, I show how some of these positions result in identity conflicts and describe the identity work of negotiating between these competing or conflicting positions.

In addition to delving deeper into the transitional identity work of the business graduates introduced in the previous chapters, the other people I have interviewed are presented. Although I describe rather condensed versions of the key conflicts in their transition, the results are based on detailed analysis of their positioning throughout their narrative accounts. My aim in writing these narratives has been to evocatively illustrate the particularities of each conflict via the idiosyncratic episodes and constellation of identity positions that have been available for them. I have tried to balance between telling their story (what has happened) and showing how they narrate their transition and position identities. Each narrative is titled using metaphors the narrators have adopted and which, in my interpretation, best capture what the career transition is about in terms of the identity conflict with which the narrator has engaged.

5.1 Identity conflicts in the disruption narratives

The ambitious hotel businesswoman loses her self

As we already learned in previous sections, Kati, the 35-year old saleswoman in the hotel business (see sections 4.1 and 4.2), is not only looking for a new job or career but a new self. She describes herself as having always been dedicated to her work and focused on career progression. In the light of her experiences of exclusion and work exhaustion, she no longer feels that she can continue in the same career. Since her whole life has been dedicated to this, it now seems like the basis of her identity is entirely threatened. Losing career identity means losing one's self altogether:

Transcript

- 01 somehow I feel that I have lost myself . //I:Mmmm// like who I am .
//I:Mmmm// there now //I:Yes// simply in that exhaustion and all this
kind of- like this that career is not progressing and blahblah so that-
02 it has somehow exhausted me and resulted in .
03 yes .
04 my own self is lost //I:Mmmm//

The identity conflict Kati is dealing with focuses on filling the void that would be left by leaving the hotel business behind. Although she is still working there, she is experimenting with new possible identities. *“There is more to this world”*, and it is no longer enough for her *“just to make money for the company”*. The new identity position she is constructing draws on discourses of better work-life balance and *“meaningful”* work. Her recent relationship plays a role here, and in fact she uses her boyfriend as a voice to negotiate the conflict between career and work orientation and balance. She quotes him: *“hey - are you planning to kill yourself doing that job? You should probably think. If it stresses you out so much does it make any sense? Being so young and everything- it gets to your health.”* As the boyfriend's comment is targeted against the identity position that Kati is attempting to put to the past, the present Kati responds: *“well it is indeed foolish . it is really not worth it”*. Yet, Kati cannot put the past identity entirely in the past, due to the many investments she has made in it. In fact, she still positions herself as a sales professional.

While Kati's identity conflict focuses on trying to leave the habitual, strong career identity position in the past, it is further complicated by the difficulty in filling the resulting void with new meanings. She is looking to regain her enthusiasm and drive but the problem is figuring out what the new meaningful career could be:

Transcript

- 01 I: What do you find as being most difficult in this transition?
02 K: (pause: 3s) Well I feel like I have some kind of age 30 transition a bit belated//I:mmm// . I think a lot about who I am //I:Yes// and what I want to do and what my life values are //I:Yes// so that's a kind of-
03 I do things rather thoroughly (laughs) and so it will be with this (change) as well
04 I am not like- indeed I won't like- if I see something in the paper "yeah a really cool job well that's it I will apply for it" //I:Yes// I don't work that way //I: Yes//
05 but what is important for me is that I would find some kind of peace with myself and find my self somewhere there- something that I find-
06 like I was thinking about my past self . I don't need the ambition back
07 but some kind of (pause: 2s)-some kind of like drive that I used to have that has disappeared //I: Yes// and that I want back
08 or I don't know if it will ever come back like that
09 but somehow I feel like I have swerved //I:Yes//from my . self . so far that I want to find something that will in turn be a key to what I want to do for the rest of my life //I:Yes, yes//
10 (pause: 2s) but like in principle I think that I could do something- something totally different but the question is what

To conclude on Kati's identity work, she is struggling to put an identity position as a career and work-oriented, ambitious person in the past while figuring out new meanings to replace it. Being ambitious and focused on her career goal to become a hotel director has given her career and life meaning and defined her identity positioning. Now, due to blocked career prospects and work exhaustion, she is looking for new meanings by which to position herself. Her identity work now focuses on downplaying the old career discourse and its conceptions of what it means to have a good career. By positioning as a career changer, she legitimizes the disruptions and attempts to weave new meanings into her career story. These meanings question her previous career goal, the kind of dedication she has showed in her career and the meaning of her work overall. It is not only the personal episodes but the nature of the business itself that she uses in accounting for the need to change. Although she looks for more balance and meaning in her career, figuring out a new career is difficult due to her long-term investments in a past identity and her on-going, hectic job. Moreover, being hardworking and having a good job/career still does have value for her beyond economic reasons. Thus quitting and getting a less stressful job, such as selling flowers, just to get away from the old seems quite "*radical*" and would involve giving up on aspects of her career that still have value for her.

A hard-core capitalist, a Mensa wimp or an idealist inventor?

Risto, the 48-year old stockbroker who had become unemployed during the global financial crisis in 2008 (see sections 4.1 and 4.2), has faced many obstacles in his career transition. Initially, the transition had stemmed from

his work exhaustion as a result of the conflicts he felt between his own style of doing the work and the pressures to make money on an ongoing basis. As a result of his “*honest and conscientious*” approach, he had found the daily trading to be harsh and stressful. He tells of having realized that it does not match his character: “*damn it . better let those people do it who like it*”. Now, however, since the sabbatical did not result in any viable new career options, and having lost his job due to the financial crisis, he is forced to look for a job in his own field or a related job in business. As the job search has proved difficult his professional identity as “*smart*”, “*talented*” and “*extremely competent in almost anything*” (with irony) is threatened, and he needs to resituate his identity in order to maintain identity positioning as a competent professional and expert. Although his imagined career ideal is to be a Gyro Gearloose type versatile inventor, he has doubts about his ability to start his own business and to make enough money. At several points in the interview, Risto notes how unemployment has been a learning experience, bringing “*realism*” to his plans.

Transcript

I: Well how about- if you think about this transition period what have you felt as being the most difficult aspect of it?

R: (3s) Mmmm well (3s) after all this situation is difficult when the crisis that I had expected came but its slope was worse than I had foreseen . //I:Mmmm// so that brings its own challenges (2s) I don't know really . I don't think this is- there's no problem really but it does undermine my self-con- self-confidence a little and you get a bit more realism in the game //I:Mmmm// when you realize that I have all these ideas and thoughts that I could do this and that and this way but all of that has sort of remained at the level of pondering . //I:Mmmm// and poking and so . //I:Mmmm// nothing happens by itself now does it . so this has been . a learning experience .

In this excerpt, Risto already points to the hesitation about his ability to start a business on his own and a bit later we come back to this issue:

Transcript

I: But why don't you consider these business ideas now that you have open- of course you are working on //R: yes// all these projects //R:Mmmm// but if you just went ahead- decided and went ahead doing it seriously without investing time in getting a job in-between

R: I must be a wimp (both laugh)

I: You want certainty that you have something //R:Yes// some clear plan which will bring enough revenue so that you dare-

R: yes that's it and of course when you have kids and family to support and wife who is a dedicated (laughs) housewife . firmly so .

Although Risto laughs about being a wimp, it does indicate an identity position he finds immoral, while the ideal is to be somebody “*who gets*

things done". This is an interpretation I have made that receives further support from an illustration he gives about what "*taking care of things and not taking care of things*" means. He talks about two communities he has been part of – the electronics hobbyists and membership of Mensa, and makes a difference between what kind of people (=men) they are. Whereas the electronics hobbyists are "*clearly successful people driving German quality cars*", the Mensa people are "*bitter and cynical guys*" who complain, criticize and get stuck with self-righteousness without getting anywhere. Risto positions himself as belonging to the former group but, with the problems he has experienced with starting his own business entrepreneurship, he faces the threat of being positioned as one of the Mensa wimps. The immorality of being a wimp also comes forward in Risto's philosophy of bringing up his children: he says having given them the advice that it is important to act according to one's wishes and "*not remain whining somewhere in the middle*". In the interview, Risto is clearly positioning as someone who takes care of things but at the same time he faces the threat of being positioned as a wimp due to his thwarted career change plans. In this sense, his identity negotiation is focused on positioning as one of the good guys in contrast to the bad, or as in the classic narrative, as a hero rather than a loser.

This negotiation of the hero-loser positioning is also illustrated in the following episode, which is part of an answer to my question about the difficult aspects of his transition. He had first talked about having gotten more realistic about his ability to make a change, and then he begins to tell about an interview he had recently had:

Transcript

- 01 R: Like when I didn't get this one job of a sales director in a bank
 02 So . that . he was quite a good guy the one that I had an interview with
 03 it was in fact the longest in his career //I:Yes// almost two hours we managed to spend
 04 and he just said that . like the right man in the wrong place I would have been as it would have been- it would have in fact involved managerial responsibilities //I:Yes// managing a new team but . but (2s) I (3s) I lost my train of thought

(after some searching for what he was going to say Risto resumes)

- 05 yes that's what it was //I:Mmmm// this guy said that when he . looks at my pattern here . I am . although I am this kind of an easy-going conservative guy I still have a little bit of a tendency to make these like . bold //I:Mmmm// moves
 06 like when I was at the railroads when I quit then I also- (3s) I resigned first and only after that I begun wondering what I am going to do //I:Yes//
 07 and the same goes for leaving for a sabbatical that was also a move that was done like . with a pretty strong self-confidence //I:Right//
 08 for which I am also paying- paying the price now

The episode continues with Risto describing how the recruiter had explained the kinds of challenges managing the new team would have involved, and how he believed that “*the temptation to make a surprising bold move could be too great*” for Risto. Using the words of the recruiter, Risto is counterbalancing the issue he brought up before this episode of not having gotten much done. Here he shows that although he might not have been aggressive enough in building a business, he is still capable of bold and unexpected moves. This also strengthens his (masculine) identity as the kind of guy who gets things done.

A similar juxtaposing and identity negotiation takes place at another level between two competing conceptions as to what a good life and career would consist of. Using his own articulations, these could loosely be labeled as “the Lutheran” and “the Soininvaara”⁹ approach. The Lutheran approach dates back to his family where he says he learned the Lutheran work ethic and the need to have a secure and stable job. This is the conservative identity position emphasizing responsibility and honesty. It is supported by his positioning as the breadwinner providing for the family, and as someone who develops long-term client relationships in his work, in contrast to aggressive, hard-nosed short-term selling. This approach is intertwined, although sometimes also conflicting, with the professional discourse and values of the finance industry where “*the meaning of life is gathering a tremendous mass of wealth*”. As Risto says, he is “*of course a stock broker and hard-core capitalist*”. Yet, he distances himself from some forms of professional identities in the field (the sales people), while constructing more conservative, responsible positions.

Yet, Risto has “*always*”, “*at least*” in his “*mind*” rebelled against the conservative values of his family background. In practice, he says he has done this by renouncing the paved career in his father’s footsteps. Although since then his career had been rather stable, he presents his taking of a sabbatical as a courageous move, even a rebellious act within the professional discourse of the finance industry. This positioning represents the more recent Soininvaara approach which refers to slowing down and making more room for free time and his interests. Talking about Osmo Soininvaara’s ideas of reducing our standard of living to the level of that in 1985, and working a four-day workweek with two months of vacation Risto says: “*This is what I find essential: why an earth do we have to push ourselves so hard?*” In this sense, he describes himself as “*a kind of a red-green idealist*” and having entertained ideas about setting up a non-profit

⁹ Osmo Soininvaara is a well-known Green party politician in Finland who has written on the importance of downshifting and free-time.

co-operative where the purpose would not be to make money, but to have “a good life”.

To conclude on Risto’s identity conflict in this transition, he is struggling between maintaining the identity of a competent and successful top professional and that of a versatile innovator that values free time more than making money. Although he is clearly drawn to the latter, his situatedness in the discourses of the finance profession, Lutheran work ethic, and breadwinner masculinity, make the identity change challenging, in addition to the material realities of the labor market.

Collisions of the wise woman: an expert on, or the victim of, prejudices?

Eeva is a 51-year old woman with degrees in business and cultural studies. We met after working hours at an old café overlooking the market place, in downtown Helsinki. At the time of our interview in February 2005, she was working for a large ICT company as a business development analyst and considering a career change. There had been many layoffs in the field at the time, also in Eeva’s company, and there were plans for more cuts.

Eeva’s career narrative constructs a career identity of an independent and proactive woman. She narrates various key episodes on her career that lead to a kind of “*crystallization*” of her identity in the past. One of these is about her high school years and the experiences as an exchange student in Canada, which gave her a new perspective and made her more open-minded towards other cultures. She points out her host mother, in particular, as a very important person – “a brilliant, independent, bohemian, unprejudiced and liberal”. She also tells about another episode from her childhood that shows her early awareness of prejudices between different people. This awareness and skill began to get integrated in her profession when “a fascinating thing happened” to her when she was working as a marketing instructor:

Transcript

- 01 E: and then I was reading a magazine in my office and then I read about this
American- no Swedish woman who had studied anthropology in the States
//I:Yes//
02 and I realized ”oh dear that is my subject”
03 it just dawned on me and and well-

The narration of the episode is dramatic, describing one single moment of revelation (lines 2-3). The episode continues when she backtracks and offers evidence of her cultural sensitivity dating back to her childhood:

Transcript (con'td)

04 because I actually have this- apparently this sensitivity that I have had since
my childhood
05 perhaps because I was brought up in Eastern Finland but my mother and
her family is from Helsinki so I have like in a way gotten two cultures there-
like two Finnish cultures //I:Yes//
06 and apparently I have grown quite sensitive to this- these cultural issues
//I:Yes//
07 I remember- in fact I remember a person just this week I was thinking about
it
08 I was under school age and I remember my grandma- this grandma from
Helsinki and her tone of voice when we went to the dairy
09 at the time milk was fetched with milk bottles from the dairy
10 and she said in a condescending- in that condescending voice to the lady at
the dairy "they are from the countryside"
11 I like registered that . //I:Yes// situation
12 and of course my stay in Canada had an impact
13 there I was faced with this blacks-whites problem
14 and so there were these kinds of issues and questions and then little by little
this man-woman issue was coming up //I:Yes//
15 and then in my matriculation exams I wrote an essay on the impact of
prejudices on human relations
16 so it has been somehow ticking at the back of my mind
17 and then when I discovered such a field as cultural studies then I somehow
realized that it is through this I will be able to understand- make sense of
these issues //I: Yes, yes//

By recounting so many episodes, Eeva manages to construct a strong causality (Linde, 1993) between her experiences, characteristics and the new professional field she is about to enter. She also makes the point that this was not simply a sudden whimsy but something that had been coming (line 16) all along. Later on, when she moved to France to live with her French boyfriend she had the opportunity to achieve a degree in cultural studies abroad. After the degree she realized what she would want to do (*"That is where it came to me that this is what I want to do"*): to set up her own business to provide intercultural training. The entrepreneurship is the culmination of her narrative in terms of her career identity positioning, focusing on cultural differences and prejudices as a central theme in her life and work. She is also enacting the contemporary protean ideal (D. T. Hall, 2004) of actively constructing personalized meanings to her career experiences and moving swiftly between different kinds of jobs, fields, and professions. Although the series of jobs she has held may seem fragmented on the surface she connects them all with the cultural theme. For example, the jobs she held after she quit the training business, working with EU issues and the knowledge-based society, are connected to cultural change.

At the time of the interview, however, she no longer sees *"any kind of future in the company"*. She is *"colliding"* with her place or work, *"losing ground and motivation"*, unable to *"push anything through"* and *"uncertain"* about the future of her job in light of the layoffs. The irony in

her situation is that while she positions as open-minded and unprejudiced, she claims to be prejudiced against in these collisions:

Transcript

- 01 E: What has been quite strange in my career is that somehow I have all the time been colliding with this wretchedness- //I:Mmmm// terrible wretchedness
02 I've gone like with an open mind to work
03 co- I am very co-operative and like
04 so terribly difficult //I:Yes//
05 (pause: 2s)
06 so (pause: 2s) and just this- all the time these prejudices.
07 the impact of prejudices on human relations (laughs)
08 yeah it has been unbelievable that I chose such a topic for my essay in the matriculation exam
09 but that is what I have been working on all my work life in these-
10 and how much it takes resources away from people

It is ironic, as she implies in laughing about it (line 06), that these collisions are a result of the very prejudices that she positions as an expert of. Her work has been about understanding and avoiding cultural prejudices, but now she finds herself as the victim of them. Due to her experiences, she is ridiculing the working world:

Transcript

- 01 what awful nonsense this working life is . I mean total nonsense
02 and impossible facades .
03 competition .
04 what I have seen in this last job is that it is- it is absurd at times
05 I mean what do they pay people for?
06 or how does this world function after all?
07 I mean it is unbelievable
08 and people- they are calling for- they are looking for top professionals
09 that is such a big joke such a big joke
10 because in the end they are not accepted in the structures (organizations)

In this excerpt she questions the organizational practices particularly in her current place of work. This is her latest “*collision*” and one she is most acutely struggling with. She describes the organizational life with strong, emotionally laden expressions, such as “*nonsense*” (line 01), “*absurd*” (line 04), “*unbelievable*” (line 07) and “*a big joke*” (line 09), and emphasizing the message with repetition (line 09). By contrasting the bad organization and good top professionals, she is legitimizing her own experiences. Although she is not talking about herself directly here, implicitly she is positioning as one of the top professionals. After all, she has been struggling specifically with the issue of acceptance to the point of influencing her health:

Transcript

- 01 E: I never imagined that- I have collided everywhere with these strange prejudices
02 I: Can you give a concrete example of such a situation- what they have been like?
03 E: For example in this last job it was like studying in Canada was negative . EU knowledge was negative . having lived in France was negative
04 I: How did that come up then because-
05 E: In the attitudes .
06 I: Did it make doing your job more difficult?
07 E: Yes it did .
08 It influenced my health .
09 It is awful to go to a new job and suddenly realize that "my god . they don't accept me in here at all"

So what kind of positioning is Eeva struggling against? On one level it deals with the expert knowledge she has gained through the variety of experiences particularly having worked abroad. She points out that she has always been "*so much ahead of her time*" or "*a pioneer*", and thus she has not been accepted, nor has her expertise been considered "*suitable*". She gives examples from her jobs, such as her business in France where "*she was the first woman, no one bothered to pay any attention to a woman*" at first. Or, working in the municipal administration, where she went "*blue-eyed*" and eager to do the work only to find out that she was considered "*the fancy lady from France*".

As the above quotes already show, Eeva's "*suitability*" is closely intertwined with her gender. She brings up the issue of gender herself (I asked no gender related questions directly) by telling about an incident in her current job where her professional competence had not been acknowledged due to her gender. Moreover, the way she describes her current place of work and working world in general points to the masculine aspects, such as competition. She also talks about equality and how femininity still needs to be downplayed at Finnish workplaces. While Eeva acknowledges having competed with men, she places this kind of masculine careerism now in the past and wants to develop her identity as a woman and to find and use her woman's resources more in her career. This is illustrated in her desired future positioning as "*a wise woman*" in her career.

In dealing with this conflict, Eeva draws on her femininity and Eastern philosophies to help her "*keep work at a distance*" and learn "*how to survive there*". She quotes Chinese medicine, a recent interest, saying "*a person is happy when s/he can express his/her virtues passionately*". It is these virtues that she is now looking for but no new ideas have emerged yet. On the day of the interview, she had had an interview for a teaching position, which could potentially be the new direction. Eeva is hoping she

can find something similar to that she had in France where work was part of her lifestyle, “*not in conflict with herself*” and she was in charge of her own schedules. She thinks that a new kind of “*crystallization*” could still well happen in her career in the future.

So, to conclude, the key negotiation in Eeva’s identity work is between her own positioning as a highly qualified professional and expert in cultural issues, against the gendered positioning by others as not credible, competent, or with the wrong kind of experience. Therefore, to deal with the disruption she is attempting to strengthen her own identity positioning by drawing on such resources as Chinese medicine and gender identity. This kind of identity work allows her to persist in the search for a new career in a context that would acknowledge and accept her ways of being.

Too old to be re-employed? Mother’s struggles with competence and age

I met Eila, a 52-year old woman, at her home in the suburbs of Helsinki on a January Monday morning in 2005. The previous year she had been laid-off from a media company where she had worked as a finance specialist for a couple of years. For most of her career, she had worked in the public sector and at the same government-owned agency for 15 years. A few years before I met with her, she had switched to the media company looking for new challenges. Soon after she had started her new job at the media firm, the company underwent major organizational changes and her unit was about to be discontinued. However, the situation had stabilized and so, the eventual lay-off came as a big shock to Eila. She became depressed and thought it was handled “*brutally*”. The reasons for her lay-off remained unclear since the company was making a profit and she had not made any mistakes in her job.

After a few months adjustment to the lay-off, she began actively looking for a job and considering alternative careers, such as going to study psychology, something she had considered before choosing to study business. A more radical career change began to lose its attractiveness, however. She accounts for this by the costs of getting a new education and the competition she expected to face with younger candidates. Moreover, she presented assessment test results in career counseling as evidence to prove that she had in fact been “*in her own field*” for most of the career. One new field that came up during career counseling and seemed like a promising new career direction was to work with financial communications. In fact, when we met she was about to begin a project with a company exactly in this area.

Yet, Eila’s identity work does not focus on active experimentation with new career identities, but rather on repairing and readjusting her

professional identity. The following excerpt illustrates how Eila evaluates the transition and positions herself:

Transcript

- 01 E: But this is really when you think about it that you have had this kind of-
that before this I didn't have any other breaks in this career
02 except when well . when Anna was born I was on maternity leave for about a
year and when Antti was born it was about two years //I:Yes//
03 so so those were like the br- only breaks
04 and then I had a job to go back to //I:Right//
05 so so like this has been like- . perhaps that has been like errr . the worst
thing about this has been exactly that if you had been like sure that say
within a year (smiling) //I: Yes// you had a position
06 then it wouldn't have- you could have taken it perhaps more as this kind of .
a vacation well earned
07 because you have worked all these years and managed the family and
household //I: Right// that it is about time . //I: Right// to have a little
sabbatical (smiling) //I:Yes//
08 but then it has seemed like whether you are ever again able to get a new job
being at this age already
09 the age here is like //I:Mmmm// the . the problem because
10 because the employers won't- errr they are perhaps cautious about hiring
someone at this age
11 because well many can be- they are getting health problems //I:Mmmm//
go on early retirement //I: Mmm// and that gets expensive . //I:Right// for
the company //I:Yes//

The “but” at the beginning of this excerpt indicates the beginning of an account of why things are not quite as she would expect or like. A break in the career is obviously unexpected and unwanted which indicates the value of its opposite: a stable career. Although she is aware of the possibility of seeing the transition as an opportunity or, as she indicates here, a chance to have a sabbatical after years of hard work, she constructs it primarily as a threat. She positions as a victim and as an aged professional (lines 08-11) that accounts for, if not the lay-off, the difficulties she has experienced/expects to have in finding a new professional job.

While age is certainly a legitimate reason to explain difficulties in employment in terms of possible health issues, it is intertwined with assumptions related to competence. In addition to the lay-off, some of Eila's experiences at the media company had threatened her professional competence. In retrospect, Eila questioned the move to the media company, which operated “*in the quarter economy and under different laws*” and where she had to learn all about “*these brands and a totally new way of thinking*”. She also felt that she was perhaps not “*always able to contribute*” due to her inexperience of the business. It had been quite different from the stable career she had had in the public sector that had allowed a balanced lifestyle and the possibility to devote time to caring for her two children while her husband was working longer hours. Her gender

also plays a role here, in the sense that she had taken the primary responsibility of managing the household and taking care of the children. As a result, she had valued work-life balance and not had the chance to take the time to invest in her career in the form of continuous education for example. In the transition, she has become aware of the need to update her skills and has thus started taking courses.

The identity conflict in Eila's case focuses on maintaining the identity of a competent professional threatened by the disruption in her career and age discrimination. This is also shown in the interview in how Eila talks extensively of her active efforts during her unemployment to take courses, network, and look for jobs. At the end of the interview, she takes me to her home office and shows her CV and some of the applications she has written. "Being active" is shown to support the identity work of older workers to position against imposed identities as inactive and incompetent (Riach & Loretto, 2009). Hence, positioning as an active job seeker helps Eila to maintain her valued identity as a competent professional and to work against the identity position of an aged worker that she is being positioned into. Age plays a role not only in the possibilities of getting a new job but also in the scope of career change options. Therefore, she is not envisioning new professional identities but focuses on re-employment and readjusting the existing professional identity positioning.

