WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF FORMAL MENTORING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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This study explores the mentoring experiences of employed women in a corporate organisation who had participated as mentees in a recently piloted formal mentoring programme within their company. The study also explores women's experiences of identity development, work and careers in relation to their personal priorities and family responsibilities.

A qualitative study was conducted with eight participants who were employed in the participating organisation. Participants held middle management, supervisory or equivalent level specialist positions within the company. Qualitative data was obtained via in-depth interviews, guided by a phenomenological approach and post-positive, interpretivist assumptions.

This study is exploratory in nature; designed to explore women's lived experience rather than commencing with a sense of what already exists. The relevance of conducting this study is underpinned by the assumptions that: (a) gender plays a role in our life experience; (b) women's own accounts are necessary to generate more informed theories about their lives and development; (c) a deeper understanding of women's work and development is well-timed, and in-keeping with the increased employment of women and legislative mandates to support and develop women's careers; and (d) the literature on formal mentoring lacks psychological depth.

The research is written from an organisational psychological perspective drawing from multiple psychological perspectives in order to inform the analysis of human experience within an organisational context. The focus of this study is at the individual level of analysis, recognising interacting contextual variables such as the individual's immediate work environment, the organisation and the broader socio-political environment as well as issues pertaining to gender and family.

In order to place the research on mentoring within the context of academic writing in the area of psychology, the study also reviews the extant literature in developmental psychology; psychology of women, specifically self-identity theory; women and work; career psychology; and work and family. Contextual insights are drawn from management literature examining the changing nature of work in the literature review and organisational culture in the analysis of this study. The review of the literature was in

itself exploratory seeking to generate insights into the issues relevant to women's lives and specifically their experience of work as a background to the relevance of mentoring.

The dissertation commences with a review of the literature, followed by a review of the considerations and approach taken with respect to research methods. The research findings and an analysis appear in the final chapter, followed by the conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Changes in the Experience of Work in Organisations

Recent changes in the international workplace have included increased global competition, the impact of information technology, the re-engineering of business processes, an increase in the number of smaller companies that employ fewer people, the rise of service industries, cost containment, and shifts in the concept of a job as a fixed collection of tasks (Cascio, 1995 as cited by Cooper & Burke, 2002; Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2000; Martin & Friedman, 1998, as cited by Cooper & Burke, 2002). The globalization of business has required that organisations perform to international standards in order to remain competitive. Organisational structures have flattened, becoming increasingly "flexible, people-centred and fluid" (Cooper & Burke, p. xiii). Management approaches have changed and many employing organisations have handled these changes badly (Cooper & Burke).

For individuals, work can be an important and self-defining aspect of life, influencing personal well being and family lives (Barling, 1995). Several factors in the work environment (such as work pace and schedule, work roles, job future and participation and control) have been accepted by academic writers as being critical to the psychological well being of workers (Sauter, Murphy & Hurrell, 1990, as cited by Barling). In addition to, and possibly as a result of, the above-mentioned changes, career patterns have changed requiring individuals increasingly to take responsibility for managing their own careers (Cooper & Burke, 2002; Greenhaus et al. 2000). Directing their career within an uncertain and ambiguous environment requires of the worker a considerable level of self-awareness, flexibility and understanding of work environments and career development, in relation to personal life development.

An United Kingdom study by Worrall and Cooper (2000), as cited by Cooper and Burke (2002), found that organisational changes, such as those mentioned above, negatively affect employee loyalty, morale, motivation and job security. Cooper and Burke state that while senior managers are excited about opportunities presented in the global picture of business changes; middle managers become angry, depressed and tired

as they attempt to deal with the psychological, behavioural and business consequences of such rapid change. During periods of change organisational members may experience a lack of understanding of their new roles (role ambiguity) as well as role conflict while roles and responsibilities are renegotiated (Chambers, Moore & Bachtel, 1998). Role conflict and role ambiguity has been cited as a cause of occupational stress and decreased job satisfaction (Rizzo et al, 1970, as cited by Chambers, Moore & Bachtel). Barling (1995) identifies the quality of the work experience as relevant to understanding the effects of work on family life, a particularly relevant aspect for women who may be juggling work and family responsibilities.

The increased employment of women has been one of the most dramatic changes in the workplace over the last few decades, despite women retaining primary responsibility for the care of children (Pascall, 1994). This points to a major social change with significant implications for women's sense of identity in relinquishing aspects of domestic life in order to sustain full-time employment and presents an ongoing challenge to women in terms of grappling with the demands of both the work and family domains. A significant amount of interest and research focusing on issues unique to the experience of women's work lives including sexual discrimination, harassment, dual responsibility for care-giver and provider roles has resulted, while much less research has examined the meaning or inner experience of work for women (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). The focus of this study is to explore women's experience of being mentoring in relation to the broader considerations of self identity, work, family and career development.