The stockbroker's time-out

Timo is a 42-year old business graduate who has worked as a broker in the finance industry his entire career. When we met at a café in Helsinki in January 2005, he was unemployed. According to him, he has had "*a perfect banking career*" with a linearly progressing career and associated benefits. Things had begun to change a few years prior, when the investment bank Timo had been working for had merged with a larger bank. As a result, Timo had been demoted and placed in a unit where he felt he was not welcomed. Timo constructs an image of the new workplace as "*a sick, sick organization*", and in stark contrast to the previous one where he had enjoyed its "*friendly and dynamic*" atmosphere and the company of his colleagues. Initially he says he had questioned the practices that to him seemed bureaucratic, but over time his morale had sank. Work became routine, and going to work proved more and more difficult. He began having sleeping problems as well. In the last year, his boss began to conduct performance reviews with him every few months, and eventually proposed to negotiate a termination of Timo's employment. In Timo's words, this is the time when he "*made the decision to leave*".

While Timo positions himself as a victim of a merger that significantly influenced his job satisfaction and resulted in work exhaustion, he is not positioning as a victim in terms of his unemployment. Leaving the company is not only his decision but also “*a relief*” and “*a time-out*” to consider new options. He uses his age and also the hectic nature of brokering to account for a need to change careers, not only jobs. The most radical option he had considered was re-training as a physical therapist, which would have “of course” meant setting up his own practice. Other options were related to staying in the business world, such as in retail.

His identity conflict revolves around his situatedness within the traditionally masculine career discourse, where status and wealth are important markers of success. In this sense, his termination and the associated experiences have undermined the image of a competent professional:

Transcript

- 01 I: What do you think about- quite a lot of people talk about no matter what field they are in that they can't take it anymore and want a change-
02 T: Yes can't take the old job anymore
03 I: Yes so what makes the change so difficult? I mean there are more of those who want to change than those who have changed or get to do so.
04 T: Yes well it is probably it- I mean the concern for the future financial situation //I:Mmm//
05 then all this re- rethinking and reorganizing of matters
06 at least these I can think, think of //I:Mmm// and
07 of course I can't know what people with similar business careers what they have- they all have their own situation how are the finances and how it all will work out and whether the employer will offer /I:Right// some kind of a golden handshake
08 and then this that how one is capable and has the strength in the new situation to build this new //I:Mmmm// new job or career .
09 these are really difficult issues
10 like how the family takes it and how friends and others
11 in a way you can end up- how it- the status is lost then and whether one gets this loser image and all- like gives up then.
12 so these are difficult issues of course (pause)
13 but personally I consider this solution now as a good thing //I:Right//

In my interpretation, this excerpt brings forward issues that are relevant in Timo's identity conflict, although he is talking about them implicitly as other people's issues. Finances are important, mentioned on lines 04 and 07, and also status in the eyes of others (lines 10-11). Although my question refers to all kinds of people wanting a change, Timo is framing this as an issue of those who cannot take the old job anymore (line 02), referring to some sort of work exhaustion also resulting in a lack of strength (line 08) to begin something new. This also pertains to his old situation, and legitimizes his own difficulties of making the change, illustrated by the fact that it took

a proposal from the employer until Timo actually made the decision to leave his job.

At the end of the excerpt above, Timo distances himself from these other people by claiming his termination of employment to be a good thing. Yet, he is concerned about his status as well, because he has every intention to get back in the game and get the status back. The metaphor of “*time-out*” implies exactly this: it is only a short break in the game (business careers) to figure out your next move in order to get back into game again. In order to be a competent player, you need to stay on top of the game and avoid disruptions that might make you a loser (line 11 above). For Timo, a career changer position constructs an image of an active, self-reliant career actor, which is enhanced by him emphasizing himself as a decision-maker in the termination of his employment.

Based on Timo’s account, and evidence of the practices in the organization make its culture seem oppressive and indeed, sick. Still, it is Timo who bears the consequences by having to make sense of this disruption and do the necessary work to repair the damage done to his career without damaging the most cherished aspects of his valued career identity positioning. Since career disruptions and work exhaustion have become more commonplace and thus more legitimate, it is possible for Timo to consider his transition as an opportunity and positive development. Yet, the conflict arises from the fact the legitimacy is not self-evident within his own field, requiring him to re-craft his identity. So far this has resulted in his conclusion that working in the old field is no longer a real option for him. He is positioning his identity as a finance professional in the past, but re-crafting it towards a more general business professional identity.

Carrying the wrong yoke?

Tiina is a 42-year old business graduate who had an academic career in economics at the university. She had always been “*a good student*” and her desire to learn motivated her to get a PhD. Due to her frustration with the level of teaching in Finland, she had applied and been accepted to one of the Ivy League universities in the US. Upon graduation, she returned to work at the university in Finland and became involved with program and teaching development. She felt it was “*a kind of a mission*” or “*a calling*” for her, having realized how difficult issues can be learned with the right pedagogical approach. However, after her maternity leave there was a change of department head and as a result, this type of development work was no longer supported. Tiina felt the possibilities for doing her work were severely constrained, and eventually she burned out and felt she had to quit the university.

After this she “*took some space*” for herself and thought about what to do. Then one of her acquaintances asked if she was interested in taking a fixed term contract running a non-profit organization. She did this for a couple of years, and although she found it to be a refreshing change it was also a demanding job that required a lot of travel. After the contract was over, she took some time off again as she was “*extremely tired*” and she wanted to spend more time with her son. She took a part-time job in another non-profit organization while she was still trying to figure out what to do when she “*grows up*”. At this point she considered getting a degree in theology, which had been “*a long held dream*”. She managed to get accepted within an extremely short preparation time (a week whereas the average is a few months) and at the time of the interview she was a freshman at the university. She was happy about being back at the university and felt she was in more harmony with the environment than in the business school. At the business school, she had resisted the thin, utilitarian conceptions of humans as consumers wanting to get rich, the competitive environment and “*the jungle attitude*” in everyday life. Moreover, she feels that theology is more appealing to her compared to economic issues.

Tiina’s evaluation of her current transition is very similar to the mismatch narratives. This is the result of the way she accounts for her decision to get another university degree after already having a PhD and a career in another field. Theology is constructed as a more authentic field for her. However, in her narrative of her academic career, Tiina never mentions any conflicts or episodes where she would have felt out of place or not authentic. On the contrary, her narrative positions her as a very talented and capable woman who has done well in her career. She devotes a relatively long section of her career narrative to explaining the process and experiences of getting her doctorate in the US which indicates the importance she places on this event in her life. Tiina identifies with a colleague who had a doctorate from a top American university and thus represented “*another class or level*” from most fellow academics. Against this background, her difficulties at the university and the burn-out certainly represent a disruption in her career that she needs to accommodate as part of her identity narrative as a capable, self-reliant career actor. This interpretation is made plausible by Tiina’s comments when I inquire further about her leaving the business school.

Transcript

- 01 I: Could you imagine yourself returning to the business school in some other role? Or was it specifically the fact that what your role was there and that you had no more space to do it that made you to leave? Or if the department head changed could you imagine going back to doing teaching and research?

- 02 T: Not any more but earlier I could have but not anymore . I have gone too far to another direction now
- 03 I: That is interesting. What do you think- is it a question of that in a way now how the situation developed there at the business school that it was sort of a push factor for a development that would have happened anyway? Like you have these interests and you would like to do something else and this pushed you to do something about it? Or is this simply a question of the situation not working out and then you just started to develop something new?
- 04 T: Perhaps this latter is closer
- 05 Like let's say that if everything had gone—
- 06 because there was a lot of good- like I said I like the university environment there were a lot of good things about it
- 07 and if Virtanen would have continued as the department head then I don't think I would have left
- 08 no at least not- no I don't see any reason why I would have left
- 09 I: So these few things that seem to you- now that you can compare with this new environment- those negative issues in that environment- so do you think that if you could have done you work well otherwise then you could have-
- 10 T: -live with them yes yes . because I had this feeling that I was doing work that was meaningful and I could make things happen
- 11 the frustration came primarily from not being allowed to do the work

As my comment on line 03 shows, I found these comments “*interesting*” and in fact, surprising. Considering what Tiina had told me before, I was expecting her to say that this change was bound to happen because of the mismatch or the conflicts she refers to having experienced. However, as she expresses above, these conflicts were not significant enough to have pushed for this kind of radical change. Her work, particularly the development of teaching, was meaningful, and even “*a calling*”, as she frames it at the end of the interview.

Yet, when it comes to account for the new direction in her life, she constructs a mismatch between her past profession and the new field. The following excerpt describes a small episode at the time she was considering studies in theology and had called a pastor she had known as a teenager:

Transcript

- 01 this was kind of curious
- 02 this Heikki- he is a professor at the university now- professor of theology
- 03 back in spring when I- I think I called him to ask that “what would you think”-
- 04 it was over 20 years since (we had seen each other) so //I:Yes//
- 05 “what if I went and started studying theology”
- 06 and at first he was shocked “why would you throw away all the investments you have made?”
- 07 so we discussed it and in the end he said that “well at the same time it is not right for one to endure the wrong yoke all one's life”
- 08 and that felt really good somehow
- 09 he gave the words- words to my feelings, as it were

In this excerpt, there is a contradiction with the representation of Tiina's academic career. Here, it is framed as a wrong yoke, while elsewhere Tiina describes it as a calling. This contradiction is in fact a key to understanding

the dilemmas Tiina has experienced in making her career change. In this small story, Heikki, the pastor, is the one who shows the competing positions in her identity conflict: the academic with a long, accomplished career, and the career changer who wants to study subjects she is genuinely interested in. Tiina had made heavy investments in her academic career and had enjoyed it, and hence, getting a whole new degree was not a self-evident choice. In telling this story, Tiina is using her old pastor to legitimize her decision to “*throw away all the investments*” and to claim her moral right to choose the right yoke. And who could have more weight in judging the morality of one’s decision than a pastor?

To conclude on the identity conflicts in the disruption narratives, Kati, Risto, and Timo share the search for more balance in their career and also the desire to have a career in business. Whereas Kati claims having lost her self altogether, Risto and Timo grapple with maintaining their identity as competent professionals while also considering new options. In this sense, Eila’s case is similar to Risto’s and Timo’s but in her identity work age and gender via motherhood play a significant role. For Risto and Timo, gender plays a role in the gendered conception of what it means to be a competent professional in the highly competitive finance profession. As to Eeva, although she seems to be mobile and adaptable in her career, she is still faced with the problems of having her gendered identity positions accepted. Tiina differs from the others in the sense that she had undergone several transitions. Her current conflict resembles those of the mismatch narratives, yet the presentation of the past academic career as the wrong yoke is in contradiction by presenting it also as a calling.

5.2 Identity conflicts in the mismatch narratives

Trapped: inner needs or a career in business?

Maria, the 33-year old business graduate who had become unemployed from a telecom company (see sections 4.1 and 4.2), is looking for a better match between her sense of self and work. Her identity work in the transition is characterized by her depiction of changing careers as being “*surprisingly difficult*” and her sense of being trapped:

“I am trapped- or I feel like I am trapped and that I can’t get- I can get out of this”

Maria uses many similar metaphors to describe her experience of the transition and dealing with its ambiguity. In addition to being trapped, she

describes it as a “rollercoaster ride”, “going zigzag” or “going around or spiraling down a circle”. She feels like she is unclear about her identity: “I don’t know what I am anymore- or who I really am”. In this sense she is similar to Kati who also felt to have lost her self when her career aspirations no longer seemed tenable. Maria is also positioning as having been career-oriented in the past, and feels a loss because this identity position no longer seems possible. This is based on her experiences that she constructs as similar to many other women:

Transcript

- 01 M: I know many others particularly women who have had similar experiences and adjusted their expectations after being in the working life for a while
- 02 you begin to feel that the price you have to pay for progressing in your career is too high .
- 03 I have noticed that I am not willing to give up my evenings and weekends and I am not willing to walk over other people and play those games I am not good at playing those games it requires
- 04 for this reason I get the feeling that I don’t want to- Actually I do want to progress in my career and achieve something but I don’t know how to play the game
- 05 I am not like that as a person so then in the end the whole thing does not satisfy me anymore because I would not want to remain on the lower levels either.
- 06 (...)
- 07 I still do believe that women can make it but it does require quite big sacrifices and a particular character . you have to be a particular kind of person .
- 08 pretty much all the people in high positions are very similar
- 09 it does require a certain toughness

Here she directly positions herself as a woman and contrasts women’s qualities with the characteristics of people in “high positions” (toughness), making sacrifices necessary. Management and business are constructed as masculine through practices such as working long hours, walking over other people, and playing games. Hence, while the career goals may still seem desirable, the price to progress in her career becomes too high. Although Maria claims not to know herself anymore, she does construct “*inner needs*” that are in contrast to a business professional/manager. While a business person becomes constructed as someone who likes numbers and the bottom line, is tough, able to play games, and make sacrifices, she is positioning herself as the opposite: nice, empathetic, and eager to help people. The characteristics Maria claims are stereotypically feminine, while those she assigns to businesspeople and managers are masculine. No wonder then that she is also entertaining options that would seem more gender authentic, such as health care, psychology, and HR. The stark contrast between these two dimensions is evident in her initial positioning

compared to her other laid-off colleagues, and how she constructs her career change intentions as “*radical*”:

Transcript

- 01 I must say that it is quite- for some reason it is difficult to say out loud these
like “I would like to go into-”-particularly when you are talking about
something like helping people
02 then you feel in that world- among many of those people you feel kind of like
“are you- are you perhaps (laughs) a bit out of whack”
03 for starters you are quest- publicly questioning- or you are bringing yourself-
you have to quite openly bring yourself up for evaluation by others
04 or that is what it feels like if you say that “I would perhaps like to do
something like this”
05 or that is how I easily think about it
06 whether those others are now thinking that “why would you want something
like that” or “she is not up to it” or “how stupid to want to do something like
that”
07 in a way you have to reveal something of yourself in a totally different way or
it feels like it
08 when it is something so different from what you have done before
09 so in a sense it is a big threshold

Even though Maria is placing the careerist businessperson position in the past, it still plays a role in the transition and one with which she needs to negotiate. Although she says her ambitions have faded away, she is still hoping to get ahead in her career once she is “*in the right field*”. Hence, she oscillates between the two positions and feels trapped. Ideally, she would like to combine them, and as a result there is “*an internal dialogue*” on-going about the trade-offs between various options. At times she wants to “*stay true to her need*” for change, and aims for a sense of an internal balance of being somewhere where she can be enthusiastic about the work, grow professionally, and do something meaningful. At other times, Maria gets discouraged about whether change is possible. One reason for this is the difficulty to know what would be the right direction to go. Maria no longer trusts her own assessment of her strengths and skills as she has “*made a mistake once before*”, referring to the choice of business school. Even if she were certain of the direction to go, the employers in her opinion look too much in to previous experience and education, which makes getting further education almost a must.

This identity conflict is further intensified by the situational position of being unemployed. Sometimes Maria feels compelled to simply get a job of any kind her experience allows. Unlike some career changers presented in the media, like some of the option millionaires from Nokia she mentions, she does not have the privilege of pure self-realization, but she “*has to get a job*”. Finances are also the reason why the more radical options of going to school or changing into a lower-paying job are not really a realistic option at the moment. That is why she is hoping for some kind of compromise

whereby she could still have good pay but still “*feel like at home*”. Time is an issue as well (“*time goes by all the time*”), not only for financial reasons, but because Maria wants to get ahead with her career and life. She feels that “*all the wrong decisions seem to be just lost time*”. This concern is similar to the time when the psychologist had mentioned going back to school to study something like psychology but Maria had felt anxious about getting more experience instead of starting all over again. She dreams of having a family and a house, which have been put on hold for now because of her unemployment.

To conclude, Maria negotiates between the contradictory position of business professional and the feminine aspects of her identity. It seems that the masculine practices that she has experienced along her career, combined with others positioning her as non-business like (family, friends, psychological testing), have contributed to the transition she now finds herself in. However, she is still attempting to combine the best from the two worlds as she still values career progression, power, and money. Yet, the expression of empathy, justice, honesty, and caring do not seem to go hand-in-hand with such career rewards. She feels trapped.

A divine blessing for a woman over 50

Riitta is a 51-year old business graduate who has worked in miscellaneous PR jobs and as homemaker. When we met in January 2005 at a café, she was a full-time theology student at the university. In her narrative, she constructs a mismatch between her identity and that of a business graduate by dating it back to the early years of her career. In retrospect, she says, she realized that business topics never “*resonated*” with her. For example, she remembers interviewing businesspeople for an article she was writing and how they were, unlike her, so enthusiastic about their work. Yet, for many years this sense of lacking the right kind of enthusiasm was not a core concern in life as she got married and stayed home with the children. It was only after several years of living abroad, due to her husband’s assignment, and having to work on various temporary jobs, that the issue of what she would do when she “grows up” became a more pressing concern.

In struggling with these issues, she was wondering what to do and then “*the option to study theology somehow emerged at that point*”. First, she studied it at the Open University but as it turned out to be so “*terribly interesting*” and her “*hunger grew while eating*”, it became more and more attractive to make “*a jump*” towards the new. After two attempts and some questioning, she got in to a degree program. At the time of the interview, she is full-time student. Although the future is still wide open and uncertain she hopes that wherever she will end up she will have a feeling that “*yes,*

now I am where I belong, in my own field and this is my thing ... this is what I am enthusiastic about”.

Although the “decision” to begin theology studies is at first presented as a matter of a few years, Riitta frames it as a slow process of identity work dispersed over several years. In retrospect, she places the beginning to her early career when “*the bubble burst*”, because she noticed that she was not enthusiastic about her work. Already at that time she felt she was “*a bit lost*” as to who she was and where she was headed. The most intensive phase started at the beginning of 2000, but even then it took her three years until she began full-time studies. There were many concerns involved. For one, there was the choice of theology. Because she had never been a religious person, she was worried about what people might say and whether they found the decision conflicting. She mentions how she developed “*a socially legitimate story*” about her career change, which did not go so deep into the spiritual side of the decision. The legitimate story presents it only as a desire to find something inherently meaningful without delving into her process of finding religion. The spiritual process had already started ten years prior, when she had begun reading spiritual texts to help her deal with the emotional turmoil of her new family situation. Although the choice is now made public, she is still struggling with her faith and wonders whether she had a strong enough calling. In this sense, at the time of the interview, her identity work around the career change was still ongoing.

The identity work in the transition is also related to her age and family situation. She positions herself as a person who was brought up to first get an education and a job, and only then to get married and have children. In other words, the ideal was of a self-sufficient woman supported by the Lutheran work ethic of working and making a living rather than self-actualization. As a result, she was concerned about her right to study while her husband Heikki would have to support her. She was wondering whether she can push the responsibility to him even though he had told her “*dozens of times*” that it was ok by him. This conflict is illustrated in the following small story of a conversation between her and the pastor of her parish:

Transcript

- 01 Well . I remember when I had been accepted in the faculty
02 and I went to our parish- I met our pastor . //I:Yes//
03 it was a warm summer //I:Yes// and we were at the beach
04 and I said ”hey listen Matti you never know what is happening with me”
05 ”well what?”
06 So I go ” I applied and got in and will begin studies at the theological faculty”
07 So he goes ”well that’s a surprise”
08 and then about - he asks ”so what are you thinking about now?”
09 and I go ” well I will be at Heikki’s mercy” . //I: Yes//
10 “So what does Heikki say about that?”

- 11 "Well he said it's totally ok"
12 "so what are you still thinking about then?" (laughs) . //I:Yes//
13 because I thought it was somehow (laughs) (pause:2s)
14 I guess at that point I was just so like- perhaps when I talked to some
outsiders for the first time I talked particularly about this difficulty . //I:
Right//

In this dialogue, the two voices, that of herself and the pastor, represent both sides of the debate she was having. On one hand she positions as someone for whom the moral good is to work hard and make a living. This is combined with positioning as an independent, strong, and as self-sufficient – one of the common gendered positions available for women in Finland. From this point of view, it is not acceptable to just do what you feel like and throw yourself at the mercy of your spouse's income. However, as the pastor actually approves of her decision, Riita can also find it legitimate to pursue her interests.

The struggle over whether Riitta "*was allowed*" to start her studies has to do with her age as well. She was wondering whether it is right to start from the beginning at the age of over 50. Re-starting at an older age may seem like a waste of resources and self-indulgent from the point of view that one is supposed to get an education in order to work and be paid. However, Riitta now places these assumptions in the past, and points to the changing attitudes. Drawing on ideas about work as fulfillment, she resists the Lutheran work ethic and the resulting "*tube-like format*" of life, and claims that one not only may but "*has to*" do what one feels one has to do. From this perspective, it seems natural that Riitta constructs her change as a force that has pulled her towards it as if she had no choice. This is illustrated in her account of how she got deeper and deeper into theology and decided upon beginning the studies:

Transcript

R: But at that point . then I had this- the pressure to make the decision . it got so strong to go do that which pulled me towards it so much and it was so interesting and it always- I just kept going to get more literature in the field and read I was like somehow totally . like I had ants in my pants

As to her age, she counteracts possible positioning of herself as too old by arguing that with the years she still has left till retirement she would have become "*exhausted, bitter and irritated*" and lose her "*vitality*" if she had not made the change. To conclude, Riitta's identity conflict is between her situatedness in the Lutheran work ethic, discourses of self-sufficient Finnish women, and the discourses of authenticity and fulfillment in working life. Her positioning as a woman of over 50 is both a liability, and a resource in defending the right to begin a new career.

From the paved road to an open sea

I met Sari, 38, at her home in the suburbs of Helsinki in January 2005. Sari had graduated from the business school with an economics major and worked as a business researcher for most of her career up until the transition. One of the themes she assigns to her career development is the following self-description: *"I'm the kind of person that whatever I dig into, I will get enthusiastic about"*. This explains many turns in her career, for instance, her choice of economics as a major. Although she describes herself as *"more of an artist"* who enjoys *"esthetic and creative things, culture, music, and opera"* and was *"not talented in math"*, she ended up studying economics. She had delved herself into studying this subject she hated so much just to avoid having to re-take the exams. Yet, the more she learned, the more interesting it got and hence, the choice of economics as a major.

She constructs her career in research in a similar fashion. She was offered a professional job as a business researcher with a good salary at the time of the severe recession in the early 1990s. Although never having identified herself as a researcher, at the time securing such a job was like *"winning at the lottery"*. Moreover, she found the job enjoyable with its freedoms and good benefits. Yet, at the back of her mind she was always thinking it was not what she wanted to do when she *"grows up"*. However, the flexibility of the job fit well with her family situation as she and her husband had three children. She always had a good job to go back to after maternity leave, and when they wanted to begin a time-consuming project of building their own house, her employer arranged a project for her that gave her even more flexibility with her time. However, the type of the project meant she had to begin her PhD studies, and once again she was *"even deeper"* into a career within research.

Although Sari felt like an *"outsider"* and *"a stranger"* among her colleagues, she constructs this identity mismatch as manageable – until her doctoral research got stuck. She was working on it independently, but then at one point began having serious problems due to the methods she had chosen:

Transcript

- 01 S: And time is pressing and time is passing and then I started feeling like- now I think this is going- this is getting out of hand //I:Yes//
- 02 And I begun to get exhausted //I:Right, yes// with the methods and with the software and I like- I like got . like st- stuck so in fact it was not progressing . anymore //I:Right// And s:o (pause: 2s) this was fall 2003 //I:Yes//and . well (pause 2s) it was before that . it was already in 2002
- 03 //I:Mmm//so I had begun to like . not slowly but pretty fast and decidedly have a feeling that now I feel like- now I feel like . that the time has come that I no longer want this research thing //I:Yes//

- 04 but there was- I had invested so much in it .
05 so at that point it felt inconceivable to consider changing //I:Right// it was
totally in the middle
06 and I am a person who does not leave things unfinished //I:Right//
07 and I thought that I will- I will finish this
08 but still like . really . I never saw myself graduating //I:Yes//
09 somehow it felt like- somehow I didn't see myself there I am not fatalist but
somehow I had this feeling that this- this is now something that this is not
my thing //K:Yes//
10 but I did not want to give much room for that thought because I had decided
that . I will do it //K:Mmmm// that I will manage and I had good advisors
and . like .

The above extract is just a short part of the long narrative about her doctoral studies and the problems she experienced. This excerpt shows the intensity of her struggles and the difficulty she finds narrating it in emphasizing words (lines 02, 03, 04, 08), using repetition and false starts, and pauses. It also shows how she negotiates between two competing career identity positions, one as a person who has had enough and does not want to do research anymore (lines 1-3, 8-9) and the other as someone who does not quit (lines 4-7, 10). The “*not-a-researcher*” is the main identity position she is constructing throughout the narrative. After this crisis, the work no longer feels good at all. It is “*disgusting, absolutely repulsive*” and “*exhausting, boring, unrewarding*”. Moreover, she felt that she was failing, and that she was not competent enough to figure out the difficult program she had been using. Yet, the “*not-a-quitter*” saw the investments made and what was at stake career-wise. She mentions her age as another factor because she felt that it would be easier to make a change while she was still 30-something rather than trying to get a job in business with a PhD at 40-something.

In the end, she says that having gotten so exhausted she had had to take an unpaid leave. While she was taking it easy, she sought career counseling and tried to think of other options. Her identity conflict was further intensified by the fact that she had no idea what the ideal, true career identity that she was searching could be. If she did quit, what would she do? Why leave “*the broad, paved career as a researcher*” if you had no other career in mind? Finally, thanks to career counseling, she was able to come up with one idea which she could see herself doing: something with wines, a long-time hobby. At the time, however, it still seemed far-fetched as her qualifications did not seem to match the requirements at all. A few months later she was still “*out in the middle of an open sea*” and did not see any solutions. She went back to her old job, but at that time she could not bring herself to do the work anymore, so she took another leave and focused seriously on job search. In the end, she found a job as a representative of a wine importer and had just started this a couple days prior to the interview.

She was relieved that she had managed to make the change and already felt that she had found a field where she “*truly belongs*” and work that is “*meaningful*”. “*Now*”, she says, “*I feel my professional identity is forming to reflect who I am*”.

To conclude on the mismatch narratives, even though the need for career change is presented as the most pressing concern, the narrators still face various struggles in actually making the change happen. Maria was trapped between the career options that she found more in line with her (feminine) values, and those options that could still provide her with career progress in terms of increasing levels of responsibility and rewards. Thus, the identity struggle was between two gendered and seemingly incompatible notions of career identity. Riitta in turn was pulled by the desire to study theology, but was wondering whether she had the moral right to quit working and economically be left to the mercy of her husband. In Sari’s case, the investments in her academic career, the loyalty to her place of work, and her identity as a persevering person made the transition to a more authentic career/professional identity difficult. While Riitta and Sari report having been aware of the mismatch for long, their positioning as mothers with caring responsibilities account for the timing of the transition. In Maria’s case this realization was more recent, although she is also accounting for the need by describing evidence from the more distant past.

5.3 Identity conflicts in the life renewal narratives

Mom’s life of her own

As we saw in sections 4.1 and 4.2, Taina, the 39-year old IT controller at a healthcare company negotiates between positioning as a mother and her desire to strengthen her career identity. In the interview, she actively resists the position of a careerist, but at the same time she is also hoping for career development. These negotiations are well reflected in the following excerpt:

Transcript

- 01 I: Well what do you think- if you compare your expectations (from the start of career) to this day- how have your thoughts changed?
- 02 T: (pause: 10s) Well perhaps li:ike I said my ambitions have . begun to emerge when the children have gotten this much . //I:Yes// old- older
- 03 and then after the divorce when one was left . all alone //I:Yes//
- 04 so there is more time . to think and to study and to reflect this //I:Yes// what one should do when one grows up (laughs) //I:Yes//
- 05 because the family life is so much different compared to this kind of –life as single that there you don’t- you don’t think about it what you would want from your own life
- 06 I: Yes, right. You don’t have time and you don’t need to-

- 07 T: No . //I:Right// . so in a way this need has emerged only now when you notice that children are growing and they need me less and less //I:Yes// so I do need to have some kind of life of my own //I:Right// so that when the children will leave at some point //I:Yes right yes// they can leave smoothly //I:Yes// and they don't have to worry about mom (laughs)

It is interesting that even here, when Taina is indicating her desire to focus on her career and “*to have a life of her own*”, she accounts for her ambitions from the position of a mother. She remarks, ironically, that she needs to have “*a life*” for her children’s sake. Her divorce plays an important role in her transition as it has made space for this kind of reflection to emerge. It has also left a void, along with the children growing, that she is now trying to fill, with studies for example. In fact, at one point of the interview she explains that she began the studies “*just to pass time*” rather than as an active choice to promote a career change.

In addition to these types of statements, Taina’s style of narrating is congruent with her positioning as a family-oriented and not a career-focused person. Although her narrative progresses chronologically, it is often interrupted by pauses, hesitation – or by her children. I attempted to give her time to keep the narrative going by allowing long silences or stepped in with questions to help her continue. My questions came particularly at times when she narrated a job change, but I could not see their reasoning. In my interpretation, her narrative style is the result of her enactment of the family-oriented career identity positioning. In other words, family or job-related reasons account for most of the changes in her career and also construct a coherent plot for her narrative. Yet, in the interview I have positioned her as a business graduate and a career changer that forces her to narrate her life from a position that she resists. She is aware of the expected norm of career progress among her fellow graduates though, but as family has been her priority, she positions herself different from these “*others*”.

In this transition, however, career development and progress have surfaced as a new concern. It is not only about mom getting a new life for the sake of children, but about Taina as a professional with the opened up space and possibility to give her career new meaning in her life. She has developed interests such as leadership, HRD, and working with children. Moreover, when I ask her to reflect on her career she comes back to the role of the recession at the start of her career a few times, and interprets it as a turning point that continues to influence her career today.

Transcript

- 01 I: Well what if you think about your past life and work retrospectively . how would you evaluate it?

- 02 T: (pause: 4s) hmm well (pause: 2s) (sighs) (pause: 10s) How would I evaluate it? (laughs) (pause: 5s)
- 03 I really haven't been any kind of careerist
- 04 because I started from unemployment and then had- had children and then within these specialist jobs //I: Mmmm// just changed from one organization to another so . some people have managed to make the career . go up in a totally different way.
- 05 I: Mmmm. (Pause: 3 s) But well [does it matter?
- 06 T: [This is somehow a delayed situation now as the ambitions emerge only later
- 07 I: Right but that is what- you have been quite happy about this?
- 08 T: Yes it was my own choice in a way the children have been more important when they were small //I:Yes// so that working life didn't even interest me really I would have rather been home with the children //I: Yes// if it had been possible financially.

Taina hesitates for long time, and wonders how to answer the question. Although I ask her about her life and work, she begins to evaluate her career against “*some people*”, presumably fellow business graduates, and the norm of career progress as the desired goal. From this perspective, her unemployment and subsequent decision to focus on the family had a decisive influence on her later career:

“perhaps I would have a different approach if my career had begun to progress from the start- that I would have gotten good salary”.

Now that she is more interested in focusing on her career again, her career development has become more of concern. She positions as a victim of the recession and frames her ambitions “*delayed*” in contrast to an expected norm. In the interview I felt that she was trying to defend herself and legitimize her career as if I, as a fellow business graduate, were there to judge her based on these norms. Since I was not, I quickly remarked on her family-orientation and its importance which she also endorsed by emphasizing it as her own “*choice*”. Due to her positioning as family-oriented, she is not simply a passive victim but someone who actively chooses family over career. In addition, she points out that she had learned from the recession how “*you can lose it all*”, which also explains her renouncement of a careerist orientation.

Taina is certainly not regretting her focus on family, but now that her “*ambitions*” have emerged, career progress in terms of upward movement is what she says she is hoping for:

Transcript

- 01 I: So what are these ambitions that you have then regarding your work? What kinds of expectations do you have for your future?
- 02 T: Well I hope I could progress in my career but well .

- 03 I have this philosophy in life that life will move you forward . //I:Yes// so that you don't have make such terrible efforts . //I:Yes// and try to force it . it will carry you along
- 04 I: Little by little in a way
- 05 T: Yes, yes.
- 06 I: By taking small steps. What would it mean to you this progression?
- 07 T: (pause: 9s.) Well what should I say to that?
- 08 I: It could mean so many different things.
- 09 T: Right, that's true, yes.
- 10 I: If you think about that how will you know? Can you picture how you will feel at that point when things have moved forward and you have progressed in your career somehow?
- 11 T: Well I guess I have a feeling that I would like to jump that one step higher from these specialist jobs to managerial responsibilities.

In this excerpt, Taina first begins to explain her hopes for progression, but then immediately adjusts this by quoting her life philosophy. In other words, even though she is hoping for career progression, she resists the normative expectations of goal-oriented career management. I support this positioning (lines 04 and 06), but then ask her to go back to the more careerist position and specify what she means by it. Her answer shows that career progression for her means traditional upward movement in the form of managerial responsibilities.

Overall, Taina's identity work in this transition focuses on the competing positions of a family-oriented mother and a career woman with managerial responsibilities. As she is trying to invest more in her career now, Taina's past positioning as a victim of the 1990's recession and as a mother legitimize her current career stage. This need is a result of the interview situation, which positions her as a business graduate and brings along some implicit assumptions of business careers. At the same time, to avoid the possible devaluation of her family orientation, she actively resists the careerist identity positioning and expected career norms. Although she is wondering whether "*this will ever lead anywhere*" or whether she "*dares to hope for anything anymore*", she actively positions against deliberate "*career construction*" and "*lets life take her forward*".

Keeping up the career, gasping for air

Johanna is a single, 45-year old controller working in a public research institute. I met her at her home in Helsinki on a wintery evening in February 2005. Having majored in accounting, Johanna worked in the accounting field since her graduation. Prior to joining the current organization where she has worked for eight years, she had worked in small firms in furniture, chemical products, and logistics. At the time of the interview she is considering a career change and offers many reasons as to why this is the case.

She begins with the problems in her current job and reports not having enough autonomy in her role and a feeling that her professional competence is disappearing. In this way she positions herself as a professional who wants to be independent and keep her expertise up-to-date. Her identity as a competent professional is also enhanced by the ridiculing of her boss and his ways of doing things as well as talking about her long hours. Then she connects the need for a change to her new hobby - kayaking:

Transcript

- 01 So in a way I am wondering about what to do now
02 And then I have on the other hand- my hobbies have become more important so . like somehow I feel that when the past years have been kind of empty there at work //I: Right//. so then I have started to invest more in the hobbies
03 and I have this- I started kayaking five years ago and I got involved with a kayaking club I have been their treasurer and now the secretary //I: Yes//
04 then on one vacation I went hiking and there was like- I just saw an announcement at this place where I went to get physical therapy here nearby and //I: Ok// so I thought “Well, I am going to go hiking”
05 I have been in the girls scouts when I was young and roaming the forests and seals and . //I: Right// so what if I went and tried how my body handles it
06 and then I noticed that these- there were a couple of these people these kayaking people from our club there too //I:Yes//
07 and this Sinikka was teaching these kayaking courses
08 and then I also took this training for kayaking instruction and I taught a couple of courses with her last summer
09 so I have really felt that like--- I really enjoy it . it is fun //I:Yes//
10 and so I have started thinking about when I was back then . after high school I was also considering a career in physical education //I: a-haa okay // but then somehow that just died down so .
11 parents didn't exactly encourage me (laughs) towards that direction
12 and in that university where they offer these programs you had to be basically a professional athlete to get in I think //I:Right, ok// or these types of real athletes so
13 and back then one didn't know how to go about through other routes perhaps //I:Yes, yes//
14 so that dissipated then
15 but it has somehow emerged from there now that (4 s)
16 one could do something else (3 s)

Johanna talks a lot about her new hobby in the interview, and describes how the excitement she has felt through the hobby and her role as a trainer have made her realize how her job is lacking in this respect. That is why she is considering whether she could change careers to physical education, for example. By backtracking to a time of initial career choice and showing she had similar thoughts back then, she gives it temporal depth (Linde, 1993) and hence more weight as an option.

Nevertheless, physical education and a related career is just an idea she is toying with. She explains that the excitement she had experienced in her new hobby has made her look for work that would provide a similar sense of

fulfillment. While this need is situated in the discourse of self-actualization, it is intertwined with balance. Johanna is questioning the hectic and busy work life doing “*12-hour days all the time*” and her entire lifestyle:

Transcript

- 01 J: Somehow I feel that life has been tied to a particular script
02 that you go to school and then you study and go to work and do that for 40
03 years . the same old thing .
04 but things are changing .
05 and so I have been thinking that “indeed . why do the same thing from one
06 day to another” .
07 you could somehow divide- there are so many sides to a person
08 that you could have more flexible options

The overall changes in the culture (line 03), and her own increasing awareness of the format she has followed in her life have made her think of other possibilities and her own well-being. She also situates her need for more balance to her family situation. For one, she does not have children that would force her to strike a better balance. Moreover, her father had been severely ill and this had made her reflect on how she should conduct her own life. She says that seeing the work at the hospital made her consider “*soft values*” and “*caring for people*”. In imagining a more balanced future self, she is yearning for more free time, and literally, air:

Transcript

“Sometimes I feel that- you are just gasp- gasping for oxygen . you need to get some air so . so that- somehow I wish the days would get shorter and there would not be such a rush all the time”

To get some air, Johanna has considered ways of being closer to nature. For example, she has entertained ideas of living in the north, kayaking, and organizing nature hiking tours, and then perhaps doing accounting on the side.

The key conflict in Johanna’s identity work is between the kind of professional she desires to be positioned as (autonomous, competent, continuously developing, dedicated) and the possibilities for doing so at her current place of work. There is no sense of a mismatch with the profession itself. She positions herself as competent in dealing with “*issues and numbers*” rather than with “*people*”, although her training experiences have made her consider more people-oriented jobs as well. However, the demands her profession places on her on the one hand, and the lack of fulfillment in the present job on the other, has made her experiment with new career identities that would allow more meaningful, balanced lifestyles. Yet, her embeddedness in her current professional and career identity make her hesitate. After all, there is nothing wrong with her profession itself,

140

whereas there is no way of knowing whether any of the new options would work out any better. What if she is not enough of a people person? Moreover, in considering re-education, she finds that her age (45) might be an issue as well as making the search for a job in a new field difficult.

It's time for my career

Sanna is a 40-year old business graduate, married with three children. I met her on an early Monday morning at a Helsinki cafe in March 2009. As soon as I walked into the café, I found her face familiar. It turned out that we had gone to business school at the same time and our paths had crossed in French classes. Before we started the interview we talked a little bit of our studies and of our families and shared our experiences as mothers of three children.

Sanna had graduated with an international marketing major in the early 1990s in the middle of “*the bad recession that we are probably both the products of*”. She is referring to the shared experience of the generation that graduated during that time and for whom the shortage of jobs had often had long term career effects. After a desperate job search, Sanna “*hit the jackpot*” and got a job in a company importing electrical equipment. She was part of a small team that consisted of engineers and her. While the engineers did sales, her job was to “*do everything else*” related to importing and marketing. She describes the environment as distressing due to the strong and chauvinistic owner-manager. Although she had no problems with him, she disliked the devaluing of employees and of women, in particular. Yet, the job market was still very tight, so she struggled and stayed there for six years until she had her first child. When she left on maternity leave, she decided she would not go back.

After her maternity leave, she got a job as a campaign coordinator at an international non-profit organization. Working for such an organization had been a long-time dream so when she had seen the advertisement she knew “*immediately*” that this was what she wanted: “*this is my thing*”. She also thought that working for a non-profit organization would allow for a good work-family balance. In fact, she had two more children while she was there. In the meanwhile, her job changed so that eventually she was a head of a small team responsible for corporate fundraising and partnerships. She enjoyed her job and the workplace that was very feminine and supportive “*with lots of humanists*” and people who look “*critically at this world*”.

Although she liked her job, she began to think about a change when she returned from her last maternity leave in 2007. First, turning 40 made her re-evaluate her life and look for something new. One of the new initiatives was her decision to take better care of herself and start running. As she and

her husband no longer wanted more children, she felt she could focus on her career. She felt that she was *“in a rush”*: if she wanted to make some career changes, she would need to make them *“before it’s too late”*. As to her career, she felt that she had not been able to invest in it that much because of family responsibilities. Her husband always had a more demanding career that included a lot of travel, so taking care of the children and home was mostly her job. Since she also wanted to spend time with the children she had avoided jobs that would have required more time.

Another reason for thinking about the change was the fact that she felt that the work was not exactly what she wanted to do. Although the working environment was supportive, colleagues wonderful, and the job offered a lot of flexibility and freedom, the work did not seem challenging enough and she could not see any future in the small organization. As she was trying to figure out what to do, she felt that she did not have any real expertise in anything. She had worked here and there, but her tasks seemed fragmented and she felt that her education in marketing was just *“fluff”*. She says how she is *“not a sales type at all”* and in the end, marketing work did not seem that interesting either. She felt she wanted to try something new and start afresh before she settled down in some field. She mentions the feeling she had whenever she started a new phase in her life, like a new job or a maternity leave, when you can feel *“so invigorated”*, being able to leave the old behind and construct life in a different way.

While she was playing with various ideas, she always came back to *“people”* and HR-work: *“somehow the people at the workplace started interesting me more and more rather than the business itself”*. Sanna dates the beginning of her interest in people and HR back to a consultant, a work psychologist who helped them with team-building and leadership issues. She had found all these issues *“terribly interesting”*, which had led her to take a leadership course provided by SEFE, the professional association of business graduates. After the course, she came to the conclusion that HR would be the field that she would want to try. She decided to make *“a radical move”* of quitting her job and beginning to study. She did not think she could find a job without experience so she thought she would *“take some courses in the business school, take it easy and spend more time with children when they are still small”*. While she was doing a career planning program provided by Sefe, she decided she would apply for HR jobs as a kind of an exercise to see *“how it would go”*. To her astonishment, she was offered a fixed-term HR-consultant position in a training company. After some reflection, and also due to the changing economic condition, she decided to take the job.

At the time of the interview, she has been working on the job for three months. She considers the job to be a great learning opportunity “*in the basics of HR*”. Although this “*jump to the completely unknown*” outside of her comfort zone has been exhausting and challenging, she has enjoyed the work. There are times when she feels that she is successful in her work and has something to offer. At these times she is excited about the work and feels that this is “*her thing*” and where she will “*build her new career*”. At other times, she is struggling with her inexperience and missing the old. Having had managerial responsibilities in the old job, the new one is also “*a jump downward*”. This means she needs to work with all the “*nitty-gritty details*” which is not her forté. Yet, not having to manage anyone else’s work also allows her “*to give more to the children*”.

Sanna feels like she has become a part of the new organization, which makes her feel “*successful in her change*”. She is planning to “*suck as much knowledge*” and “*get the basics*” within in the year or so that her contract lasts and then see whether she will continue on this path. At the moment, she finds international HR, or working as an HR manager of a small company, and building HR systems from the start, as the most interesting options. The main thing is to find work which is “*in balance with her self*” – her “*own thing*”. It is not only a question of finding something that fits with the sense of who she is but also about developing a professional identity of an expert in a particular area.

In addition to experimenting with her own thing, her identity work in the current transition focuses on the competing positions of a mother and a working or career woman. Although she wants to invest in her own career, she is also setting the parameters of her career options from her position as a mother who wants to give time to her children and as a spouse with the main responsibility of caring for the children because of her husband’s job. The negotiation of these rights, responsibilities and her desires is at the heart of the transition and well illustrated in the following excerpt:

Transcript

- 01 I: Yeah so then you can see what it is . as there are many- [a lot of options
 02 S: [there
 are all kinds like what it could be and what one could, like, do
 03 but of course it’s that- it’s only that- like I said my husband is a lot- his work
 has always taken a lot of time //I:Yes// and like it is- in that kind of a job
 where you have to travel a lot and, like,
 04 in a way I could not under any circumstances- I can’t even have a job like
 that //I:Right// where-
 05 or of course I could but I just don’t want to (laughs) be //I:Yes//
 06 like when you would have to put a lot- //I: Yes // so that you are available 24
 hours a day on the average //I: Exactly// and on the weekends you would
 need to work and all the time be thinking about something I- I just can’t do

- that //I: Yes// it's that I don't have enough capacity for that //I: Yes// I have seen that already that it just doesn't- that doesn't work
- 07 and there were all these things like my husband was- he's done long- he is part of a team that has these long trips and the last one was in 2006 . in the spring (details omitted) he was away for little over three months and Mia our third child was then less than 2 months when he left (I laughs) and it was really tough (laughs) (I: Oh my god)
- 08 so this has probably left this like- I have thought now that I have- that this is probably also in the background when I started thinking that now it's my turn for little- something- //I: Yes, yes// invest a little in myself
- 09 but then again I know that I can't have any outrageous- because it is my husband who at the moment pays for our living in the end//I:Yes//
- 10 so it is like it's it is a double-edged sword . //I:Yes// so I should strike a meaningful balance . //I: Yes// in my career . //I:Yes right//
- 11 but like- and invest – in a way I think that I have the right to- that I will invest time and money into myself and do something with my career too
- 12 but then again I couldn't not do anything //I:Right// just go to some extraordinary thing //I:Right) [it does have to be
- 13 I: [like if you were traveling all the time
- 14 S: No no no no that would not work at all //I:Right// it would not work //I:Yes// it just does not go so it will have to be something different altogether

On lines (04, 06, 09, 10, 12, 14), Sanna is enacting the positions of spouse and mother whose responsibility is to take care of the children and develop her career accordingly. She has this responsibility because she considers her husband's job more demanding and time-consuming (line 03), and one that primarily pays for their living (line 09). Since she is the one responsible for taking care of children and the household, she cannot consider a similarly demanding job for herself. On the one hand, this is a taken-for-granted constraint based on her experience that she does not have the "*capacity*" to have some "*extraordinary*" job since that "*would not work at all*". On the other hand, it is also a mother's choice: she wants to spend the time with children (line 05). On lines 07 and 11 she enacts the position of spouse and a career woman who thinks it is also her right to take more time to develop her career. To legitimize this right she gives an example which shows how demanding it has been for her to take care of these responsibilities (line 07). The negotiation is thus between her desire to invest in her career and spend time with the children and the responsibility to take care of her children and the right to invest in her career. So, to conclude, at the heart of Sanna's transition is her positioning as a woman of 40 years of age who wants to invest more in her career and strengthen her professional identity in a specific field of expertise, and as a mother with the primary responsibility for family life.

To conclude, the identity conflicts in the life renewal narratives all involve other aspects of the narrators' personal life. For Taina, it is a competition between being a mother and her desire to have a more fulfilling career.

Sanna is also negotiating between a desire to strengthen her career identity through a new area of expertise and her positioning as a mother. In Johanna's career transition, the conflict focuses on her need to reinvigorate and strengthen her professional identity as a competent "numbers person" while at the same time experimenting with new identities that would enable a more balanced life-style.

5.4 Identity work in career transitions: moral negotiation and struggle

As the preceding sections have illustrated, identity work in career transitions also involves the practice of negotiating between contradictory and seemingly incompatible positions of identity. These identity conflicts seem to be at the heart of the transition influencing how it may evolve. The positions that come to play in these conflicts may be between ones that the narrator simultaneously claims or, between a position one claims or wants to claim and a position that one is being positioned in within the contexts s/he is situated. The conflicts arise from the differing conceptions attached to the positions as to what is right, good and desired. In other words, these positions are aligned with different moral orders (Harré, 1983). Each negotiation involves an attempt to maintain a moral sense of self between contradictory assumptions about one's rights and responsibilities in constructing a "good" career and life. Therefore, these negotiations are, in fact, moral dilemmas arising from the different social and cultural contexts within which a person is located.

Considering this moral nature and centrality of these conflicts, *I argue that identity work in career transitions involves moral negotiation and struggle*. By struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), I refer to the power that these socio-culturally available positions have in identity work, and the resulting pressure to work through these conflicts. However, by claiming these struggles as moral, I do not intend to make any claims of the morality of the narrators per se (cf. May, 2008). The moral nature of these struggles simply shows how they are situated in a variety of practices and their moral orders that guide identity work and action. Although these struggles need to be worked on at a personal level, their source is in the particular, conflicting cultural norms and assumptions in a given situation along the person's life trajectory.

My analysis has also illuminated how these moral struggles can be gendered. Firstly, gendering takes places at the level of master narratives and discourses of profession and career, as I discussed in section 4.1. The

temporary positioning as a career changer itself with the associated virtues may be a source of conflict. For example, in the case of Maria, the mismatch narrative relies on the ideal of change and authenticity and yet, achieving such change is extremely difficult considering the gendered and contradictory identity positions available to her. Hence, the search for authenticity becomes a gendered struggle, “*a trap*” as Maria puts it. Secondly, gendering takes place via specific identity positions, and the discourses they draw on that are in conflict in the transition. In other words, these positions are attached masculine or feminine meanings that are contradictory to those of a position one finds oneself or desires. For example, in Risto’s case the identity struggle focuses on the masculine professional discourse of stockbrokers and his unemployment, but also on his negotiation for a more balanced career identity position. Finally, struggles may be gendered in the form of the past identity positions one is able to claim. For example, for women with children this often entails having taken primary responsibility for the children and accounts for why they are in the career transition at this given moment.

This view of identity work in career transitions as moral struggles shows how these personal problems stem from wider social and cultural contexts. Instead of seeing such transitions as individual processes of decision-making, for example, this view calls for a better understanding and recognition of the kind of cultural resources (narratives and discourses) available in a given context and how they empower or constrain identity work through the differing conceptions of good careers. I discuss the implications of this view in more detail in the concluding chapter. An interesting question that emerges from these struggles is whether change and agency are possible and if so, how. To explore this issue, let us turn to the findings resulting from follow-up interviews I conducted four years after the struggles described here.

6 Shifting identities: four years later

Initially I did not plan to conduct a longitudinal study. However, as this research has intertwined with my own life and career and I had been home caring for two new children in our family, enough time had passed to consider follow-up interviews. In addition to being interested in finding out how my interviewees' lives had moved on, my work on the theoretical framework of this study made this choice relevant. As I have argued in section 3.3.1, the issues of agency and change are a source of theoretical debate in constructionist research and hence, worth exploring empirically. Moreover, examining how the research participants have, or have not, moved on from the moral struggles presented in the previous section, is very relevant for practical actors experiencing similar dilemmas.