South African Socio-Political Context

Whilst South African companies have been subject to the same international trends as businesses in other countries, they have also faced unparalleled transformations in the last eleven years, since the democratisation of the country. Just over a decade ago South Africans were living and working in an oppressive and discriminatory system.

The effects of apartheid policies on the mental health of South Africans are still prevalent in the high levels of crime, violence, intolerance, fear and distrust that South Africans encounter on a daily basis. The psychological effects and the polarized

educational, sporting and social systems of apartheid left historically disadvantaged groups with a legacy of exclusion from opportunities for equal education and job opportunities; feelings of inferiority and a dearth of role models (Dommisse, 1987; Nicholas, Pretorius & Naidoo, 1999).

Since South Africa's democratisation, transformations of all aspects of society are evident in the policy and legislative changes that have been introduced. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, intended to promote national unity and reconciliation had a positive and perhaps even therapeutic effect on the nation (Emsley, 2001). Similarly, the ongoing transformation of the South African workplace needs to acknowledge the recent past and its implications for racial and gender groups and find ways to address not only the structural, but also the psychological and emotional needs of individuals. It is suggested, therefore that the management of South African companies ought to make it a priority to invest in programmes that will support the future psychological and emotional needs of their workers.

Development of Women in South African Organisations

According to Hinks (2003), relatively little is known about the role of women in the current South African labour market. Some evidence exists that the labour market has become increasingly feminised with a shift in the demand for labour away from traditionally male jobs in the primary sector towards the service/tertiary sector, potentially increasing the likelihood for the employment of women relative to men (Hinks, 2003). Employment of women has increased in every industry but remains largely located within the informal sector (Casale & Posel, 2002, as cited by Hinks, 2003; Hinks, 2003). Various implications surface regarding household structures in this scenario with a possible shift away from the traditional male 'breadwinner' role towards dual-worker families and an increasing number of female only households (Casale & Posel, as cited by Hinks).

In South Africa, the development and career advancement of women, including issues concerning work-family balance, needs to be done with a contextual understanding of historical and psychological effects of apartheid and the nature of contemporary challenges facing women who are now being 'fast-tracked' in organisations. Gender

discrimination is encountered by all race groups in South Africa (Rospabe, 2001, as cited by Hinks, 2003). This is so despite mandates issued to organisations by the South African government to achieve gender and racial transformation in accordance with the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1988 and the Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998. According to Niven Postma (CEO, Business Women's Association of South Africa [BWASA] 2004), the emphasis to date has been on racial rather than gender transformation, particularly in the corporate sector (Pile, 2005).

The first census of South African women in corporate leadership, mandated by the BWASA, reports that "although employment equity regulations, black empowerment charters and skills shortages have encouraged businesses to employ more women, the glass ceiling is still in place, even if it is showing signs of cracking" (Corporate Leadership Census, 2004, cited by Pile, 2005, par. 7). The research was conducted by Catalyst, a businesswomen's organisation in the USA, in collaboration with the BWASA, timed to coincide with the ten-year anniversary of South Africa's democracy.

Catalyst has also tracked the trends of women in business in the USA, Canada and Australia over the last few years (Daily News, 24 April 2004). The findings indicate that women make up 52% of the adult population in South Africa; 42% of the working population (Australia 44.6%; Canada 46.5%; and USA 46.1% in 2003), 14.7% of all executive managers and & 7.1% of all directors (Australia 8.4%; Canada 11.2%; USA 13.6% in 2003). Only 3.2% of chairs of boards in South Africa and 1.9% of CEOs in South Africa are women, (comparing favourably on the last-mentioned metric to an international average of 1% of all CEO positions that are held by women).

Niven Postma, has observed that in other countries the largest companies have led the way with the empowerment of women. According to Dr Namane Magau, BWASA President 2004, the reverse is true in South Africa where state owned organisations have outperformed the listed companies. 40% of cabinet ministers are women (Kalideen, 2004). These statistics and a current unemployment rate of 40% (Kingdon & Knight, currently being revised for publication) suggest that a big challenge for South African business is to create effective development opportunities for women in their employment and to achieve better representation of women at all levels in the organisation.

The relatively small numbers of women at executive management levels is noticeable. Women executives cite the exclusion from formal and informal networks, lack of mentoring, ineffective leadership style and limited opportunities for visibility as current barriers to advancement within the South African business context (Corporate Leadership Census 2004, cited by Pile, 2004).