Therefore, the purpose of the analysis here is to find out how the research participants position their career identities four years later. The guiding question in doing the follow-up interviews was to examine how identity positioning is different four years later and what the practices, resources and constraints for such change might be. While identity positioning is always contextual and situated within the purposes of specific instances of narration, and thus always different, some positions are re-produced due to the resources one has available. For example, the master narratives presented in section 4.1 still serve as resources for narrating their career. However, if the previous narratives were more geared towards answering the question 'why do I need a career change' and thus positioning them as particular kind of career actors, in the follow-up interviews their narratives attempted to account for how they have dealt with these previously narrated intentions ('did I manage to make the desired change?'). In this sense, the narratives construct these women's identity in showing how they report having acted upon these intentions. As the following sections show, these women are either 1) adopting a new career/professional identity position and positioning as successful career changers; 2) modifying existing positions by drawing on alternative discourses and thus no longer positioning as career changers; or 3) re-positioning identity conflicts and

reproducing the career changer positioning albeit with new resources in terms of events and interpretations.

In illustrating the narrators' practices of positioning in this new situation, I have found it necessary to provide their accounts of the previous four years in their lives and careers. After all, it is through claiming particular experiences, events and actions as one's own that positioning takes place, as I have described in section 3.3.3. As a result, it is inevitable that the narratives may also be read referentially, reporting what has happened to these people. As Koskinen et al. (2005) have pointed out, in the analysis of texts it is in fact difficult to separate *what* people talk about from *how* they talk about it. Analytically, however, I have continued with the constructionist approach and used their narratives to identify how they position the narrator's identities. I make one exception, however. In the attempt to show where the possibilities for change and agency may lie, I identify the actions these women have taken and hence, take a referential view of what they are saying in the texts. The importance of this move relates not so much to the action itself but to the kind of new resources it has provided for identity work and change.

6.1 Practices of identity work in career transition over time

The results presented in this section are based on the follow-up interviews I had with eight women that I had interviewed for the first time in 2005. I have grouped the cases in three categories based on the practices of re-positioning their identities. These findings are summarized in table 4 (see section 6.2.) which also includes the variety of resources and constraints informing identity work. I discuss these findings in more detail in section 6.2. But first, let us see how these eight women do their identity work in narrating the four years that had passed.

6.1.1 Adopting a new identity position: “*finding my path, coming home*”

The first practice is that of adopting a new career or professional identity. This group includes those who had made a career change, changed from one profession to another and constructed new identity positions in narrating their life and career: Riitta, Sari, and Maria. In addition to positioning the narrators as successful career changers and thus enacting the current ideal of doing “my thing”, their accounts construct new professional/career identities. All three had situated their career transition as an issue of mismatch four years earlier. Now, this sense of mismatch is

narrated as more or less gone and hence, they are able to construct an ideal ending to their narratives of career transition. These are joyful narratives of “finding one’s path”, “coming home” and “expressing authenticity”.

Riitta

Transcript

- 01 R: And I have enjoyed it **so very much** . //I: yes//
02 I mean the fact that when I started on the job and I had not been there that long I got the feeling that now I have come home
(pause: 3s)
03 I don’t know if you remember when I told you how I always had this weird feeling //I: yes// that I am not doing what I’m supposed to be doing //I: yes yes//
04 but not anymore //I: that’s so great// it is indeed such a **fantastic** thing it is somehow like that you can’t- you just dwell in it and purr inside //I: right// (both laugh)

This is Riitta, now 55 years old, who had begun studies in theology the last time I met with her in 2005. Now that we meet again in February 2009 at a café she has graduated with her Master’s degree. Moreover, after a couple short-term contracts as a confirmation camp pastor and in church administration, she had been ordained and was now working as a pastor in a Lutheran parish. Riitta feels she has come home and found her vocation. It gives her “*an ongoing deep sense of happiness*” and “*a peace of mind and soul*”. She is no longer restless or on the lookout for a better job but enjoys “*the here and now*”, even though there are no guarantees of employment. So, the primary evaluation of this narrative is a successful completion of career change and of Riitta as the heroic protagonist and accomplished career changer. In contrast to the ambiguous professional identity of a business graduate in the past, she now enacts a strong professional identity as a theologian and pastor.

As the above excerpt shows, I accept and support this evaluation of the story. When I do not affirm Riitta’s expression of the sense of coming home right away, she emphasizes her point by reminding me of our last meeting and how she had felt back then. I acknowledge her point, and in the end we both laugh in the shared understanding of the significance of the career change outcome. Also later on, I support the evaluation of her narrative on several occasions remarking on her ability to make the change. Moreover, Riitta provides further support for the evaluation by quoting one of her new colleagues who had complemented her for being “*such a fully-fledged pastor already and with only less than a year of experience*”. This third-person distancing offers further evidence of the suitability of the new

profession, not only in terms of intrinsic satisfaction, but also as being a natural expression of her self:

Transcript

- 01 R: So **he** like told me that when he looks at you he can only wonder what a
fully-fledged pastor you are
02 and because I have not been there even a year yet
03 and he said that just as if I had always been
04 I: right that must have felt good
05 R: yes
06 I: [it radiates outward
07 R: [he has said it so many times that he can only wonder //I: yes// that
it is so natural being a pastor and how it all goes //I: yes//
08 and I have received feedback **really** good feedback //I:yes// a lot //I: yes//

This is a successful career change, no doubt, and a perfect example of the kind of contemporary career change narratives in the popular media of finding “*your thing*”. The problem with this kind of retrospective narrative is that they often gloss over the past struggles and concerns for the future. Yet, in Riitta’s case we know what the process has been like as I had met her when she was still in the middle of the transition. Her decision to begin the studies in itself was a long and gradual process. She dated the motivation of her career change by explaining a “*burning sense*” for a change from the start of her entire career in the 1980s, along with the growing personal interest to study religious texts and explore spiritual questions in the 1990s. Beginning from 2000 onwards, she had engaged with a more active exploration of theology through part-time studies in theology. Even when she was already a full-time degree student she was still hesitating about her “*right*” to delve into the studies. Moreover, at our first meeting Riitta was enthusiastic about her studies but still had no clear idea where she was headed professionally.

The choice of becoming a full-time student had not been the end of her struggles, however. Quite soon after our first interview Riitta had faced an unexpected disruption: her husband had wanted a divorce. In addition to the terrible personal distress it had caused, the divorce also presented a serious risk to her ability to continue her studies. Yet, she reports having decided very soon to continue her studies no matter what, unlike some other people of her age in a similar situation. The comparison to her peers emphasizes her own persistence in the face of obstacles and the importance of the studies for her identity. In this sense, her divorce with all its ramifications and emotional turmoil serves to show her moral strength vis-à-vis her career change. She overcame the obstacles and held on to her studies as a source of well-being amidst “*the terrible crisis*”. Also, she thinks “*the burden of dropping out*” would have been overwhelming.

Another struggle – a word Riitta uses – is the pastoral vocation. According to Riitta, it is a personal struggle all future pastors need to face and a question of testing one's vocation and its authenticity. These ideas of pastoral vocation are very similar to those of the Romantic Movement on the importance of finding a true inner self and to the ideals of self-expression prevalent still today. In Riitta's view, testing one's pastoral vocation is a process that is also difficult to articulate, but necessary if one wants to attain the spiritual capability for the job. As Riitta had not been a particularly religious person before, this process proved long along with her questions of whether she had the right to make such a change of quitting work and studying.

As we can see, Riitta can now construct a new professional identity with the evidence of having finished her studies and becoming employed at the church. She also narrates a successful ending to her career change narrative and can position as a successful career changer: she has come home and found the ideal match, which she expresses as natural and authentic. Her search for authentic career identity can be likened to the struggle for finding one's spiritual vocation and calling. As she narrates having accomplished this, the narrative positions her as having reached a moral ideal and also a very happy ending to her struggles.

Sari

Transcript

S: The day I started at X (the wine agency) . well . perhaps not that very day but very quickly //I: yes// I had the feeling that . this is where I belong . //I: right//

S: this is my professional identity . exactly this //I: yes// I am s:o at **home** s:o at home in this field

S: I decided to throw all that away (research career and PhD) and have not regretted the day 'coz I am s:o happy so happy about this job . it is such a **wonderful** feeling when- sometimes when I wake up and I think that oh . I will just quickly get myself ready so that I can go to work //I: right// I mean I am so terribly enthusiastic

When I had met Sari four years previously she had just started on her first job in the wine business. Now, in March 2009, we meet at a café near her work and she is still happily in the same field. As she describes it right at the beginning of her account of the past four years, the "*career crisis*" had now been resolved. Four years ago she had been excited about the possibility of combining her "*passion and hobby*" with employment, and her experience has proven it to be "*true*". She no longer feels like "*an outsider*" or "*temporary*", as she did during her research career that had lasted about ten years. Back then she had felt she did not experience the

work in a similar fashion as the others and hence, did not feel her expertise was at their level, even though she had years of experience and a PhD in its making. Now, she is “*extremely sure*” of herself and feels like “*a professional*”. This is “*a fantastic feeling*” and gives her a sense of balance as well.

As was the case with Riitta, Sari’s new career has not been without obstacles. The biggest threat to her new found career and identity came when the small company she had started working for merged and later downsized the operations. She became unemployed after only 2 ½ half years in the industry. She was “*terrified*” as her experience was still so thin and she was also beyond 40, a watershed she constructs as decisive in making a big career change. Moreover, she has accounted for her initial employment in the field as a result of luck as she had just been at the right place at the right time. Back then her CV had not really mattered, but now she felt the situation was different. Still, positioning as a determined person, she reports having begun calling a list of potential employers. As a result of her active search, she had two companies to choose from, one of which she has been working at ever since.

The explanation of this choice of employer is interesting in how it constructs Sari’s new career identity. She had been uncertain as to which of the companies to go to work for, and so in her narration she negotiates their differences. One of the companies was a big international with “*top-notch systems and processes*”, whereas the other was a Finnish family firm. Although her husband, a business executive, had thought the international firm to be the natural choice, Sari reports having chosen the family business as it just felt right. From a perspective of a business school graduate it may be that a bigger corporation has more status, opportunities, and better rewards and hence Sari needs to account for her decision to choose otherwise. The emphasis on how the family business appealed to her is understandable in the light of the mismatch narratives she has been drawing on: it is a sense of authenticity that matters. Later she also positions herself as enjoying the entrepreneurial quality of her work, which allows her to participate in a variety of tasks and develop things herself. This is a new positioning and quite different from the nature of work in her previous work.

Another difference in Sari’s career identity positioning is her enactment of professionalism. Throughout the narrative Sari constructs the identity of competent professional in her new chosen field. She tells about her intrinsic interest that compelled her “*to absorb everything like a sponge*” and learn tremendously within a short period of time. Unlike in her previous career in research, she feels sure of herself and her competence, even though her

experience is thinner and she has less education for it (she did not study marketing at the business school).

In the interview, we also talk about the trade-offs of Sari's work, such as the low pay and weak prospects for advancement. This reflection comes forth when Sari reclaims having been a victim of the 1990's recession and the plans she had then to embark on a banking career. She is wondering whether she would have been happy in that career and acknowledges that salary-wise she would have been. However, at this point I remind her of one of the meanings she already assigned to her career four years earlier:

Transcript

I: I remember that we discussed last time that when the recession hit you had considered going to University of Art & Design //S: yes// so that culture and these kinds of issues were very important //S: yes// so it could well be that in the end here . wine is in a way essentially linked with that so that you can combine it //S: right// because culture is quite remote from banks

S: Yes it is yes . that . art culture is one of my . areas that I strongly feel that I am very close to it here //I: yes// this food stuff in addition //I: exactly// I **love** restaurant culture it is very important //I: yes// and it is my hobby so I am **for sure-** that's actually a very good point I realize it now myself //I: mmmm// that for sure I am happier //I: yes// but in salary development I am surely compared to my friends- I mean they pay very poorly in this field you can't deny that and all my friends . and anyhow all my friends are in really fancy positions //I: yes// as marketing directors in big international companies and quite extraordinary- //I: mmmm// but I have not envied them for a minute (laughs) //I: right//

Although salary is not a decisive factor for Sari she needs to make sense of this issue, given that her reference group of business graduate friends have perhaps more status through working in large companies, high in the hierarchy, and with high salaries. However, in the interview I remind Sari of how she has constructed the content of the work and the ability to identify with it as more important. In fact, I even help her construct these meanings by connecting her current job to her larger interests with art and culture, which she approves as a good point. Later, she also makes the point that it is not sales and marketing where she situates her identity, but the specific business and products that give her career its meaning. From this perspective, the low salary, poor career progression prospects and even the sometimes frustrating part of the work itself come to be construed as extrinsic and less important factors of her career.

Although Sari is aware of all the years ahead of her before retirement, and admits the possibility of getting "*bored*" in the long run, she is not actively thinking about her future career. In terms of career identity, defined by the traditional markers of increasing responsibilities, challenge and rewards, this work might not be ideal. While aware of these norms and using them to evaluate her work Sari actively positions her identity against them and

emphasizes the passion she feels for her work. She simply positions her self as being “*at home*”.

Maria

Transcript

M: so this has been quite a long journey that I have traveled since (laughs) //I: right// but at least it has . like . it has . well I am really pleased with myself somehow that I was determined enough and kept looking for the path and that I found it

Maria and I met at shopping mall café in Helsinki close to her home in March 2009. She is on maternity leave and brings along her one-year old daughter who is still having a nap when we start. I had told her she could bring the child with and when we met we first talked about children. We found common ground as mothers as I told her that I had also been on maternity leave since we had met the last time. After the baby wakes up we pause every now and then to attend to her needs and sometimes also share experiences of parenting before resuming the talk about Maria’s career.

Compared to Riitta and Sari, Maria had not made any decisions on possible new directions of her career the first time we met. She had been unemployed and experimented with career options where she could help other people, such as health care, psychology, and HR. Moreover, she had been studying education and social psychology at the Open University and enjoyed it a lot. According to Maria, these studies had felt “*right*” for her and supported her intention to change her career. Quite soon after the first interview, she had noticed an announcement for a course in HRD that included an internship at a company. She applied and was accepted into the program and she also managed to find an internship placement – one of the prerequisites in order to maintain a place in the program. At the end of the course, while she was still applying for “*all kinds of jobs*”, she was offered two jobs in similar areas that she had worked in her earlier career in telecommunications. Then her internship company also decided to make an offer for a job in HR. While Maria found the other offers lucrative, she decided to keep her course with the career change even though it still felt like an uncertain direction at the time.

When Maria started out at the company as an HR coordinator, she was the only HR person in the company. The company was growing fast and so within a short period of time the company had hired an HR director, two payroll administrators and then Maria became an HR manager. She was also nominated to the Finnish board of directors, right before her maternity leave. So Maria had not only become employed again, but she had made a

career change and had already progressed in her new career. As she concludes in her initial account of the past four years:

Transcript

M: So in that sense I am myself- myself very . satisfied and happy that it . //I: yes// was successful . //I: yes// that the change was successful

In her initial account, Maria positions not only as a successful career changer but also as an HR professional. At the beginning, there had been some doubts about the value of HR in the company, but following a change of managing director, the HR function was invested in and they got “*a real HR team*” along with the hiring of the seasoned HR professional as the director. As a result, according to Maria, the whole function became more professional. She has learned a lot and also feels that she has gotten enough responsibility. Unlike Riitta and Sari, Maria does not talk about a similar sense of homecoming and finding a perfect match. I ask her about it:

Transcript

- 01 I: How has the HR work felt like? The last time you talked about wanting something that would feel more meaningful //M: right// than the previous jobs
02 M: It feels- or I mean it feels like I have- I like feel for now that it has somehow meaning what I do //I: yes//
03 even though it is such a . support . function in a way //I: mmmm//
04 but . like. so far it has been like . I can help like the managers //I: yes// or something else- or I find that as meaningful when I can help people

Maria returns to the same theme she had constructed four years prior in articulating what a meaningful career would be like for her. She feels this need has been fulfilled but she seems to experience some concerns about it as well. For one, she uses the expressions “*for now*” and “*so far*” which indicate a degree of uncertainty about the future. We return to this issue later and she expresses her concerns about whether the work might prove repetitious later on. She also remarks that work has not been just “*dancing on the roses*”. Second, the role of HR as a support function, as the reservation on line 03 would indicate, also concerns her. She returns to this issue later on when she talks about the importance of HR being valued in the organization. For her, it would no longer be as meaningful if it was not given such a high priority as is the case with her current employer.

A bit later on I remind Maria of what she had been talking about in the first interview:

Transcript

I: (...) you were living amidst great uncertainty then and seemed to be questioning just about everything //M: mmm// everything at that point

and you were thinking about all these- different things
like if you were to re-educate yourself from the very beginning . into some other
field //M: yes right//
but apparently that dropped off?
M: Well you just turned it around back then . that it would have been somehow
even h-harder //I: yes// after all when you have already been working //I: yes//
so you could not be bothered to start from the beginning //I: beginning// and
somehow interesting- meaningful or I came to the conclusion that in a way in HR
even though it is its own field //I: yes//
you can still use what you have done //I: yes// been there in the business side
//I: yes// and done that //I: yes// that . so it is also useful //I: yes//
and on the other hand if you go and study something from the start it is quite a
long road . //I: yes//
and financially you begin to feel that you do think that you should get //I: yes//
back to work sooner //I: right//

In this excerpt, Maria and I are negotiating the meaning of her career change. In mentioning her plans for even more radical career change at the time of the previous interview, I place a normative expectation on Maria to account for a change from the perspective of these plans. As the narrator, Maria distances her current self from the past and, using the passive form, explains her decision by arguing that starting anew would have been harder, taken a longer time, wasted the investments made in a business career and been financially strenuous. My supportive utterances show an agreement of her point. In her account, Maria is positioning as someone who has made a right, reasonable decision. The basis of this evaluation relies mainly in the idea of economic rationality: new studies would be a waste of previous investments, time and effort concerning the financial and career expectations she has.

So does Maria construct HR as the authentic match with her self? It feels right and has meaning for her, but this is not the primary reasoning now in her account of the change. The economic rationality seems to override for many reasons. Firstly, she had been unemployed for over a year before she started the HR program and the need to become employed was becoming an urgent concern. Secondly, she had been working for only about 5 years at the time of the lay-off and the need to become more established career-wise is apparent, compared to a need to find a possibly more authentic match. Third, she was 33 years old at the time and was hoping to start a family with her partner. This decision, however, was contingent on their financial situation.

In addition to this economic rationality, Maria's decision can also be interpreted from her positioning in the career discourses of business. As the analysis of Maria's identity work four years prior showed, one of the key negotiations she had had already then, was the gendered struggle between her feminine gender identity and values and the masculine practices of the business world. Career progress and bigger responsibilities attracted her,

but due to her gendered positioning she constructed an incongruity between them. In reflecting on that past situation, she distances herself from this conflict and constructs it in a slightly different fashion, to account for her thoughts of wanting a more radical change back them. She brings up the issue of the lay-off herself and talks about the strain it had on her:

Transcript

M: I mean in the end . like have you made crazy choices or would the previous have be al- alright after all and right (talks to her child) . and particularly when it was such a forced situation that your job is pulled under you so then you can begin to think in a distorted way and belittle what you have been doing before and the conditions somehow so you turn it around in a way that it wasn't that good after all (laughs)

In this excerpt Maria distances herself from the narrator of four years ago by using the pronoun you and re-evaluating her thoughts back then. In the interview I also acknowledge her point that crises can make you question the past as a way to come to terms with the issue. Yet, Maria comes back to the feelings of gendered incongruence that continue to have relevance in her career when she talks about the personality tests she had taken:

Transcript

M: (...) and I answered somehow like how I **would like** to be //I: right// but in the end how I am not really like that and somehow it- I have somehow admitted at some point that one just is what one is . even though it may not include all those . //I: yes// characteristics what you might wish yourself to have //I: yes yes// so like . it is somehow . tough anyhow //I: yes// and like . think about how you can manage with those characteristics then //I: yes// and particularly when you feel that they are perhaps not what the society now values the most //I: mmm . yes// quite like soft . //I: yes// soft evaluations or just this that you are more like this kind of person and not like these that you are assertive and whatever other ones there are //I: exactly// these what are always stated as what you should have . //I:yes// in business life although not many have them in the end

This excerpt shows how she has been dealing with the issue that in order to work in business you need to have certain characteristics she does not feel she has, such as assertiveness. This is a typical example of a characteristic that is culturally evaluated as masculine and which is used in constructions of gendered images of leadership, for example. In Maria's case, it seems that HR presents the best compromise between her desire to work and have a career in business, but to be able to feel a better match with her identity and what is valued in the work.

The identity struggle between her career and gender identity also continue now in a new form. In terms of her career, she situates her future self in HR and later maybe "*general management*" and hopes for "*basic career progress*". However, the birth of her child "*came at a problematic*

time from the perspective of career progress". Although she says this with laughter, she is already negotiating her positioning vis-à-vis the implications it has for her career development. She positions as a mother who is taking the primary responsibility for the care of the child. As a consequence, she thinks she will "*put on the brakes a bit*" as she is not willing "*to sacrifice*" her family and personal life in order to "*advance high*", but will be "*settling for less*". So even though she is still on maternity leave, she is doing identity work and negotiating her positioning with respect to her career development. Being a good mother is morally more important than being a good careerist, and based on Maria's interpretation of what these positions entail in the industries she has worked in, they are incompatible and call for a compromise.

6.1.2 Modifying existing identity positions: "*work is work*"

The second practice of identity work is that of modifying one's positioning by drawing on alternative identities. In this second group, the women had not made the kind of career change they had been looking for four years previously, but they were no longer looking for one either. I have placed Eila and Taina in this group. Four years earlier, Eila's account had been situated in the disruption narrative, while Taina's was in the life renewal. In accounting for their experiences, both modified their career identity positions by drawing on alternative identity positions that offered them new meanings as to how to understand themselves in the career context. In both of these cases, this re-positioning had to do with adjusting career expectations and de-emphasizing the value of career, as the quote "*work is work*" illustrates. The practice of re-positioning of career identities does not necessarily always refer to the devaluing of career but in other cases might involve different types of re-formulations as to what a good career entails. In terms of the nature of career transition, these would count as intra-role transitions as the women have changed their orientation or adjusted their career identities since the first interview. These are the type of transitions that may be more common than changes into new roles, yet in the absence of any apparent movement they are usually harder to capture.

Eila

Eila and I meet at a downtown café in Helsinki in February 2009. While waiting to order we chat about the last time we had met at her home in the suburbs. Eila asks me about my children and life and talks about her own children and their choices of what to study. When we begin the recorded interview Eila begins a narrative of the previous four years. After the short project in financial communications she had been about to start when we

had last met, she had then gotten a job as an auditor. However, that job had proven very challenging in many respects. As auditing was new for her there had been a lot to learn, yet she had been supposed to become billable early on. At the same time, the other auditors had been incredibly busy with their own work and had had no time to teach her anything. This resulted in a tremendous pressure and Eila had become sick and decided to quit. It was not only the pressures of the job, but also the stressful period she had recently had – having been laid-off – that she uses to account for her getting ill. After these new stressful experiences she felt she needed to rest and had decided to take some time off from job searching and have “*a sabbatical*”, a possibility she had mentioned also four years earlier.

Eila is aware of the moral evaluation of this new disruption. She points out how the expectation is that one should find a new job soon, but she argues for the legitimacy for people of her age to take some time off. She backs this up with the experiences of acquaintances of her age by stating how “*many people*” or “*everybody*” says they would have needed a break as “*many people in their 50s have all kinds of crises and losing a job just adds the finishing touch*”. By referring to these needs, she constructs her actions as reasonable and moral. “*Is it really that bad if one is outside the working world for some time occasionally?*” she asks.

This evaluation shows the primary identity position of Eila that she uses throughout her account – age. Last time we met she mentioned it as well, but now it frames the evaluation of all her career experiences. After a long break of more than a year or so, she took her next short contract in a small media firm, first in office work and then in bookkeeping. After that, she had decided that she needed to upgrade her knowledge and enrolled in an accounting program where she was “*one of the oldest ones, of course*”. There were some other people of her age, though, which she enjoyed as they proved to her that “*it is really difficult to get a new job when you are over 50*”. As part of the program, she got an internship at an accounting department in a hospital where she was hired on a fixed-term contract after her program was finished. At the time of the interview she was still working there.

In describing her work at the hospital, Eila draws on her professional identity in finance by making a difference with the “*others*” who work there. She says she would have a lot to offer as she has a greater perspective on the issues based on her experience and talks about various developmental needs she has observed. Even though Eila would like to stay at the hospital she is concerned about her chances of getting a permanent job there:

Transcript

- 01 E: they do have positions there . open so in that sense and they value that you have their system . //I:yes// experience and knowledge of that and all //I: yes//
- 02 but this age now is the bad . //I:mmm// thing so so . //I:yes// so they do like to hire the young ones
- 03 or they can recruit older ones
- 04 but then there is this that you would have to have very- this work I have been doing is not the core //I: Mmmm// core competence as they have all this accounts receivable and accounts payable and accounting and these basic-payroll so if you have a good knowledge of these in practice so I think the age is not such a decisive factor //I: right right//
- 05 but then again I don't have- I have been in expert positions //I:right// there a bit elsewhere //I: yes// so I have not developed such- (competence in basic financial administration)

This excerpt shows the two primary identity positions Eila draws on in her career account. First, there is her age as discussed above. It is a position that is imposed on her in the contemporary labour market. Second, there is the professional identity position as a finance expert that Eila is drawing on. She uses it to differentiate her from others and also to resist being positioned as too old. In the context of the accounting work at the hospital, her professional identity as an expert also accounts for her unfamiliarity with the basic accounting work that her current job would call for.

For Eila, her struggle continues in terms of getting a job that matches her professional qualifications. She is not looking for just any job, however. She is a professional and would like to find employment that allows her to use her experience in one way or the other. The problem here is that similar kind of work that she used to do in the public sector barely exists anymore. Moreover, the kind of job she had in the media company had felt quite strenuous. In retrospect, she evaluates it as having been "*too big of a jump*" for her. That world was "*too big and hard*" for someone who had worked for the public sector all her life. There she had also realized that she had not been able to keep her competences in finance up-to-date.

She comes back to this issue of neglecting continuing education when she has asked me about my interviewees and the kinds of options they have found. I tell her about Taina for whom family plays a big role in her career development. This makes Eila talk about how her husband had continued his education through a professional development program and how she had never had the opportunity for such a thing. In retrospect she regrets not having upgraded her education but she accounts for this by reference to her family position and by drawing to an important identity position of hers, that of a mother. She was the primary caretaker of their children, and she wanted to spend the time with them, particularly because her husband was traveling a lot. Eila evaluates these past experiences now from the distance of time and considers how she could have acted differently. Still,

she defends herself from the position of a mother whose “*children have not had any bigger problems and have all managed quite well in life*”. So what she did was natural and right, from her position as a mother, to the disadvantage of her professional self. Her actions are totally understandable for a woman and common with many others, which she also conveys by telling a story of her acquaintance who had had a similar experience.

Although some kind of career change is inevitable, Eila has not been willing to “*jump into something completely new*”. As I tell her about some of my observations based on the first round of interviews, and talk about my interest in identity, Eila brings up the necessity of earning a living. She distances herself from the people who are “*jumping into something new*” and positions herself as “*an everyday realist*” for whom earning a living is the main concern in this transition. It is not that she had very big financial demands, but falling on basic unemployment benefits is not acceptable to her. Then she brings up an example of a friend who had worked as a journalist and begun freelancing after losing a job. However, as Eila points out, her fees have been very modest so it is “*foolish to think one could live on such fees*”. The threat with a completely new career is the financial risk, creating the “*necessary constraints*”.

Another interesting issue emerged when I had shared thoughts on my research up to that point. When Eila talks about her concern about livelihood she mentions how “*my writing is more my identity*”. Earlier she has explained to me how she had taken many different courses in writing while she was on sabbatical. This is something she enjoys doing and she has been encouraged to continue by her instructors. While this is an activity she sees herself continuing with, positioning as a realist she does not see any sense of trying to make it into a living at her age.

Overall, Eila has adjusted to her career phase although she has not managed to make a desired change. The emphasis in her positioning has shifted from the position of an expert professional to the aged worker. This shift was already discernible four years earlier, but back then it was more of a concern, not a position she enacted. Although she is now, at the age of 56, enacting this socially available position as an aged worker, it is not something she has freely chosen, but a position that is imposed on her due to the experiences she has had. Even her expectations of the ideal future are framed by this positioning: she would like to continue working for the hospital in order to earn a living and make use of her experience. While writing offers her a new source of meaning, she does not think that re-education or career change would be wise at her age. Moreover, she is tired of the “*desperate applying*” and working on short-term contracts people of her age face. Hence, if the hospital does not hire her she thinks she will “*slip*

into the tube”, a system designed for people over 57 that allows for earnings-related unemployment benefits until retirement. Then she could devote her time to her writing without the need to worry about the finances.

Taina

Taina and I meet again twice in 2009, the first time in the winter and second in the late summer. My recorder had not saved our interview the first time and at first I had thought to rely on my notes. However, soon I felt I needed to have more reliable empirical evidence of how she narrates her past years and decided to interview her again. Taina was happy to meet again, particularly because there had been another major change between our meetings. At both times we met at the cafeteria at her workplace.

Taina’s career had not been smooth since we met in 2005. In the summer of 2006, she was laid off from the medical company she had worked for as an IT controller. She decided to take the summer off and then took a couple of courses in logistics and in management development. It was not until the fall of 2007 that she managed to get an eight-month contract in budgeting at an insurance company. As the contract was not renewed, she had another long summer “*vacation*”. After having been unemployed for about a half a year, she got another fixed-term contract as a controller at a healthcare company where she was still working at the time we met. She was a maternity leave substitute and there was still about half a year left on her contract. Although there had been discussions about extending her contract, all recruitment plans were now on hold as the company was going to merge with another firm. The “*totally unexpected announcement*” of the merger was threatening Taina’s plans and hopes to continue with the company. She liked working for an international company; the work had been interesting, although quite hectic and she also enjoyed the culture there.

At the time of the interview the future seemed, once again, uncertain. However, Taina had started studying again.

Transcript

- 01 T: Everything is truly open now //I:yes// and of course none of those managers can promise anything when they don’t even know whether they will be able to hold on to their own jobs . //I: right// . so . //I: right yes// so that is . interesting
- 02 (pause 7 s)
- 03 then I started to study again this summer for fun (laughs)
- 04 I: oh what have you now started to study?
- 05 T: well I have started something totally different I have started studying well-being of children and the young (laughs)
- 06 I: aha . well what is it . is it some kind of a degree program or where-
- 07 T: It’s a the summer university a 25 credit or basic studies like a study package .

- 08 but when I started thinking last summer that what I should do now if it so happens that this ends this work in January
- 09 so I thought that I could continue my teacher training now that I have completed those //I: yes// the basic studies in adult education and I could continue with the trainee period on top of that //I: yes// or to get that qualification . teacher qualification so that would take a year if you work at the same time //I:yes// while you study
- 10 but at that time you could not apply for those anymore the deadlines were past and I thought that this would be a kind of snack for me then this . //I: yes// well-being of children and the young but maybe now when in January again they have new application period maybe them I will apply for that teacher training .

Taina explains her studies first as something she has begun to do “*for fun*”. She laughs about it, perhaps indicating the big difference between her past studies and career in accounting and these new studies in the well-being of children. However, she then connects it to her work life and the impending risk of losing her job. Her original plan was to continue her studies in education to become a certified teacher in her own field but as the application deadlines had passed she took on this certificate program “*as a snack*”. This positioning is similar to the way Taina had positioned herself four years prior, resisting the identity of a goal-focused career planner. Although she associates these studies to her concern about future employment, she repeats a bit later how these studies are simply for fun as she finds it interesting. Since Taina has brought it up as part of her plans for the future, I did not accept her account as the following excerpt shows. The way we negotiate the meaning of her studies reveals the cultural expectation of adequate causality (Linde, 1993) for a career move in this context:

Transcript

(a response to a question about the content of the certificate program)

- 01 T: (...) I don't even know what I will do with that program (laughs)
- 02 I: How did you end up applying there?
- 03 T: It was just on the spur of the moment . for fun (laughs)
- 04 I: But children- I mean are children anyway- or have you thought about it before that it could be interesting?
- 05 T: Yes I have enjoyed being . with children //I: yes// as I only have two children and they will soon be brought up //I: mmmm// (T laughs) //I:right//
- 06 but if something else one day //I:yes//
- 07 (pause:3s)
- 08 I: Could you imagine that you could do it for living somehow?
- 09 T: Mmmm yes or as voluntary work or something //I:right exactly// yes
- 10 I: but this teaching work is more like . like what you . are aiming at in a way or
- 11 (pause: 1s)
- 12 T: Yes for now I think that I will try to get in there . //I:mmm/ to study (pause: 2s)

In this excerpt, I keep making sense of Taina's studies although she had already explained how she had begun the studies just for fun. As this does not seem to meet my expectation of an adequate explanation, I keep looking for a fuller account. Since my initial question on line 02 does not accomplish this, next I attempt to articulate the reasons by establishing more temporal depth (ibid.) in her interest in the topic (line 04). Taina agrees to this and even hints at the possibility of doing something with it one day (line 06), which leads me to ask whether she could imagine making a career out of it. Taina agrees, but adds the reservation that only as voluntary work, not as a form of employment or career. So by the end, we have negotiated the meaning of these studies as something that she has an enduring interest in but no plans for using them for her career. Thus we return to the teacher training, which has more relevance for her career.

As much as the above exchange is a negotiation of the meaning of a particular action, it is also part of Taina's identity positioning. Doing something just for fun or for her own interest goes against the utilitarian career planning or ambitions. She has no need to prove her moral worth as a competent career actor since her positioning in the career context has shifted as the following excerpt shows. The last time we had met, Taina had positioned as a career changer who wanted to progress in her career in the managerial hierarchy. When I ask about these aspirations, Taina tells me she no longer finds it "*so important*". As I ask her to remember her thoughts back then and compare it to the current situation Taina gives the following answer:

Transcript

- 01 T: Well there have been so many discontinuities after that as there was the lay-off //I:yes// been unemployed and studying and had these short-term contracts
- 02 so . //I:yes// so I no longer have any kind of clear career goal //I:mmm// (T laughs) so that has died //I:yes//
- 03 so it is a bit like a driftwood . //I:right// phase
- 04 so even with the studies or the teacher training I thought that it is a kind of a back-up plan if I can't find work in my field so I have another . //I: yes// option

Taina recounts the death of her career goals and aspirations (line 02) as a natural consequence of the fragmented nature of her career. She avoids taking an active position towards planning her career (line 03), and downplays the studies by claiming them as a back-up plan (line 04) rather than as a career move as I had expected. As Taina's previous aspirations for career development have disappeared, "*work is work*" now. The irony she uses and her laughter can be interpreted as ways of dealing with the situation. It is important to note, however, that she is not positioning as a

helpless victim of the discontinuities. So what are the resources she has for coming to terms with these changes and positioning as a moral person careerwise?

Transcript

- 01 I: You have described how these past years have been kind of discontinuous and all but what is you think about these years overall what would find the best thing that happened?
- 02 T: Well (pause: 4s) perhaps it is in the end this in- like finding inner //I:mmm// peace or balance so . //I:mmmm// (pause:2s)
- 03 your own happiness is not tied to these extrinsic things and like career and . //I:yes// success and all .
- 04 I: Yes . well that is great . how did- tell me how you achieved that (both laugh) state of peace that everybody is looking for?
- 05 T: Well for me it had to with finding religion
- 06 about - it's been about five years now //I:mmm//
- 07 so it has been growing a little by little this- . //I:yes// this inner feeling that you are at peace

So, positioning as a religious person is now the basis of the moral valuation of Taina's self and hence, her career has shifted from outer to "inner" criteria. She no longer positions as career-oriented or puts much emphasis on progress or even its content. Although she refers to herself as "*driftwood*", she is not simply a passive victim of difficult working conditions. In fact, she is actively embracing an open positioning towards her career. As she concludes, she is "*just waiting to see where the next door will open*".

6.1.3 Repositioning identity conflicts: "*looking for a new framework*"

The third practice of identity work over time involves the repositioning of the identity conflict. In other words, career transition is still ongoing, but in light of the new experiences it comes to be re-positioned. The narrators in this third category had experienced various changes in their work and career, which they used in re-positioning themselves vis-à-vis the need for change. The nature of identity conflict and the resources they drew on to make sense of it were no longer entirely the same. Of the three women in this group, Eeva and Kati had situated their transitions as disruption narratives, whereas Johanna had drawn on the life renewal narrative.

Eeva

When I had met Eeva four years previously, she was working at an ICT company in the business development unit. She was looking for a change as she felt her work was not recognized and as there was uncertainty about the future of the work due to the re-organizations in the ICT sector. At the

beginning of our second interview at a café in February 2009, I asked Eeva whether she remembers her situation the last time we had met, and Eeva gives the response – an abstract for the narrative to come:

Transcript

- 01 E: It was wintertime //I: winter of 2005 yes// there at Kappeli (a café in Helsinki) I remember that //I: yes//
02 (pause: 2s)
03 I don't remember exactly . if I situate it with my work situation . then it was most certainly the time when our work group was at its height.
04 but then came the downhill (pause: 1s)
05 and now I am-
06 was laid off last year (year 2008) //I: ok//
07 so now I have- so since January 2007 I have been a post-graduate student

Right at the beginning Eeva tells about the two major changes in her career. She has become unemployed (line 05), and she has become a PhD student (06). In congruence with similar positioning from the previous time, the focus is right away on her agency when Eeva proceeds from lay-off directly to her studies (line 06). This change could seem radical, but as part of Eeva's career narrative it makes sense. As Eeva points out: "*it is kind of funny how my life is all about transition in the end*". She has made many changes in her career, but as the analysis of her career narration four years earlier showed, there are common threads connecting the events. She positions as an entrepreneurial and flexible career actor who can move between very different professional and work settings. Moreover, she connects the positions with a cultural theme so that all her experiences, studies and personal characteristics contribute to a special expertise in understanding various issues from a cultural framework. She is not strictly speaking a professional anthropologist, but a cultural understanding is the basis of her expertise and the main source of her career identity.

Eeva explains her commencing of the PhD studies as stemming from a course she had taken in change management. The course had involved an assignment as part of which she analyzed a development project with an NGO at her work in the ICT firm. While she was going over research material on the project it "*dawned on*" her that she should do research on these issues as it was "*so extremely interesting*". She talked to her colleague who had suggested she build PhD research out of it. Eeva says having been "*a bit terrified*" about the idea, but she quickly connects this idea to her past, and her ideas to do post-graduate studies in anthropology being already rooted years before when she had completed her program in France. Also, the focus of her PhD project is on interaction between different cultures: the theme she constructs for career. She describes being enthusiastic about the research project and talks about the content and

process of her research extensively as a fellow PhD student. In discussing at length the various social issues she is studying and concerned about, she comes to be positioned as professional and expert, to whom these issues are inherently interesting and a focus of her passions. Once she makes a remark about her age which shows she is aware of the cultural norms: *“it is so wonderful that it is still possible to do a PhD at this age”*. Otherwise she does not indicate having any need to do identity work on her right to study, as Riitta did with her theology studies, for example.

In our meeting, Eeva and I discuss further the meaning of her career and her career identity positioning based on the interpretations I had made in analyzing the interview texts from our first meeting:

Transcript

- 01 I: (...) you seem to enact a kind of ideal orientation in the contemporary society //E: yes// when you think that //E: yes// you can go almost anywhere and find the meanings yourself as to how it connects to the plot of what I think I am //E: yes// doing and all //E:yes// I find that very fascinating
- 02 E: yes and but I don't- the more I think about this career well I would not even talk about career //I:mmm// because in fact we should find a whole new word for it .
- 03 I: yes I know I usually use the word working career //E: yes// to get away from- it has so many different cultural meanings but I see it as being a question of individual lives as a whole //E: yes// and how the events are made sense of //E:yes// so for some it is a very traditional sense of career and all but as things are changing and there are these requirements for flexibility and so a certain need for security is understandable in order to make sense of the chaos //E:yes// in order to find a read thread //E:yes//in there
- 04 E: and of course family can be a factor //I:mmm/ I have not had a family for the most part so I have been able to act just- //I: right
- 05 (...)
- 06 E: but I have sometimes thought that it helps me a lot that- it's been a tremendous resource that . anthropologically speaking that I have studied in Canada and then I was in France //I: mmmm// so that I have been in different systems /I: yes// in addition to Finland //I: yes right// so because of that I can think differently //I: yes// so I don't get stuck with these norms //I: yes right// so deep

First I comment on how she is able to construct a meaningful and coherent narrative about her varied experiences (line 01). Eeva agrees with this, but wants to frame her experiences as different from traditional careers, which also shows how she actively gives meaning to her career (line 02). After we agree on a looser definition of the word career (line 03), Eeva makes a further point of her possibility to have such a mobile career as she did not have a family, which could have impeded her in having the kind of career she has. Then a bit later she also adopts the position of an open-minded person due to her experiences in different cultures, a position that was also dominant in the first interview.

Similar to our earlier meeting, Eeva mentions the problems at her last workplace only in passing. At first, she simply reports that the lay-offs were expected, “*no wonder*”, as there had been so many organizational changes. Later on we return to her experiences there when we discuss her idea of being able to use her “*virtues*” in work. I ask whether this still describes her thinking:

Transcript

E: Yes absolutely //I:yes// then you will be able to manage and //I:yes// then- I believe that you are at your best then for sure //I:yes// and then you can contribute to everything well //I:yes// rrr (pause: 2s) you will end up having burnouts and other problems . when you have to work against yourself //I: yes right// so (pause)

After this Eeva begins to talk about her views on working life and how we should learn to act wisely and not waste human resources. She talks of how people are treated “*in a disgusting manner*” instead of allowing them to use their virtues, which makes her so angry. Although Eeva talks about working life in general, I connect this to her own experiences as she had remarked briefly earlier that she had started turning “*cynical*” and her work had been becoming “*more and more repulsive*”. Hence, I asked her to tell more about her experiences there. This results in several examples of situations where her and her colleagues’ innovative ideas for business development had not been accepted. She concludes on her experiences by saying how relieved she is now that she is out of there, and how she has actively worked on coming to terms with it. She even tells of having made “*a concrete act*” of throwing away the mug she had gotten as a gift upon starting her job there. She not only threw it away but she threw it on the ground in her back yard to break it. We laugh about it and Eeva agrees with my comment that it was a real rite of passage, as the anthropologists would say.

In terms of her future career, her situation is the same as before: she has no “*clear vision*” for where she is going. She is not “*a researcher type*” and she no longer wants to work in private firms as she had “*her share*” of them. Teaching or working in the public sector administration, however, may be possible options. In the coming fall she will have to look for a job, but for now her studies are what make her career meaningful. It is along with her studies that she also hopes to get new expertise, or “*a new framework*” and a better vision for her next career move.

Johanna

I met Johanna again at her home in March 2009. Similar to Eeva, Johanna gives an abstract of the narrative right at the beginning of her interview. When we had met four years earlier, she had been working as a controller in

the public research institute and was considering a change. Now she reports having changed jobs soon after we had met the last time to work for an accounting firm run by her old acquaintance:

Transcript

J: I always called him if he knows of any jobs because he had a good touch with where new people were needed and then he needed someone there and so I went there but I don't know whether that has been any paradise either (I laugh) so this has also been quite the struggle after all

Johanna had taken the job as an office manager with the expectation of replacing the owner as the managing director when he retires. However, thus far the work has not met all of Johanna's expectations. She is eager to take on more responsibilities but this has not happened. Johanna positions as a "*developer*" who would like to apply her experiences from the previous workplaces in bigger firms. However, her boss Seppo still makes all the decisions and according to Johanna wants to do things as they always have been.

At the beginning, the situation had seemed more promising and her boss had encouraged her to take certificate programs in management and in accounting. During the first couple of years, Johanna had worked hard getting the studies completed along with the full-time job. She got a lot of new inspiration and felt satisfied with the upgrading of her professional competence, but none of the new ideas led to any concrete development in Seppo's firm. However, Johanna had been able to learn new things on the job as she got more involved with customer work and also with the IT systems. In this sense, she has strengthened her professional identity in the past years as she had hoped for four years ago.

The continuing struggle for Johanna is related to her career ambitions. While four years earlier she was concerned about her eroding professional competence, now she was concerned about getting more responsibility and independence in developing and managing the business, particularly after having completed a program in management. As she has not been assigned such responsibilities she had looked for other jobs too. Once she had received an offer for a job at a large, prestigious accounting firm, but she had declined due to the loss of independence and variety, as well as to the loyalty she felt for the small firm. Her need to "*be able to do whatever one feels like*" has made her seriously consider starting her own business. The problem with that, in addition to the financial risks, is the risk of ending up with routine work and losing the good colleagues that she now has. Other options include getting into IT systems or even sales work, which has previously been inconceivable.

The source of enthusiasm she had four years earlier in kayaking and giving courses in the sport has subsided. One reason she gives for this is her age. She talks about an experience of a physical injury and how healing took longer at her age. Moreover, she says that she had now become aware of her own “*mortality*”. For the first time she can actually understand people who just settle with their work and wait for retirement. Yet, she makes the point of telling that she is not one of these people, but keeps reflecting and working on her own ideals and expectations of work:

Transcript

- 01 J: sometimes I think that does it really have to be something special the work //I: mmm// like what will I do with it
02 or couldn't I just be satisfied that I have work //I: mmm// and that's it . mmmm
03 I: yes why not?
04 (both laugh)
05 J: yes I don't know //I: right// because others know how to work from 8 to 4 nicely //I: mmm// or whatever the times are so from one year to another the same (pause: 5s) mmm so how could one . like when they say that you should just be able to enjoy the everyday life and not dream about something fancy //I: yes// and about the future //I: yes// but enjoy the moment

As the above transcript also shows, she distances herself from those people who are just content with the work. By doing this, she positions in a similar fashion as four years previously, as a person who is focused on work and ambitious. However, she questions now, as she also did four years earlier, whether this really is a good thing after all. Still, the desire to get ahead and achieve fulfillment in her job are an issue she continues to grapple with.

Another positioning Johanna reproduces from the last time is the desire for more balance. While in practice she continues to enact a work and career-orientated position she is struggling to get more balance and peace in her life. For example, she has not given up the idea of moving away from the capital region, preferably to the north, as an escape from the hectic world of work. Against this idea, she positions as more family-oriented and accounts for her need to stay close to her family, particularly since her father had now been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Yet, her father's situation also plays a role in her attempt to re-position the role of work in her life. She often works overtime which “*makes no sense*” but still she finds herself doing so, and puts part of the blame on the way the firm is managed.

So all in all, Johanna is still struggling with changing her career. It is a negotiation between her career identity positioning as an ambitious person who wants to use and develop her skills further, and the possibilities of enacting such a career in the present context. While the struggle four years earlier had more to do with maintaining her competence, this is no longer

the issue: she constructs herself as a competent and experienced controller, but one whose ambitions have not yet been met. Moreover, she continues to struggle with the issue of balance and draws on her age and family positions to negotiate a less work-focused identity positions. As she says, without a family of her own or other similar time-consuming commitments that shift seems to be harder to make.

Kati

Of the eight women that I interviewed again, Kati is the only one who still works for the same employer. However, by the time we meet again in February 2009, she has changed jobs from sales to service management. Moreover, her company had undergone several re-organizations, and as a result, Kati has switched between units and managers (*“this is probably the fourth boss I have now since then”*). Since the interview was started by my positioning of Kati as a person who had wanted a career change four years earlier, she initially positions as achieving the desired change via this change of jobs. She had enjoyed the freedom and the opportunity to craft her work according to her own ideas.

Within a couple of years, however, she had become exasperated about her work again and felt a strong need to leave. She had no longer enjoyed the work and had felt that she *“had to”* do something. Then she got pregnant and so the desired break from her job materialized in a form of maternity leave. She returned back to work after her leave and felt happy to be back to work. However, the results of the leave soon began to wear off. The constant re-organizing continued and work became stressful again, causing Kati sleeping problems, for example. Moreover, right before we met for the second time, there had been warnings of lay-offs. Kati is not so concerned about the possible lay-off though, as she thinks the most important issue now is her need to change into work with different, *“more humane”* values *“in contrast to staring at the numbers and euros”*. She had already applied for a couple of jobs:

Transcript

- 01 K: and one of those jobs was such that- it still annoys me not having gotten it
02 the salary would have been significantly lower like probably a third less or so
03 . but it was in the cultural sector //I: yes//
04 it was a sales assistant job //I: yes// but okay . it depends- an assistant job
05 can be- it depends on where //I: yeah right// so I didn't feel that being a
06 sales assistant- it would have not necessarily have meant going downward
07 but it was exactly the environment that interested me it was (mentions the
08 name of the cultural institution) //I: yes//
09 and there were so many of elements in the job where I could have used my
10 previous experience //I: yes//
11 and I was also fascinated by the environment //I:yes// and in those cultural-
12 even the building itself is interesting and at least on my mind I was thinking-

- 07 and then when I got an interview and they had over 100 applicants and I was
among the top 6
08 so they really did not measure- yes they did look at the numbers but they
looked at- the main thing was not how much money they make but how they
can offer culture to as many people as possible //I: right//
09 so the perspective was totally different //I: yes//
10 so that confirmed this sense that wow this would really be-
11 that I could have used what I have learned in marketing and sales but the
goal would be that as many as possible would get some pleasure from seeing
something beautiful

In this transcript Kati constructs her career identity by positioning as someone to whom the environment and purpose of the work, and the field of culture in particular (lines 04, 06 08, 11), are more important than the extrinsic rewards, such as career progress or salary (lines 02-03), which have been more important to her in the past. While from the perspective of the traditional career discourse the downward move is certainly questionable Kati legitimizes the rationality of this career option by referring to the possibility to use her previous experience (lines 05 and 11).

As part of her account, the recounting of the above episode is a key indicator of her identity work pertaining to her career. She points out the importance of the event in the rich description of the episode as well as more explicitly, in line 10, referring to how this experience “*confirmed*” her intentions that she would like to do such work. Later, she comes back to this and points out that in applying for the job, writing up the CV, and “*processing it*” she felt that “*this is indeed the right direction*”. In the recruitment interview she remembers having thought that “*oh my god these are real people - or like living people . soft*”.

As she did not get the job and the situation at her present work has not become any better, Kati is still thinking of how to go about the change. Although Kati’s professional identity continues to be positioned in sales, it has become more important to sell something meaningful, an issue she had also raised four years previously. She remembers how earlier on her career she had known the hotels and the people who worked there, and hence “*knew their stories and details*”. Now that the company has grown the number of hotels has increased and selling them no longer feels meaningful or humane. She has been thinking of studies – she would like to study esthetics or something to do with arts – but the problem is the difficulty of getting funding for such a degree. Although such studies would “truly” interest her, they would also be “*a way to escape from the hard world*”.

Another reoccurring issue from four years previously is the reflection Kati has made on “*what is important in this world*”. Her maternity leave had made her realize and question the high importance she has placed on work. She is trying to negotiate space for some balance in her life and less focus

on work. She describes having done 10-11 hour days and quotes her fiancée from the time she had been on a maternity leave to show what having more balance in her work could mean:

Transcript

K: my partner even said then when we analyzing it a bit as to what had happened when I was off from my work and he said that “you are so diff- you are so different . like more carefree and . you laugh and you are like a totally different person when you have been on leave”

Making the change has proven difficult, however. First, Kati has been too exhausted again to think of career change at work and second, she is not willing to leave just to become unemployed as the job market is tight. With respect to the ability to make the change, she positions as “*a perfectionist*” who is a very conscientious and loyal person that respects “*education, work and doing your job well*”. This makes it difficult to get “*away from the rat race*” and look for your own thing as she wants to make sure she does her current job well. As she says, she wants to be able to “*respect*” herself. Claiming as “*a realist*” vis-à-vis the option of leaving the current employer to pursue her own interests is another position that is competing with the imagined career identity.

So to conclude, while Kati has a good idea of what she is like and what kind of environment would be more meaningful to her, she is at the same time pulled by her work ethic and the respect for a good job and career. It is the negotiation between these competing identity positions that she is situated within that keep identity struggles and the search for a change going. While she has tried to keep in mind “*what is important*” and adjust her approach to work, she still thinks “*that something else has to also give*”.

6.2 Changing careers, repositioning identities: resources, constraints, actions

In this section I summarize the results of the analysis of these women’s narrative accounts by considering the resources, constraints and actions influencing their identity work vis-à-vis the career transition (see table 4). In other words, how do the cultural resources and/or the agency of career changers empower and constrain identity repositioning and change? I also draw on the analysis of all the first-round interviews where relevant.

Identity work practices	Discursive resources & constraints
<i>Adopting a new career/professional identity position</i>	New career discourse (<i>resource</i> : possibility to change; <i>constraint</i> : the ideal of change, the authenticity imperative, individualization of career problems)
<i>Modifying existing identity positions</i>	Master narratives of career change Professional discourses
<i>Re-positioning identity conflicts</i>	Alternative discourses of identity (family, gender, age; special interest & hobbies; ideologies)

Table 4. Practices and resources of identity work in career transition over time

First, we can take a look at the master narratives of career change themselves available in this context. How do they constrain and enable people to adjust and change in their career transitions? As a resource, career change narrative presents an individualized strategy to deal with unexpected and undesired changes and disruptions in one's work. In this sense, it functions as a legitimizing resource as well as a source of empowerment. It offers a way for a person to distance themselves from the discourses in the field or profession, and to place some aspects of identity in the past. It also serves the imagining and experimenting with alternative identities (Ibarra, 1999) and new sources of meaning. Embedded in the new career discourse, career change narratives make career change desirable and question traditional career norms. In this sense, career change narratives as the cultural ideal offer a way to practice reflexivity in terms of evaluating one's life and career in more flexible ways. In Riitta's words: "*it is really quite wonderful that our attitudes have changed that people make these kinds of decision more and more*". In contrast to the linear and unbroken careers of the past ("*life as a tube*" – Riitta), the new careers and the acceptability of change offer a new kind of good flexibility, at least for people in position to do so.

The individualistic and heroic ideal of career change embedded in all of the narratives can also be limiting in glossing over the difficulties and constraints evident in such changes. Career change is not the easy option, neither is it necessarily always ideal. As a form of adjustment, career change, particularly when it involves re-education, is much more demanding as it often entails giving up some of the dearly held benefits

already gained as a result of the investments in a particular field. Although the benefits of career change for those who had achieved are quite clear, there were others who had resolved their original dilemmas through other means. Furthermore, in the cases where identity work was spurred by a career disruption, career change became a way to resist the negative practices at their places of work and to deal with their consequences. While it places the responsibility on the individual, it can also turn the transition into an unnecessarily arduous process.

The narrative of career change can also prove constraining when it asserts the search for authenticity, “*my thing*”, as the overriding norm and ideal. I have called this the authenticity imperative. While the theoretical framing of identity in this study questions the idea of a true self, it does not exclude the possibility of feeling authentic in some work, while not in others. The empirical evidence also supports this, as illustrated by Riitta and Sari and their sense of feeling at home in their new jobs. Sometimes, however, the search for authenticity keeps people “*trapped*”, as was the case with Maria before she found a solution. The romantic ideal of one true self, often translated in the context of career as “*my thing*”, may thus be a source of ongoing struggle, and prevents one from finding satisfaction via other possibilities. It is also important to point out that even the achievement of a sense of a homecoming involves contradictions and may result in new struggles. Sari, for example, while positioning perfectly congruent with her new professional identity, was already voicing concerns about her future career development. In Riitta’s case, although she does not emphasize them, the concerns were more material, as she had not yet got a permanent position. As for Maria, new identity struggles were emerging between career identity and that of a mother.

What about the resources and constraints of those who did not make a career change similar to the mismatch cases? Eila and Taina had both adjusted their career aspirations as Taina’s expression “*work is work*” well illustrates. For Eila, it is the discourse of age that was already evident in her identity work in the first interview. Although she was only 52 she was already facing problems due to her age. In fact, research has also shown that women may experience being too old in the context of work differently, and at an earlier chronological age, as men (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). By the second interview, this identity position as an older professional had become dominant, as Eila had also more experiences in looking for work. Although she does not recount any episode of direct harassment she interprets her difficulties in getting professional work through this position. It is a position that has been imposed on her that she both actively adopts and resists due to the embedded assumption that older workers would also

be incapable (Riach & Loretto, 2009). Her way of resistance is to emphasize her positioning as an experienced professional. However, she also actively adopts the position to account for her problems at work and her waning aspirations of finding work to match her professional competence. In this sense, as problems of re-employment are shared by others in a similar stage, positioning as an older worker has helped her adjust to the situation although she is by no means pleased with its consequences.

As to Taina, who had also given up on her aspirations for career development in the traditional sense, discourses of spirituality and religion offered new resources for her identity work. Since her career experiences had been so discontinuous and active career planning did not seem plausible, she no longer positioned as a career-oriented person. Within the discourse of religion/spirituality, career development is seen as an extrinsic issue and irrelevant to happiness and peace of mind. Therefore, it offers an alternative cultural resource for identity work in assigning meaning to career as simply work.

In contrast to Taina and Eila, Eeva, Johanna and Kati are still searching for change in their career, or a new framework. All of them had already made changes in the career, but the search for a better solution persisted. Eeva had become unemployed but studying for a PhD had provided her with new resources to assign meaning to her career. Beginning the studies served her identity work in strengthening her career identity positioning as a self-reliant, mobile expert in cultural differences. However, she distanced herself from researchers by positioning as a practice-oriented person and hence, her future career was still uncertain. As for Johanna, while her positioning as a controller was perhaps stronger than the previous time, she had now shifted her ambitions towards more managerial responsibilities. In other words, the discourses of management had emerged along with the discourse of profession as resources for identity. As the changes were slow in coming, she was also experimenting with a similar "*work is work*" attitude as Eila and Taina. She was using the discourses of balance and family as alternative sources of meaning in life, but so far, this had not resulted in any changes in her work practices. Kati's identity work was very similar to Johanna's in the sense that she was still doing the same work but continued to search for new directions. Moreover, she was also drawing on the discourse of balance and family in trying to distance herself from the career and work oriented identity. In contrast to Johanna, she was also actively engaging with new career options and drew on her interest in art and culture as ways to frame her career in a new fashion.

An important question that pertains to the possibilities of identity work and change is how one can acquire new cultural/discursive resources. That is why I have identified the *actions* the narrators report having taken during their transition and that play a role in their ability to reposition identities. In contrast to the analysis of identity work as a situated and performed phenomenon, these observations rely on a referential view of language with respect to the narrative accounts.

Firstly, all of the people in this study have positioned as potential career changers and have sought *career counseling* to get help with their change. This is of course the common dominator for almost all the participants of the study. The role of career counseling, however, varies across cases. In some cases, the narrator never mentions it and in others its role has been crucial (e.g. Sari). The main role of career counseling is to offer resources for identity work. Traditionally, however, career counseling has focused on methods of “know thyself” (Ibarra, 2003), in other words, personality tests and other forms of assessment. These provide knowledge about the client’s traits, skills, needs and desires, as well as information on types and places of work matching one’s qualities. From the discursive perspective, these kinds of practices actively construct knowledge about the self rather than simply representing pre-existing selves (Burr, 2003; Hollway, 1984a). However, counseling, and interviews, can also offer a space for reflection and an opportunity for identity work in narrating one’s career. Imagining possible selves is a form of identity play (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010) that is needed in order to engage with identity change.

Secondly, *training and education* offer new resources for identity work. It is one way to experiment with possible selves (Ibarra, 1999). The most obvious case here is Riitta who decided to get a university degree in a whole new field. Maria, in turn, was taking courses in social psychology and education at the Open University, which confirmed to her the direction she was heading. In fact, Riitta also started with the Open University and did her own reading to experiment with theology until it “*got so strong, to go do that which pulled me towards it so much*”. Johanna had taken a course in management, which seems to have offered her new resources in terms of the new positioning as someone oriented towards career progress in management. For Eila, the courses she had taken to upgrade her skills strengthened her identity as an accounting professional, while also giving her resources to position as a competent professional and downplaying the role of age. Moreover, having engaged with writing and taking courses in it, she claimed writing to be her “*identity*” while she was no longer interested in attempting to make it into a career at her age.

Thirdly, the simple practical action of *writing up a CV* and applying for a job in the field one is considering had proved important for Sari and Kati. Sari points this out explicitly when she had begun considering this area and had applied for a job advertised in the paper. While she did not get an interview, the writing of the application worked as a form of identity experimentation and construction of herself as a professional of that field. As for Kati, in my second interview with her, she offered a detailed description of the first job she had applied for in the culture and arts sector. It helped her position herself in the field and confirmed the direction where she wanted to go career-wise.

Fourthly, engagement with *non-work activities* can offer a source of new meaning to one's career. This shows most clearly in the case of Sari who made her long-time hobby and "*passion*" in wines into a new career. Participating in various practices outside of work may not necessarily lead to a career change but it can help in reinterpreting the meaning of career in one's life. In Taina's case, religion offered a new source of meaning that shifted her identity positioning in the career context, as did Chinese medicine for Eeva. For Johanna, during the first interview, kayaking became a source of enthusiasm in her life and impelled her to look for a similar sense of satisfaction and "*air*" in her career. Eila claimed writing to be her favorite pastime activity, which offered her a new source of identity although not in the context of career or paid employment. A similar point has been made by Tracy & Tretheway (2005) who recommended participation in uncustomary locations and situations in order to enrich identity work and see/construct different facets of the self.

Finally, it is important to point out the relationality of these processes via the role of *other people* as resources or constraints (Bosley, Arnold, & Cohen, 2009). Sometimes it is the other people, such as one's spouse and children and the material needs to provide for them, who are positioned as the constraints to making a desired change (eg. Risto). In the case of most of the mothers, the role of their relations is more of a constraint vis-à-vis the desire to invest more time and effort into one's career (Taina, Sanna, Eila, Sari, Riitta). While this was not a concern in the middle of the transition, it was an important factor in why these people explained being in such a transition in the first place. Interestingly, Tiina, who is also single mother, does not account any role to her motherhood in her career. Other people, such as parents, friends, colleagues or teachers are given an important role in either supporting or resisting the identities the narrators claim. Maria, for example, uses her parents' and her friends' comments from the times before her studies to position herself as a nice and emphatic person unsuited for business. Eeva, in turn, shows how her colleagues had

questioned her competence and suitability to the point that she wanted to make a career change. Friends and family members have also been used to discuss career change issues and make sense of who one is (e.g. Sari). Other people can also offer identity source as role models (Ibarra, 1999), as was the case of Eeva's host mother during her exchange study year.

To conclude this chapter, identity work in career transitions has evolved in a variety of ways in the cases studied. Only some intentions to change careers resulted in an adoption of new career identities, while in other cases identity was re-positioned or the work continued. Moreover, this study has shown that the intention to change careers is in itself identity work in order to deal with the changing conditions of one's career. Hence, actual career change may not always be the solution for such troubles at work. Identity work is needed, however, to deal with the identity conflicts and struggles at the heart of such transitions. Yet, even in the cases that did result in more significant change in identity and career, the process involved complexities, ambiguities and struggles. This is a result of the multiple positions and their conflicting conceptions of what is the right, moral thing to do. Changes do take place, however, and based on the cases in this study, such changes are best characterized as incremental, subtle shifts of positioning by engaging with new sources of meaning.

7 Endings and new beginnings

7.1 Findings: summary and evaluation

Summary

The purpose of this study has been to understand identity work in the context of non-institutionalized career transitions. I conducted narrative interviews with 12 business graduates in the middle of a career transition, wanting to make a career change. Moreover, I carried out follow-up interviews with eight women four years after the first round. So, what did I find?

In taking a cultural perspective on identity and careers, my first research question referred to the concept of career identity: in contrast to the dominant conceptualization of career identity as an internal construct, **how can we understand career identities as cultural, discursive phenomena?** I chose a narrative approach to identities due to the apparent similarities between the concepts of career and narrative as temporal concepts concerned with sequence. As a result of my explorations into discursive, constructionist and narrative identity studies, I conceptualized *career identity as a narrative practice of positioning that takes place in situated articulation and performance of career narratives* (LaPointe, 2010). The narrative practice of positioning means that identities (and careers) are always co-constructed at the level of interaction and the wider context via the discourses and narratives available for narrating careers. Given their reflexivity and particularities of past positioning along their life trajectories, individuals have agency in the form of identity work in taking up, adopting and modifying the identity positions available to them. While identity work is always contingent on the interaction and power relations, there is continuity through the habitual ways of positioning and having been positioned.

Based on this narrative and performative view of identity work and career identity, I analyzed my research materials and asked: **How do business graduates do identity work in narrating their career transition?** And more specifically: **what are the resources and constraints, in other words discourses, narratives and identity positions available for their identity work?** I found three practices of identity work in this context. Firstly, there is the practice of *positioning as a main character of a career change narrative*. The master narratives used to account for the transition are a resource for identity work in situating the narrator as a particular kind of career changer and actor. Within this sample, I also found three types of master narratives, which I labeled as *disruption, mismatch, and life renewal narratives*. All the narratives draw on new career discourses that construct the narrator as a self-reliant, adaptable, and proactive career changer. I showed how such gendered constructions of identity can be constraining and exclusionary in their emphasis on mobility and independence over more communal or relational understandings. However, career change narratives can also function as a resource for legitimization and empowerment of change. In addition, each narrative entails a particular plot vis-à-vis the need to change, as well as a construction of the main character. Whereas in the disruption narratives the past, valued career has been broken due to reasons beyond the narrator's control, in the mismatch narratives the focus is on finding a valued, authentic career and identity. For life renewal narratives, in turn, the reasons for the transition are accounted for by changes in personal life, such as becoming a certain age, new special interests, etc. Finally, each narrative enacts a specific virtue: while the virtue in the disruption narratives is resilience, in the mismatch narratives it is authenticity, and in life renewal narratives it is purposefulness.

The second practice of identity work involves the *temporal ordering of multiple identity positions*. This refers to a practice of drawing on not only work-related positions but also those situated in discourses of gender, age, family, special interest, or ideology. Moreover, positions are not simple categories based on group identities, but always articulated and crafted vis-à-vis the specific discursive resources at hand in a given situation, including the biographic particulars of the narrator. Most importantly in the context of career transition, this practice refers to the temporal ordering of these positions to account for the need to change. In other words, some positions are narrated as being in the past and others more relevant in the present, while also experimenting with imagined future identities.

The third practice of identity work is about *negotiating identity conflicts*. These conflicts are a result of conflicting and competing positions in the

transitions. These may be positions that the narrator has adopted but finds incompatible, or they may be imposed by others, or ones to which the narrator feels an obligation. Each position is situated within a specific discourse and the associated conceptions of what good careers, lives and identities entail. Hence, I argued for a locally and culturally situated view of identity work in career transitions as moral negotiation and struggle.

In the follow-up study, I interviewed eight women four years after the initial interviews. The research question guiding the analysis of these narrative accounts was: **How does identity positioning in career transitions change over time? What are the practices, resources and constraints for such change?** The first practice of re-positioning identity was *adopting new professional/career identities*. Of the eight women, three constructed new identity positions in their accounts. Another practice of repositioning was *modifying existing identity positions*. This was the case for two women who had given up on the idea of career change and adjusted their career aspirations by drawing on alternative sources of identity (e.g. religion and age). Third, there was the practice of re-positioning identity conflicts. Three of the women were still looking for a change, but based on their new experiences were re-positioning themselves vis-à-vis the need for change.

Considering the resources and constraints for change, the new career discourse and the master narratives of career change embedded in it were both a source of empowerment as well as a constraint. As a resource they legitimize and make change acceptable while as a constraint they idealize change as an individualized strategy for dealing with the problems at work and depict their norms about careers as taken-for-granted truths. Finally, to acquire new cultural resources for identity work and change the women in this study had taken a variety of actions: career counseling, education, applying for jobs and writing CV's, engaging with new non-work practices (hobbies, spirituality, etc.), and talking with others.

Evaluation

How can we evaluate the credibility and relevance of these results and the knowledge produced in this study? If one uses narratives in the realist tradition, it becomes necessary to establish a correspondence of the facts discovered within a study to that of reality "outside the data". Since this is a constructionist, narrative study, what I have offered here as findings can best be described as situated "truths" (Riessman, 2008) or a re-contextualization (Czarniawska, 2004) of the hows and whats of identity work in career transitions. The results and the knowledge constructed are situated in many senses of the word. First, they are situated in terms of the

context, in other words Finnish business graduates and professionals who were in a middle of a career transition, and the discursive resources they have available. Second, they are situated in terms of the specificities of the interactional occasions where the research material was produced, namely the narrative interviews. Third, the theoretical and cultural resources that I have used to analyze and interpret the research materials are another way to situate the findings. Finally, this study needs to be evaluated as interpretative and constructionist research. From this perspective, it is not really relevant to ask whether the narratives told in the interviews correspond to events that “really happened” (Riessman, 2008). Each narrative is a situated articulation from a specific point of view, and what matters more is the meanings and how they are constructed in the narrative.

Narrative and feminist researchers rarely make a claim of generalizing the narratives to wider populations (Chase, 2005). Rather, the aim is to offer experiences and narratives that prove interesting to earlier assumptions (Oinas, 2004). It has also been argued that narrative research needs to be understood as a form of case-centered analysis (Riessman, 2008) that aims to offer rich descriptions of linguistic detail. In fact, most narrative research, such as the study here, relies on a rather small number of cases. Each narrative is always particular to the teller and to the interactional features of the situation: hence, the range of narrative possibilities is potentially limitless (Chase, 2005). Although the narratives themselves are always particular, I have also searched for patterns across them primarily at the level of the *hows* of doing identity. The practices of identity work and the three types of career change narratives count as such findings. The practices they engage in may also have relevance across other contexts and tell us something about the way business graduates, and perhaps other professionals, do their identity in such transitions. Yet, the content of the stories and the variety of identity positions would always be specific to the particularities of the lives studied as well as their contexts. For example, class would make a difference to the kinds of resources – master narratives and discourse – available for identity work. In this study, such differences were not analyzed; they were not apparent as the people that participated in this study seemed homogeneous in this respect. This is probably due to the education of the participants as well as the research design: career counseling might be a typically middle class service.

Another aspect of trustworthiness in evaluating this study is the correspondence of my own interpretations. To establish the trustworthiness of the knowledge I have constructed here, I have carefully spelled out the theoretical and methodological choices I have made along the way,

considered alternative views, and argued for the benefits of my choices. In terms of the empirical material, I have wanted to bring as many direct quotes and transcripts as possible in order to bring the voices of the interviewees onto these pages. In light of the discursive approach I have chosen, words and articulations are very important indexicals for identity. Moreover, in emphasizing narration as an interactional performance I have included all my utterances in the analysis and offered detailed transcriptions for readers to judge. While this may have weakened their readability, this has been a way to bring the lived reality of the interview contexts and the narrators as speaking bodies on these pages.

I do not claim to interpret my research participants narratives with an authoritative voice defining their careers and lives. Neither do I claim to have somehow gazed upon their souls to find something they had omitted. There is no one correct reading of these people's experiences and narratives. What I do claim to have done is to identify the kinds of cultural practices and resources they are drawing on in positioning their identities. Since the analytical lenses that I have used in this work have not necessarily been available to the narrators, I have been able to produce novel interpretations of their experiences by making visible underlying assumptions and practices that are usually taken-for-granted or implicit in career narration (Chase, 2005).

Czarniawska (2004) has argued that social science needs to reach outside its own circles in order to matter more in the life of contemporary societies. Instead of asking "is it valid?", 'is it reliable?' or even 'is it Science?', we need to ask 'is it interesting?', 'is it relevant?', 'is it beautiful?'" (p. 136). One important question regarding the relevance of this study concerns the doing of identity in an interview situation vs. other contexts. How does this knowledge pertain to any other interview or non-interview situations? Would these people be positioning the way they do if such accounts were not elicited as was the case in the interviews? As I have argued in Chapters 2 and 3, while doing identity is always particular to its embodied narrating, there is continuity in positioning. Moreover, telling career stories is similar to life stories (Linde, 1993) in the way that it occurs quite widely in a variety of contexts and hence, we can draw some reliable connections between narratives told in an interview and those told in other situations. Therefore, the findings of this study should also have relevance for understanding identity work in other contexts as well.

Further, in terms of interest, relevance, and beauty I hope that these narratives resonate with readers and show the variety of ways of constructing careers and identities. While I have attempted to show the situatedness of our careers and the role of power in the kinds of career

narratives people can tell, I have also wanted to point to the possibilities of agency and change at the level of identity work. Albeit limited by the master narratives available, there are a variety of ways careers may be narrated and hence, there is always the possibility to reflect on one's career from another angle and to imagine otherwise. I do not wish to encourage unnecessary navel-gazing but still, it is important to occasionally reflect on how one is habitually situated amidst competing narratives of career and life. As my study indicates, we may be able to make only subtle shifts, even in the more reflexive re-positioning along our trajectories. Yet, they will always need to make sense in the context of some common conceptualizations of what a good career/life looks like.

Finally, this study needs to be evaluated in terms of my treatment of the interviewees. In the interest of engaging them as active participants, I have used an interviewing method that gives them as much freedom as possible to consider topics of relevance, and as discussed in section 3.1 also gave them the opportunity to comment on this final text as well as the transcripts. Moreover, I shared the initial findings of the study with the eight women that I was able to interview for the second time and hoped to be able to give additional resources for their identity work. I was also happy to hear the comments of some who welcomed the opportunity to reflect on these issues.

7.2 Contributions and implications

In this section, I situate my findings in the context of prior research and suggest the contributions this study makes to our understanding of identity work and/or career transitions. The main theoretical contribution of this study is the re-conceptualization of career identity work as narrative practice of moral positioning. Based on this view and in empirically identifying specific practices and resources of such identity work in the context of career transitions, this study contributes to the discussion on the processes of identity construction and work in career transitions. However, this study also contributes to studies of career transitions and identity work more broadly and hence I will discuss its contributions and implications in light of relevant discussions. I also consider the implications of this study to individuals who may be struggling with similar identity conflicts as the participants of this study.

Career identity and identity work as a narrative practice of positioning across multiple sources of identity

For career studies, this study brings a cultural re-conceptualization of career identity as a narrative practice of positioning, and a methodological approach with which to study it. While the importance of career identity in the context of changing careers has often been acknowledged (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Fugate et al., 2004; D. T. Hall, 2002), the concept itself has remained underexplored. In contrast to the dominant notions of identity as a rather fixed and internal construct, something one has, I have proposed to see it as an ongoing practice of co-construction, something we do. This approach not only situates identities within diverse historic and socio-cultural contexts, but also takes into account the local, interactional contexts of their construction. Whereas previous research on career identity has often taken a functionalist approach and measured career identity in the form of individual dispositions, the approach used here shifts the focus to the practices, resources, and constraints in a given context. Such understanding of career identity provides a way to situate the individual, and better understand the embeddedness of career experiences and identity work.

As a narrative approach, this re-conceptualization offers a way to capture the temporal nature of career identities and the maintenance of continuity (Linde, 1993) as well as the richness and ambiguities of lived experiences (Riessman, 2008). In this sense, it builds on, and contributes to, the development of constructionist and narrative approaches. While such approaches have attracted some interest among career scholars in psychology and counseling (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Collin, 2007; Richardson, 2004) contribution from management and organization studies have been rather rare. Among the most interesting exceptions include Christine Coupland's discourse analytical work on early phases of career (Coupland, 2001; Coupland, 2004), and the work by Laurie Cohen and her colleagues on career stories as a methodological tool (Cohen & Mallon, 2001), on the relevance of social constructionism for career studies (Cohen et al., 2004) and on career narratives as cultural processes and practices (Cohen, 2006).

Compared to earlier narrative approaches, however, this approach places identity as the key conceptual link between individuals, narratives, and wider contexts and offers specific conceptual and methodological tools to study the role of the person and agency. While the psychological view of individuals as autonomous subjects is questioned, individual agency is theorized through the reflexive capacity of embodied beings to negotiate identity positions with the resources and constraints they have available as

a result of their past trajectories. The specification of the role of the person offers an alternative view of the particularities and continuities in career identity and career, not because of enduring individual characteristics, but because of habitual, rehearsed positioning (S. Taylor, 2005; S. Taylor, 2006). As a result, it is possible to study in more detail the ways, such as the practices of identity work identified in this study, that individuals may negotiate their identities vis-à-vis the activities and events with relevance to their careers. Such occasions may range from the increasingly frequent involuntary and voluntary career transitions to daily activities at work when one is faced with decisions that influence how one's career may evolve in the future.

In particular, this conceptualization of identity work contributes to the stream of literature that combines identity work and career transitions (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Pratt et al., 2006). These earlier contributions have shown the importance and relevance of identity work in various role transitions across the life course. However, they assume an essentialist view of identity and do not pay similar attention to the situated construction of identities, even though the role of narratives has been noted (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). For example, Ibarra & Barbulescu (2010) have developed a functional model to predict the prevalence, effectiveness and consequences of identity work in role transitions. Their model also theorizes the dynamics of identity work in considering how the self-narratives evolve in career transitions and the means by which they lead to enduring and coherent changes in the narrative repertoire. In other words, the model builds on the idea of identity as a narrative that a person has and works on. In contrast, this study takes into account the situated performance and co-construction of identity via the concept of positioning. Moreover, it does not attempt to model the processes of adaptation and identity work over time but offers situated understandings of the practices and dilemmas of identity work. In this sense, the empirical findings further specify the nature of identity work in terms of the practices and resources identified in the context of the study. In particular, this study shows the moral aspect of identity work which I will discuss in further detail.

Finally, this approach to identity work also has relevance to studies of identity work in organizational contexts. This is a burgeoning and inspiring field of literature that aims to understand the processes of how individuals craft their identities in the face of the various contradictory and ambiguous conditions and experiences at work and in organizations (Alvesson et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In embracing a broader view of the sources of identity positioning, the approach to identity work as a narrative

practice joins other contributions that have paid attention to the variety of discourses influencing identities in work contexts, such as gender, profession, age, and ethnicity (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Thomas & Linstead, 2002) and affirms the need to look at the varied resources in the context of whole lives (T. J. Watson, 2009). As Halford & Leonard (2005) have argued, the specific contexts of everyday lives across space and time influence the diverse, complex and multiple ways agency can be enacted in the context of organizational and managerial discourses. For future studies of identity work, this approach provides an alternative, detailed conceptualization of identity work and a methodological approach that addresses the temporal and local situatedness of such work.

Career transitions as gendered, moral struggles of identity

Considering the empirical findings of this study, this study contributes to existing studies of career transitions, particularly those that are unpredictable and non-institutionalized. Instead of focusing on the retrospective accounts of the reasons for such non-institutionalized transitions per se (Mallon, 1998; Mallon & Cohen, 2001), this study has been situated in the liminal middle period of career transition, which has rarely been studied before. As a result, I have been able to capture transitions that may never turn into any perceivable changes of career, but that are likely more prevalent than actual career changes. The examination of such transitions in this study showed how accounting for the need to change careers is part of identity work. Most importantly, it showed how it serves the purpose of dealing with the various predicaments of working life without the need to actually change careers.

The main contribution of the findings relating to career transitions is a new, culturally and locally situated understanding of such transitions as moral negotiations and struggles of identity. The analysis of the practices of identity work showed the multiple positions in which people are situated and how the contradictions between some of them resulted in identity conflicts that needed to be negotiated. These findings have been made possible with the narrative approach since narratives are always involved with an evaluation of the self, including its morality. While prior research has also studied such identity conflicts and change, it has focused on clarifying how people tailor or manage existing role identities to the demands of the new (Ibarra, 1999; Komulainen, 1998; Pratt et al., 2006). As a result of the focus in the liminal phases of transitions, possible new identities did not exist, neither was identity work focused on mere role identities. All the identity positions relevant for the identity struggle were adopted in the present, although some of them were attempted to be placed

in the past. Therefore, instead of viewing the conflicts in terms old and new, or personal and organizational, this study shows how they are struggles between conflicting identity positions that are situated in particular practices and moral orders with their differing norms and values.

This study has also contributed to the understanding of the gendered nature of such moral identity struggles. In most cases, gender played a role either in the form of identity positions situated in gendered discourses (e.g. masculine managerial discourse), in gender identities or in past gendered identity positions (motherhood). The gendered identities resulted in moral struggles for both men and women as they negotiated the contradictions between these positions (e.g. breadwinner vs. balance, woman vs. manager, mother vs. career-oriented). The view of career transitions as gendered, moral struggles points to the role of the various conflicting positions and their embeddedness in different moral orders in dealing with such transitions, and in attempting to change careers. However, some of these conflicts may not be resolvable at the individual level, due to the hegemonic status of some of the narratives and discourses.

Finally, considering the implications of this view of identity work in career transitions as a moral struggle, what is the role of authenticity in such an understanding? As this study has shown, the ideal of authenticity and the dichotomy of real and fake selves, particularly in narratives of mismatch, is still alive and well in the everyday understandings of our selves, as also demonstrated in other studies (Collinson, 2003; Costas & Fleming, 2009; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). The question of real and fake selves is particularly pertinent in the context of work and organizations because identity has become an important managerial concern (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Even if we question the essentialist idea of a real, authentic self as a product of the historically situated discourses, such as Romanticism, we cannot ignore the relevance and practical effects such an ideal has for people and their actions (Costas & Fleming, 2009). Authenticity matters. A sense of incongruence between selves placed as more “real” and authentic and those that are possible or demanded at work has symbolic and material consequences to people. If the selves available in our culture are too essentialist and rigid, it increases the insecurities and anxieties that the conflicting identity positions may cause. Moreover, those who cannot align their identities with those expected at work are deprived of many opportunities, privileges and material rewards.

If there is no authentic self, is the search for real and authentic self simply an illusion that misguides identity work in career transitions? Based on the findings of this study, authenticity itself is a virtue and a moral ideal. As such, it is a product of the Romantic period (in the 19th century) and based

on the assumption that the source of our morals can be found in an inner voice. Hence, it is necessary to be in touch with, and true to, this inner self and resist outward pressures to conformity:

Being true to my self means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment or self-realization in which it is usually couched. This is the background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialized forms. This is what gives sense to the idea of “doing your own thing” or “finding your own fulfillment”. (C. Taylor, 1991: 29)

Rather than viewing the search for authenticity as a narcissist, self-indulging endeavor of looking for an assumed one true self, Taylor (1991) has argued that it should be seen as a moral responsibility. As the findings of this study illustrate, one’s “own thing” or identities can be authentic only in reference to some horizons of significance. In other words, authenticity and identity can only be deemed meaningful dialogically in relations and practices with others within specific social and cultural contexts. This idea is embedded within the theoretical understanding of identity in this study, more specifically, in the concept of positioning. Identities can be constructed only with the positions available and accepted in one’s culture, even though positioning allows for individual agency. From this perspective, there may be not one but many authentic identities. The sense of inauthenticity the narrators construct in this study would thus not mean a mismatch between a true real self and a fake self, but a conflict between some positions one has adopted/been positioned within that may be authentic in some respects while not in others. As Tracy and Tretheway (2005) have shown, the sense of authenticity emerges from the constellations of discourses that seem to best resonate with one’s biographical experiences and a given context.

This kind of understanding of authenticity acknowledges its role in identity work, while attempting to redefine its meaning in a non-essentialist fashion. As Tracy and Tretheway (2005) have proposed, we need an alternative vocabulary for articulating authenticity in order to overcome the dichotomy of real and authentic vs. fake and inauthentic selves and the problems they cause (unnecessary career changes, rigid conformity to some identities, constant concern with achieving ideal identities, etc). They suggest the metaphor of a “*crystallized self*” (p. 186) as an everyday linguistic alternative to the real self vs. fake self dichotomy. It emphasizes the multidimensionality of the self and the different shapes it takes depending on the contexts and discourses of its emergence. In this sense, it shows that identities are not only the making of the individual but also a

product of power relations in organizations and in society at large. I propose that the concept of identity as a practice of positioning and the multiplicity of positions it involves offers a similar way to talk about many facets of identities and their co-production. In addition, it allows for a more dynamic view of the fluctuating conditions and its practices.

Identity work over time: subtle shifts

How does this study contribute to our knowledge of change in identity work and careers? When identity is understood as a narrative or a big story (Freeman, 2006) and narratives as representations of identity, such issues of change, continuity and coherence are not problematic. Researchers of small stories (Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006b), or narratives as performance and interaction (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006a; Peterson & Langellier, 2006), in turn, focus on identities as always situational and temporary. Such approaches rarely address the issue of why people invest in certain positions and why there is continuity in identity positioning. While I have not sought answers to such questions in this study, I have addressed this in the theoretical formulation of identity. In line with Davies & Harré (1990), Taylor (2005; 2006) and Taylor & Littleton (2006) I have described this process as one of habit, repetition, and rehearsal. In other words, we never start afresh when doing identity, but rely on the past biographical resources to position ourselves. The findings of this study, based on the longitudinal material, give support to this view as many of the positions adopted remained the same, even if their articulation was different.

The findings also contribute to our understanding of how identity positioning changes in career transitions. I have argued that this can best be described as a process of subtle shifts. First, in many cases career transitions were not about leaving past identities behind and forming new but adopting new resources to adjust prior positioning. This is similar to the findings of Pratt et al.'s (2006) longitudinal study, which showed the various practices of customization that medical residents engaged with in tailoring their past identities formed during their studies to fit the demands of the workplace. However, as my study was focused on a different type of career transition, identity work was more varied due to the multiple identity positions that the business graduates drew on. Moreover, this study shows how these shifts did not always stem from work-related identities but drew on discourses of gender, family, ideology or special interests.

Such subtle shifts serve to problematize the protean ideals and assumptions in the new career discourse. Change involves struggle and negotiation between competing conceptualizations of what is good and

right. Moreover, changes seem gradual and subtle. In particular, these findings challenge the protean ideal of flexible, mobile and adaptable heroes of the new career discourse. While flexibility is certainly welcome in light of the traditional exclusionary career norms, the new career discourse seems to reproduce new norms while ignoring the various constraints involved. An understanding of the everyday struggles and how they are situated is thus called for. However, there are also possibilities for change and agency at the level of identity work as a means to deal with various transitions and struggles at work. It is at the intersections of multiple sources of identity across whole lives that such possibilities may be located. In showing the sources of change that stem from non-organizational contexts, these findings may also have relevance for studies of identity work in organizations.

Career change: a reflexive, narrative quest of “knowing thy situated selves”

Finally, I would like to consider the practical relevance of these results for those grappling with career struggles. In her popular book, based on research on voluntary career change, Herminia Ibarra (Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Lineback, 2005) has challenged the conventional view of making a career change. While the old adage calls for “knowing thy self”, she emphasizes the idea of working identity. Instead of thinking about one’s qualities, personality traits, values, and desires and matching career options, she urges people to experiment with new identities, for example, by engaging with new projects and people. While I certainly believe these recommendations would be useful, I do not intend to propose any such strategies here. In contrast, my findings point to the need to emphasize the ways such projects are always constrained by the variety of discourses and narratives imposed on us. Although a less prominent aspect of the study, but one yet recognized among the business graduates I interviewed, the material conditions of our lives always play a big role in transitions. Nevertheless, I would like to consider briefly what implications the findings of my study may have for people in transitions similar to those of the people I studied.

While the dominant model of career change is based on the idea of an autonomous, rational, and choosing individual with particular psychological properties, I suggest viewing careers and transitions as a culturally situated, relational process of negotiating and positioning identities. In practice, rather than dwelling on “thy self” this calls for reflexivity in terms of understanding how your assumptions, values and norms in making sense of your career and life stem from a variety of

cultural sources. As MacIntyre (1981) has argued, one needs to ask oneself in which narratives one has ended up. We have a history of being part of certain communities and practices in which we need to situate our choices. This means a shift away from assuming one true career identity towards an understanding of how identities are products of larger practices in various organizations and institutions. “Know thy selves situated” would capture this idea the best. In this respect, I hope that this study makes a contribution in offering resources for such a reflexive practice of identity work in the context of careers.

Since our identities are situated in various cultural practices and influence how we can even think about things, it becomes difficult to see otherwise. We keep reproducing these practices, often without realizing it. Yet, at the intersections of various practices, or aspects of our lives, reflexivity and change may become possible. The findings of this study show how the business graduates engaged with various activities in order to change their careers or adjust their existing approach to their career, such as education, hobbies, religion, CV writing, etc. Although these are all actions that one can take, this does not mean that it is an individual endeavor. It is by engaging with alternative cultural narratives and practices that we may subtly shift our positioning. It is a narrative quest for the good career (or good life) (MacIntyre, 1981) within the narratives and moral orders sustained by the communities and practices we participate in.

7.3 Towards new beginnings

As I have shown and argued in this study, talk and narratives about career change seem to be more common than actual changes. To better understand the variety of experiences of career transitions, more research should be conducted beyond retrospective studies of career change as these may cover only a fraction of experienced transitions. Rather, we should try to catch people in action, so to speak. Moreover, the majority of research on career transitions has focused on institutionalized career transitions, such as promotion (Ibarra, 1999), or career entry (Coupland, 2001; Pratt et al., 2006). In such cases, identity work involves tailoring the existing sense of self into the expectations of a new role. In the context of contemporary careers, however, non-institutionalized career transitions have become a frequent experience. Identity work on such occasions is less structured than in intra-organizational transitions, which are often facilitated with practices such as mentoring and training. Hence, in order to broaden our understandings of the nature of identity work in transitions, we need

studies that focus more on transitions as lived experiences regardless of the kind of changes they result in.

Even though a focus on identity work recognizes the role of the person as an active agent, research on identity work should not be seen as an individual level project. To better understand career transitions and change, more research is needed on the cultural resources and constraints conditioning thinking about such transitions. This study has offered only a glimpse of what these resources have been among mostly female Finnish business graduates who had sought career counseling to help them deal with their situations. I have relied on prior research to identify these resources while I also identified new ones: the master narratives of career change. Other studies of identity construction in transitions could focus on identifying resources for identity work in specific organizational, occupational, and professional settings. Although I certainly do not want to devalue the struggles these business graduates have lived with, they are nevertheless a privileged group with the kind of resources they have, compared for example, with non-educated or blue-collar workers. Yet, identity work is not only the privilege or problem of professionals.

In addition to examining the situated processes of career transitions, another fruitful direction for studies of identity work in such transitions is to better understand specific conditions of contemporary work. Such studies could provide an alternative lens to the struggles and constraints people face in attempting to maintain their sense of self along the increasing regulation of identities in organizations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Fournier, 1998). Prior research has already identified and focused on various identity struggles and tactics such as dis-identification and self-alienation (Costas & Fleming, 2009), conforming (Collinson, 2003), and strategized sub-ordination in order to realize preferred organizational identities (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005), or compartmentalization and faking common in marginal, subservient work, such as in dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Focusing on people who want to change careers can offer new insights as to how to promote work and careers that allow for multiple identities, a sense of authenticity, and possibilities for “good” careers. Future studies could also provide alternative narratives and vocabularies for thinking and enacting diverse and sustainable careers. Such careers would not only benefit the lived experiences of individuals, but could offer a source of renewal for organizations and the society at large.

For future studies on identity work, this study suggests a closer examination of the various sources of identity relevant to work contexts and their intersectionality. In this study, I took a closer look at gender and its role in identity work in the context of career. Other studies could use

similarly pervasive and often exclusionary markers of identity, such as ethnicity and age, and their role in career transitions as a relevant lens with which to examine the lived experiences of work and careers. Moreover, we need to contextualize identity work across multiple spaces and times of the lived experiences of those we study. A focus on career perspective with a narrative approach used here offers one such alternative. While not without its limitations due to its sometimes rigid reification as progress in hierarchy or status, a career perspective allows one to consider people not only as employees of an organization or as members of a profession, but as persons with whole lives and diverse resources of identity. As a result, it may broaden our view of what good careers entail and how to make subtle shifts towards better work lives.

References

- Abbott, H. P. (2002). *The Cambridge introduction to narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139-158.
- Alasuutari, P. (1997). The discursive construction of personality. In A. Lieblich, & R. Josselson (Eds.), *The narrative study of lives, volume 5* (pp. 1-20). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Alestalo, M. (2007). Rakennemuutokset ja sukupolvet. *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka*, 72(2), 146-157.
- Alvesson, M. (1998). Gender relations and identity at work: A case study of masculinities and femininities in an advertising agency. *Human Relations*, 51(8), 969-1005.
- Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, K. L., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization*, 15(1), 5-28.
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619-644.
- Arnold, J., & Cohen, L. (2008). The psychology of careers in industrial and organizational settings: A critical but appreciative analysis. In G. P. Hodgkinson, & J. K. Ford (Eds.), *International review of industrial and organizational psychology. vol. 23*. (pp. 1-44). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Arthur, M. B. (1994). The boundaryless career: A new perspective for organizational inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(4), 295-306.
- Arthur, M. B. (2008). Examining contemporary careers: A call for interdisciplinary inquiry. *Human Relations*, 61(2), 163-186.
- Arthur, M. B., Claman, P. H., & Defillippi, R. J. (1995). Intelligent enterprise, intelligent careers. *Academy of Management Executive*, 9(4), 7-20.
- Arthur, M. B., Hall, D. T., & Lawrence, B. S. (1989). Generating new directions in career theory: The case for a transdisciplinary approach. In M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall & B. S. Lawrence (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory* (pp. 7-25). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arthur, M. B., Inkson, K., & Pringle, J. K. (1999). *The new careers: Individual action and economic change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (Eds.). (1996). *The boundaryless career: A new employment principle for a new organizational era*. New York, NY: Oxford University press.
- Ashcraft, K. L. (2006). Back to work. Sights/sites of difference in gender and organizational communication studies. In B. J. Dow, & J. T. Wood (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of gender and communication* (pp. 97-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ashforth, B. E. (2001). *Role transitions in organizational life: An identity-based perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Elbaum Associates, Inc.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Fugate, M. (2001). Role transitions and the life span. In B. E. Ashforth (Ed.), *Role transitions in organizational life: An identity-based perspective* (pp. 225-258). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Elbaum Associates.

- Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management*, 34(3), 325-374.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Kreiner, G. E. (1999). "How can you do it?": Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 413-434.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(1), 20-39.
- Atkinson, P., & Silverman, D. (1997). Kundera's immortality: The interview society and the invention of the self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 304-325.
- Bamberg, M. (2004). Positioning with Davie Hogan: Stories, tellings, and identities. In C. Daiute, & C. Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society* (pp. 135-157). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Bamberg, M. (2006). Stories: Big or small - why do we care? *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 139-147.
- Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk*, 28(3), 377-396.
- Barley, S. (1989). Careers, identities and institutions. In M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall & B. S. Lawrence (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory* (pp. 41-65). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Barley, S., & Kunda, G. (2001). Bringing work back in. *Organization Science*, 12(1), 76-95.
- Barry, J., Berg, E., & Chandler, J. (2006). Academic shape shifting: Gender, management and identities in Sweden and England. *Organization*, 13(2), 1350-5084.
- Bauman, Z. (1995). *Life in fragments: Essays in postmodern morality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Beech, N., MacIntosh, R., & McInnes, P. (2008). Identity work: Processes and dynamics of identity formations. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 31(9), 957-970.
- Benwell, B., & Stokoe, E. (2006). *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Blustein, D. L., Schultheiss, D. E. P., & Flum, H. (2004). Toward a relational perspective of the psychology of careers and working: A social constructionist analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 423-440.
- Boje, D. M. (2001). *Narrative methods for organizational and communication research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Bosley, S. L. C., Arnold, J., & Cohen, L. (2009). How other people shape our careers: A typology drawn from career narratives. *Human Relations*, 62(10), 1487-1520.
- Briscoe, J. P., & Hall, D. T. (2006). The interplay of boundaryless and protean careers: Combinations and implications. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(1), 4-18.
- Brubaker, R., & Cooper, F. (2000). Beyond "identity". *Theory and Society*, 29(1), 1-47.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1-21.
- Bruni, A., Gherardi, S., & Poggio, B. (2004). Doing gender, doing entrepreneurship: An ethnographic account of intertwined practices. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11(4), 406-429.

- Bujold, C. (2004). Constructing career through narrative. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 470-484.
- Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism* (2nd ed.). London, New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism, and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Buzzanell, P. M., & Lucas, K. (2006). Gendered stories of career. unfolding discourses of time, space, and identity. In B. J. Dow, & J. T. Wood (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of gender and communication* (pp. 161-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 651-679). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cochran, L. R. (1990). Narrative as a paradigm for career research. In R. A. Young, & W. A. Borgen (Eds.), *Methodological approaches to the study of career* (pp. 71-86). New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.
- Cohen, L. (2006). Remembrance of things past: Cultural process and practice in the analysis of career stories. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(2), 189-201.
- Cohen, L., Duberley, J., & Mallon, M. (2004). Social constructionism in the study of career: Accessing the parts that other approaches cannot reach. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 407-422.
- Cohen, L., & Mallon, M. (1999). The transition from organisational employment to portfolio working: Perceptions of 'boundarylessness'. *Work, Employment & Society*, 13(2), 329-352.
- Cohen, L., & Mallon, M. (2001). My brilliant career? Using stories as a methodological tool in careers research. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 31(3), 48-68.
- Collin, A. (2007). Contributions and challenges to vocational psychology from other disciplines: Examples from narrative and narratology. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 7(3), 159-167.
- Collinson, D. L. (2003). Identities and insecurities: Selves at work. *Organization*, 10(3), 527-547.
- Collinson, D. L., & Hearn, J. (1994). Naming men as men: Implications for work, organization and management. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 1(1), 2-22.
- Costas, J., & Fleming, P. (2009). Beyond dis-identification: A discursive approach to self-alienation in contemporary organizations. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 353-378.
- Coupland, C. (2001). Accounting for change: A discourse analysis of graduate trainees' talk of adjustment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(8), 1103-1119.
- Coupland, C. (2004). Career definition and denial: A discourse analysis of graduate trainees' accounts of career. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 515-532.
- Coupland, C. (2008). Identities and interviews. In A. Pullen, N. Beech, & D. Sims (Eds.), *Exploring identity: concepts and methods* (pp. 274-287). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Crossley, M. (2003). Formulating narrative psychology: The limitations of contemporary social constructionism. *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 287-300.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2003). Reflexive inquiry in organizational research: Questions and possibilities. *Human Relations*, 56(8), 983-1003.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2008). Orientations to social constructionism: Relationally responsive social constructionism and its implications for knowledge and learning. *Management Learning*, 39(2), 123-139.

- Czarniawska, B. (2004). *Narratives in social science research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Dany, F. (2003). 'Free actors' and organizations: Critical remarks about the new career literature, based on French insights. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(5), 821-838.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20, 43-65.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harré, & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 32-52). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Day Sclater, S. (2003). What is the subject? *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 317-330.
- De Fina, A. (2009). Narratives in interview - the case of accounts. *Narrative Inquiry*, 19(2), 233-258.
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Analysing narratives as practices. *Qualitative Research*, 8(3), 379-387.
- De Fina, A., Schiffrin, D., & Bamberg, M. (2006). Introduction. In A. De Fina, D. Schiffrin & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and identity. studies in interactional sociolinguistics* 23. (pp. 1-23). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Down, S., & Reveley, J. (2009). Between narration and interaction: Situating first-line supervisor identity work. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 379-401.
- Dreier, O. (2009). Persons in structures of social practice. *Theory & Psychology*, 19(2), 193-212.
- Driver, M. (2009). Encountering the arugula leaf: The failure of the imaginary and its implications for research on identity in organizations. *Organization*, 16(4), 487-504.
- Duberley, J., Cohen, L., & Mallon, M. (2006). Constructing scientific careers: Change, continuity and context. *Organization Studies*, 27(8), 1131-1151.
- Duncan, C., & Loretto, W. (2004). Never the right age? Gender and age-based discrimination in employment. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11(1), 95-115.
- Dyer, S., & Humphries, M. (2002). Normalising workplace change through contemporary career discourse. *Advances in Mental Health*, 1(3), 158-169.
- Eriksson, P., & Kovalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative methods in business research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Essers, C. (2009). Reflections on the narrative approach: Dilemmas of power, emotions and social location while constructing life-stories. *Organization*, 16(2), 163-181.
- Essers, C., & Benschop, Y. (2009). Muslim businesswomen doing boundary work: The negotiation of Islam, gender and ethnicity within entrepreneurial contexts. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 403-423.
- Evetts, J. (1994). Career and motherhood in engineering: Cultural dilemmas and individualistic solutions. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 3(2), 177-185.
- Ezzy, D. (2010). Qualitative interviewing as an embodied emotional performance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(3), 163-170.
- Faulkner, W. (2000). Dualisms, hierarchies and gender in engineering. *Social Studies of Science*, 30(5), 759-792.
- Faulkner, W. (2007). 'Nuts and bolts and people'. gender-troubled engineering identities. *Social Studies of Science*, 37(3), 331-356.

- Fine, G. A. (1996). Justifying work: Occupational rhetorics as resources in restaurant kitchens. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41(1), 90-115.
- Fondas, N. (1996). Feminization at work: Career implications. In M. B. Arthur, & D. M. Rousseau (Eds.), *The boundaryless career: A new employment principle for a new organizational era* (pp. 282-293). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. New York: NY: Pantheon.
- Fournier, V. (1998). Stories of development and exploitation: Militant voices in an enterprise culture. *Organization*, 5(1), 55-80.
- Fournier, V., & Grey, C. (1999). Too much, too little and too often: A critique of du Gay's analysis of enterprise. *Organization*, 6(1), 107-128.
- Freeman, M. (2003). Identity and difference in narrative inquiry: A commentary on the articles by Erica Burman, Michelle Crossley, Ian Parker, and Shelley Sclater. *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 331-346.
- Freeman, M. (2006). Life "on holiday"? In defense of big stories. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 131-138.
- Frost, N. (2009). 'Do you know what I mean?': The use of a pluralistic narrative analysis approach in the interpretation of an interview. *Qualitative Research*, 9(1), 9-29.
- Fugate, M., Kinicki, A. J., & Ashforth, B. E. (2004). Employability: A psycho-social construct, its dimensions, and applications. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65(1), 14-38.
- Gagnon, S. (2008). Compelling identity: Selves and insecurity in global, corporate management development. *Management Learning*, 39(4), 375-391.
- Garcia, P., & Hardy, C. (2007). Positioning, similarity and difference: Narratives of individual and organizational identities in an Australian university. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 23(4), 363-383.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2006a). The other side of the story: Towards a narrative analysis of narratives-in-interaction. *Discourse Studies*, 8(2), 235-257.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2006b). Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 122-130.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gergen, K. J. (1994). *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gergen, K. J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. (1986). Narrative form and the construction of psychological science. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology. the storied nature of human conduct* (). New York: NY: Praeger Press.
- Gergen, M. (1992). Life stories: Pieces of a dream. In G. C. Rosenwald, & R. L. Ochberg (Eds.), *Storied lives: The cultural politics of self-understanding* (pp. 127-144). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gherardi, S. (1994). The gender we think, the gender we do in our everyday organizational lives. *Human Relations*, 47(6), 591-610.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Grey, C. (1994). Career as a project of the self and labour process discipline. *Sociology: The Journal of the British Sociological Association*, 28(2), 479-497.
- Guerrier, Y., Evans, C., Glover, J., & Wilson, C. (2009). 'Technical, but not very...': Constructing gendered identities in IT-related employment. *Work, Employment & Society*, 23(3), 494-511.

- Gunz, H., Evans, M., & Jalland, M. (2000). Career boundaries in a "boundaryless" world. In M. Peiperl, M. B. Arthur, R. Goffee & T. Morris (Eds.), *Career frontiers: New conceptions of working lives* (pp. 24-53). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gunz, H., & Peiperl, M. (2007). Introduction. In H. Gunz, & M. Peiperl (Eds.), *Handbook of career studies* (pp. 1-10). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Halford, S., & Leonard, P. (2005). Place, space and time: Contextualizing workplace subjectivities. *Organization Studies*, 27(5), 657-676.
- Hall, D. T. (1971). A theoretical model of career subidentity development in organizational settings. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 6(1), 50-76.
- Hall, D. T. (1976). *Careers in organizations*. Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear.
- Hall, D. T. (2002). *Careers in and out of organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Hall, D. T. (2004). The protean career: A quarter-century journey. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65(1), 1-13.
- Hall, S. (1992). The question of cultural identity. In S. Hall, D. Held & T. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and its futures* (pp. 595-634). Cambridge: Open University & Polity Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs 'identity'? In S. Hall, & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1-17). London: Sage Publications.
- Handley, K., Sturdy, A., Fincham, R., & Clark, T. (2006). Within and beyond communities of practice: Making sense of learning through participation, identity and practice. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(3), 641-653.
- Handy, C. (1989). *The age of unreason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hänninen, V. (1999). *Sisäinen tarina, elämä ja muutos* [Inner narrative, life, and change]. Tampere: Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 696.
- Harré, R. (1983). *Personal being*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Harré, R., Cairnie, T. P., Rothbart, D., & Sabat, S. R. (2009). Recent advances in positioning theory. *Theory & Psychology*, 19(1), 5-31.
- Harré, R., & Moghaddam, F. (Eds.). (2003). *The self and others: Positioning individuals and groups in personal, political, and cultural contexts*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1999a). The dynamics of social episodes. In R. Harré, & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 1-13). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (Eds.). (1999b). *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Hearn, J. (1992). *Men in the public eye. the construction and deconstruction of public men and public patriarchies*. London: Routledge.
- Henriques, J., Hollway, W., Urwin, C., Venn, C., & Walkerdine, V. (1984). *Changing the subject. psychology, social regulation and subjectivity*. London: Routledge.
- Henttonen, E. (2010). *An ethnographic study of women's small ICT businesses in Finland*. Helsinki: Aalto University School of Economics A-371.
- Hogg, M. J., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), 255-269.
- Holland, D., Lachicotte Jr., W., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Hollway, W. (1984a). Fitting work: Psychological assessment in organizations. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (pp. 26-59). London: Routledge.
- Hollway, W. (1984b). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (pp. 227-263).
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1997). Active interviewing. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (pp. 113-129). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2000). *The self we live by: Narrative identity in a postmodern world*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hughes, E. C. (1937). Institutional office and the person. *American Journal of Sociology*, 43(3), 404-413.
- Hyvärinen, M. (1994). *Viimeiset taistot* [The Last Fights]. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Hyvärinen, M. (1998). Thick and thin narratives: Thickness of description, expectation, and causality. In N. K. Denzin (Ed.), *Cultural studies: A research volume* (pp. 149-174). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.
- Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), 764-791.
- Ibarra, H. (2003). *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Ibarra, H., & Barbulescu, R. (2010). Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(1), 135-154.
- Ibarra, H., & Deshpande, P. H. (2007). Networks and identities: Reciprocal influences on career processes and outcomes. In H. Gunz, & M. Peiperl (Eds.), *Handbook of career studies* (pp. 268-282). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Ibarra, H., & Lineback, K. (2005). What's your story? *Harvard Business Review*, 83(1), 64-71.
- Ibarra, H., & Petriglieri, J. L. (2010). Identity work and play. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 23(1), 10-25.
- Jacoby, S. M. (1999). Are career jobs headed for extinction? *California Management Review*, 42(1), 123-145.
- Jorgenson, J. (2002). Engineering selves: Negotiating gender and identity in technical work. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(3), 350-380.
- Kakkuri-Knuuttila, M., & Heinlahti, K. (2006). *Mitä on tutkimus?: Argumentaatio ja tieteenfilosofia* [What is research?: Argumentation and philosophy of science]. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Kanter, R. M. (1989). *When giants learn to dance*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Katila, S., & Meriläinen, S. (2002). Metamorphosis: From 'nice girls' to 'nice bitches': Resisting patriarchal articulations of professional identity. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 9(3), 336-354.
- Kelan, E. K. (2008). Emotions in a rational profession: The gendering of skills in ICT work. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 15(1), 49-71.
- Kelan, E. K. (2010). Gender logic and (un)doing gender at work. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 17(2), 174-194.
- Kerfoot, D. (2002). Managing the professional man. In M. Dent, & S. Whitehead (Eds.), *Managing professional identities: Knowledge,*

- performativity and the "New" professional* (pp. 81-95). London: Routledge.
- Kiander, J. (2001). *Laman opetukset: Suomen 1990-luvun kriisin syyt ja seuraukset*. Helsinki: Government Institute for Economic Research.
- Komulainen, K. (1998). *Kotihiiriä ja ihmisiä: Retorinen minä naisten koulutusta koskevissa elämäntarinoissa* [A course of one's own: the rhetorical self in educational life stories by women]. Joensuu: Joensuun yliopiston yhteiskuntatieteellisiä julkaisuja 35.
- Komulainen, K. (1999). A course of one's own: The rhetorical self in educational life stories by women. *NORA Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 7(2-3), 123-137.
- Kondo, D. K. (1990). *Power, gender, and discourses of identity in a Japanese workplace*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Koskinen, I., Alasuutari, P., & Peltonen, T. (2005). *Laadulliset menetelmät kauppätieteissä* [Qualitative methods in business research]. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Kram, K. E. (1996). A relational approach to career development. In D. T. Hall (Ed.), *The career is dead - long live the career. A relational approach to careers*. (pp. 132-157). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the black English vernacular*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* (pp. 12-44). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- LaPointe, K. (2010). Narrating career, positioning identity: Career identity as a narrative practice. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77(1), 1-9.
- Levinson, D. J. (1978). *The season's of a man's life*. New York: NY: Knopf.
- Linde, C. (1993). *Life stories: The creation of coherence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Linstead, A., & Thomas, R. (2002). "What do you want from me?" A poststructuralist feminist reading of middle managers' identities. *Culture and Organization*, 8(1), 1-20.
- London, M. (1983). Toward a theory of career motivation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 8(4), 620-630.
- Louis, M. R. (1980). Career transitions: Varieties and commonalities. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(3), 329-340.
- Löyttyniemi, V. (2001). The setback of a doctor's career. In D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Turns in the road. narrative studies of lives in transition* (pp. 177-202). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Löyttyniemi, V. (2004). *Kerrottu identiteetti, neuvoteltu sukupuoli*. Jyväskylä: Minerva Kustannus Oy.
- Lucius-Hoene, G., & Deppermann, A. (2000). Narrative identity empiricized: A dialogical and positioning approach to autobiographical research interviews. *Narrative Inquiry*, 10(1), 199-222.
- Lupton, B. (2000). Maintaining masculinity: Men who do 'women's work'. *British Journal of Management*, 11(3), S33-S48.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2008). Intensive remedial identity work: Responses to workplace bullying trauma and stigmatization. *Organization*, 15(1), 97-119.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue: A study in moral theory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mallon, M. (1998). The portfolio career: Pushed or pulled to it? *Personnel Review*, 27(5), 361-377.

- Mallon, M. (1999). Going "portfolio": Making sense of changing careers. *Career Development International*, 4(7), 358-369.
- Mallon, M., & Cohen, L. (2001). Time for a change? Women's accounts of the move from organizational careers to self-employment. *British Journal of Management*, 12(3), 217-230.
- Martin, P. Y. (2003). "Said and done" versus "saying and doing": Gendering practices, practicing gender at work. *Gender & Society*, 17(3), 342-366.
- Mavin, S. (2001). Women's career in theory and practice: Time for a change? *Women in Management Review*, 16(4), 183-192.
- May, V. (2008). On being a 'good' mother: The moral presentation of self in written life stories. *Sociology*, 42(3), 470-486.
- Mayrhofer, W., & Ieallatchitch, A. (2005). Rites, right?: The value of rites de passage for dealing with today's career transitions. *Career Development International*, 10(1), 52-66.
- McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- McArdle, S., Waters, L., Briscoe, J. P., & Hall, D. T. (2007). Employability during unemployment: Adaptability, career identity and human and social capital. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 71(2), 247-264.
- Mills, C. W. (1940). Situated actions and vocabularies of action. *American Sociological Review*, 5(6), 904-913.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mishler, E. G. (1999). *Storylines: Craftartists' narratives of identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Murray, K. (1989). The construction of identity in the narratives of romance and comedy. In J. Shotter, & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity* (pp. 176-205). London: Sage Publications.
- Muzio, D., & Bolton, S. C. (2006). Feminisation and paradox: Stratification and segmentation in professional contexts. *Irish Journal of Management*, 27(1), 79-93.
- Nicholson, N. (1984). A theory of work role transitions. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29(2), 172-191.
- Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing feminist research* (pp. 30-61). London: Routledge.
- Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative. Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Oinas, E. (2004). Haastattelu: Kokemuksia, kohtaamisia, kerrontaa. In M. Liljeström (Ed.), *Feministinen tietäminen: Keskustelua metodologiasta* [Feminist knowing: experiences, encounters, narration] (pp. 209-227). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Oxford English Dictionary* (1989). (2nd ed.)
- Peltonen, T. (1998). Narrative construction of expatriate experience and career cycle: Discursive patterns in Finnish stories of international career. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9(5), 875-892.
- Peterson, E. E., & Langellier, K. M. (2006). The performance turn in narrative studies. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 173-180.
- Poggio, B. (2006). Editorial: Outline of a theory of gender practices. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 13(3), 225-233.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1990). Action theory approaches to career research. In R. A. Young, & W. A. Borgen (Eds.), *Methodological approaches to the study of career* (pp. 85-105). New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.
- Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., & Kaufmann, J. B. (2006). Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(2), 235-262.
- Pringle, J. K., & Mallon, M. (2003). Challenges for the boundaryless career odyssey. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(5), 839-853.
- Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(2), 243-263.
- Riach, K., & Loretto, W. (2009). Identity work and the 'unemployed' worker: Age, disability and the lived experience of the older unemployed. *Work, Employment & Society*, 23(1), 102-119.
- Richardson, M. S. (2000). A new perspective for counsellors: From career ideologies to empowerment through work and relationship practices. In A. Collin, & R. A. Young (Eds.), *The future of career* (pp. 197-211). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richardson, M. S. (2004). The emergence of new intentions in subjective experience: A social/personal constructionist and relational understanding. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 485-498.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Roberts, H. (Ed.). (1981). *Doing feminist research*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rolin, K. (2002). Sukupuoli sosiaalisena käytäntönä. In S. Pihlström, K. Rolin & F. Ruokonen (Eds.), *Käytäntö* [Gender as social practice] (pp. 84-91). Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.
- Sarbin, T. R. (Ed.). (1986). *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.
- Savickas, M. L. (2002). Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behavior. In D. e. a. Brown (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (3rd ed., pp. 149-205). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1997). Whose text? Whose context? *Discourse & Society*, 8(2), 165-187.
- Schein, E. H. (1978). *Career dynamics: Matching individual and organizational needs*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Schein, E. H. (1996). Career anchors revisited: Implications for career development in the 21st century. *Academy of Management Executive*, 10(4), 80-88.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Siltala, J. (2004). *Työelämän huonontumisen lyhyt historia*. [A short history of the deterioration of working life]. Keuruu: Otava.
- Silverman, D. (Ed.). (1997). *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(6), 1336-1371.
- Somers, M. R. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society*, 23(5), 605-649.
- Sools, A. M., Van Engen, M. L., & Baerveldt, C. (2007). Gendered career-making practices: On 'doing ambition' or how managers discursively

- position themselves in a multinational corporation. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 80(3), 413-435.
- Strauss, A. L. (1959). *Mirrors and masks: The search for identity*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Sullivan, S. E. (1999). The changing nature of careers: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 25(3), 457-484.
- Sullivan, S. E., & Arthur, M. B. (2006). The evolution of the boundaryless career concept: Examining physical and psychological mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(1), 19-29.
- Sullivan, S. E., & Crocitto, M. (2007). The developmental theories. A critical examination of their continuing impact on careers research. In H. Gunz, & M. Peiperl (Eds.), *Handbook of career studies* (pp. 283-309). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sullivan, S. E., & Mainiero, L. A. (2007). The changing nature of gender roles, alpha/beta careers and work-life issues. *Career Development International*, 12(3), 238-263.
- Super, D. E. (1957). *Psychology of careers*. New York, NY: Harper.
- Super, D. E., Savickas, M. L., & Super, C. M. (1996). The life-span, life-space approach to careers. In D. e. a. Brown (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (3rd ed., pp. 121-178). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, 56(10), 1163-1193.
- Tanggaard, L. (2009). The research interview as a dialogical context for the production of social life and personal narratives. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(9), 1498-1515.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1991). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, S. (2005). Self-narration as rehearsal: A discursive approach to the narrative formation of identity. *Narrative Inquiry*, 15(1), 45-50.
- Taylor, S. (2006). Narrative as construction and discursive resource. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 94-102.
- Taylor, S., & Littleton, K. (2006). Biographies in talk: A narrative-discursive research approach. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, II(1), 22-38.
- Thomas, R., & Linstead, A. (2002). Losing the plot? Middle managers and identity. *Organization*, 9(1), 71-93.
- Townley, B. (1993). Performance appraisal and the emergence of management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 30(2), 221-238.
- Tracy, S. J., & Trethewey, A. (2005). Fracturing the real-self <-> fake-self dichotomy: Moving toward "crystallized" organizational discourses and identities. *Communication Theory*, 15(2), 168-195.
- Trice, H. M., & Morand, D. A. (1989). Rites of passage in work careers. In M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall & B. S. Lawrence (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory* (pp. 397-416). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, V. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Valcour, M., Bailyn, L., & Quijada, M. A. (2007). Customized careers. In H. Gunz, & M. Peiperl (Eds.), *Handbook of career studies* (pp. 188-210). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*. London: Routledge & Kegan.
- van Langenhove, L., & Harré, R. (1999). Introducing positioning theory. In R. Harré, & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 14-31). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

- Watson, C. (2007). Small stories, positioning analysis, and the doing of professional identities in learning to teach. *Narrative Inquiry*, 17(2), 371-389.
- Watson, T. J. (2008). Managing identity: Identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances. *Organization*, 15(1), 121-143.
- Watson, T. J. (2009). Narrative, life story and manager identity: A case study in autobiographical identity work. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 425-452.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125-151.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9(3), 387-412.
- Wetherell, M. (2003). Paranoia, ambivalence, and discursive practices: Concepts of position and positioning in psychoanalysis and discursive psychology. In R. Harré, & F. Moghaddam (Eds.), *The self and others: Positioning individuals and groups in personal, political, and cultural contexts* (pp. 99-120). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Wortham, S. (2000). Interactional positioning and narrative self-construction. *Narrative Inquiry*, 10(1), 157-184.
- Wortham, S. (2001). *Narratives in action. A strategy for research analysis*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Wortham, S., & Gadsden, V. (2006). Urban fathers positioning themselves through narrative: An approach to narrative self-construction. In A. de Fina, D. Schiffrin & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and identity: Studies in interactional sociolinguistics* 23. (pp. 314-341). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ybema, S., Keenoy, T., Osrick, C., Beverungen, A., Ellis, N., & Sabelis, I. (2009). Articulating identities. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 299-322.
- Young, R. A., & Collin, A. (2004). Introduction: Constructivism and social constructionism in the career field. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 373-388.
- Zilber, T. B., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Lieblich, A. (2008). The embedded narrative: Navigating through multiple contexts. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14(6), 1047-1069.

Appendix 1

SEFE CAREER COUNSELOR'S LETTER TO THE POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

The original in Finnish

Alkuun omat tervehdykset + aasinsilta aiheeseen:

Yhteydenottooni on joulutervehdyksen lisäksi toinenkin syy: olisitko kiinnostunut lähtemään haastateltavaksi väitöskirjatutkimukseen?

KTM Kirsi LaPointe Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulusta tekee väitöskirjatutkimuksen ekonomien työurien siirtymävaiheista. Teema kiinnostaa luonnollisesti myös meitä täällä SEFEssä. Olenkin lupautunut etsimään asiakkaistani potentiaalisia henkilöitä tutkimukseen ja sinä tulit yhtenä sopivana haastateltavana mieleeni. Tarinasi olisi mielestäni kiinnostava tutkimuksen tavoitteita ajatellen. Tutkimuksen kohteena ovat työuraansa ja -elämäänsä jonkinlaista muutosta tavoittelevat ekonomit. Sen tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten tällaisia siirtymä- ja muutosvaiheita nykyisessä työelämän kontekstissa jäsennetään. Kiinnostuksen kohteena on itse siirtymävaiheen prosessi ja siihen liittyvät pohdiskelut, ei niinkään muutoksen toteuttaminen sinänsä. Toisin sanoen muutosta ei ole tarvinnut tapahtua - riittää, että sitä on pohtinut.

Haastattelut tehdään elämäkertahaastattelun periaatteita soveltaen. Haastatteluaineistot ovat tietenkin ehdottoman luottamuksellisia, eivätkä yksittäiset henkilöt ole väitöskirjasta tunnistettavissa. Minä en luonnollisesti ole antanut Kirsille mitään tietoja henkilöistä, joihin olen yhteydessä.

Jos siis olet kiinnostunut osallistumaan tähän tutkimukseen, lähetä nimesi ja yhteystietosi Kirsille 7. tammikuuta 2005 mennessä sähköpostitse osoitteeseen kirsi.lapointe@hkkk.fi. Hän ottaa sitten sinuun tammikuun alussa yhteyttä sopiaukseen tarkemmin haastattelun toteutuksen yksityiskohdista.

The translation

Own greetings + introduction:

In addition to wishing you merry Christmas there is another reason for my message: would you like to be interviewed for a PhD research study?

Kirsi LaPointe (M.Sc.) from Helsinki School of Economics is conducting PhD research on business graduates in career transition. This theme is naturally of interest to us here in SEFE. Hence, I have promised to look for potential participants for the research. I thought you would be a good candidate for an interview. Your story would be interesting considering the aims of the research. The research project focuses on business graduates who are aiming to change their careers. It examines how these kinds of transitions and change periods are made sense of in contemporary work life. The emphasis is on the transition process itself and the associated reflection, and not implementation. In other words, no change needs to have taken place – it is enough that you have considered it.

The interviews will be conducted by using the principles of biographic interviewing. Interview materials are of course strictly confidential and individual people will not be recognizable in the research report. I have not given Kirsi any information regarding the people I am contacting, either.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please send your name and contact information to Kirsi by January 7, 2005 by email to: kirsi.lapointe@hse.fi. She will get in touch with you at the beginning of January to agree on the specifics of the interview.

Appendix 2

THE INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Original

Hei!

Haastattelin sinua neljä vuotta sitten väitöskirjatutkimukseeni ekonomeista työuran siirtymävaiheessa. Tutkimus on edelleen käynnissä. En sentään ole näitä vuosia pakertanut vain tutkimukseni parissa, vaan olin tässä välillä vanhempainvapaalla 2 ½ vuotta. :)

Olen ajatellut täydentää aineistojani haastattelemalla tutkimukseen osallistuneita uudestaan. Minua kiinnostaisi kovasti tietää, mitä tutkittavilleni nyt kuuluu ja minkälaisia elämänvaiheita viimeiseen neljään vuoteen on mahtunut. Olisin erittäin iloinen, jos haluaisit osallistua seurantahaastatteluun. Tunti riittänee ja paikan voimme valita sinulle parhaiten sopivaksi.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Kirsi

Translation

Hello!

I interviewed you four years ago for my PhD dissertation research that focuses on business graduates in career transition. The research is ongoing. I have not been working all these years just on this study, however, as I was on parental leave for 2 ½ years. :)

I would like to get new material for my study by interviewing the research participants again. I would love to know how you are doing and what the past four years in your life have entailed. I would be very pleased if you were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. An hour of your time would do at a location you find most convenient.

Best regards,

Kirsi



ISBN: 978-952-60-4098-1 (pdf)
ISBN: 978-952-60-4097-4
ISSN-L: 1799-4934
ISSN: 1799-4942 (pdf)
ISSN: 1799-4934

Aalto University
School of Economics
Department of Management and International Business
www.aalto.fi

**BUSINESS +
ECONOMY**

**ART +
DESIGN +
ARCHITECTURE**

**SCIENCE +
TECHNOLOGY**

CROSSOVER

**DOCTORAL
DISSERTATIONS**