Various authors have stressed the need for researchers to understand women's work experiences, not from a perspective of traditional models of work, but rather from women's own accounts of their experience of work and the meaning they make of it within the context of their lives (Bolton, 2000; Chester & Grossman, 1990; Stewart, 1990). This view recognizes that women's experiences, considered through the lens of what seems appropriate to men, are unlikely to surface the true meaning and complexity of their lives and that women's own perspectives have been overlooked in the past.

This study explores women's experience of being mentored from the perspective of the mentee, taking into account the broader aspects of women's lives, including their work, their careers, their development and their identity. The timing of such a study seems relevant in relation to the immediate challenges facing South African organisations. It will be valuable to know what role mentoring has to play in facilitating the ongoing development of women within South African organisations. While many existing studies on mentoring have offered practical guidelines for running effective mentoring programmes, this study aims to explore a deeper, psychological basis to understanding the potential that mentoring has for the development of women. Greene (2003, p. 2) has stated that a developmental perspective sheds light on the "shifting, complex and multifaceted place of gender in the person's psychological functioning over the life course".

A review of the literature will cover the psychological development of women with particular reference to the development of identity, women's experience of work, family and careers in relation to one another, and mentoring as a means of facilitating the development of women.

Adult Development of Women

A number of development theories will be discussed in the next section, drawing from widely cited career development texts, dominated by models derived from men's experiences, as well as alternative, women-centred views of women's development as well as feminist literature. Many of the latter developmental theorists, such as Chadorow and Gilligan, concerned specifically with female development, draw upon psychoanalytic theory as the basis for their work (Greene, 2003). Psychoanalytic theory may provide the most substantial account we have of the complex and contradictory nature of women's lives and psychological development. Women's development literature is explored as a means of deepening our understanding how the experience of mentoring can assist the ongoing development of women.

Traditional Approaches

Early theories exploring the nature of adult development and whether an underlying structure existed for adults, as for children, were developed from research conducted with male participants only. Results were often generalized to formulate universal theories of human development, thought to apply equally to women and men (Pescitelli, 1998, Ross-Gordon, 1999). Pescitelli (1998, p 1., p.8) states that "women's development has been historically neglected" and "both understudied and ... misinterpreted".

Universal differences between men and women can be observed across cultures affecting the way in which each experience their life in terms of their interests, attitudes, behaviour and the roles they play (Josselson, 1987; Ross-Gordon, 1999). How individuals approach the question of their identity or answer the question: "Who am I?" shapes these differences.

Traditional conceptions of adult development proposed by Freud, Erikson and later Levinson and colleagues describe adult development as a typically linear, hierarchical progression with prescribed time frames for life events and transitions. In response to the traditional male-based conceptions of adult development and their limitations in describing the woman's life experience, the past 25 years have produced a heightened level of interest, attention and research on the impact of gender on adult

development (Ross-Gordon, 1999). Researchers such as Bardwick (1980), Rossi (1980), Giele, (1982), Gilligan (1982) and Josselson (1987) have challenged and expanded upon on existing models of development conceived by Freud, Erikson (1959, 1968), Marcia (1966) and Levinson (1978) to formulate more holistic conceptions of identity development in women.

Erikson's (1968) work outlined an eight-stage process of development, building upon each preceding stage, occurring in a pre-determined order and during a specified time frame (Collins, 2001). Erikson proposed that individual development progresses through stable periods interspersed with crises, which initiate a personal transformation resulting in the individual's increased development. The crisis emerging during adolescence, for example relates to that of establishing identity versus role confusion, and is resolved during adolescence as a basis for future stages. The primary focus of early adulthood is a preoccupation with resolving the crises of intimacy versus isolation and later generativity versus despair as adults seek to pass on and nurture the future generation (Gerdes, 1988). The two latter stages detail incremental steps in individual maturity in how the individual learns to manage to retain a sense of 'self' in relating to others.

It is suggested that the stage-related nature of Erikson's theory may not be as applicable to women as they potentially are to men and that women may experience ongoing identity development in relation to their inclination to integrate new roles in their personal and professional lives. Women's identity may therefore evolve beyond adolescence to encompass their future roles as wives, mothers and work professionals and issues of intimacy and nurturing may be a tendency throughout their lives and not at specific stages.

Building on Erikson's work, Levinson (1986) and his associates developed a more refined model of adult development based on studies with men (as cited by Greenhaus et al, 2000) and a decade later with women (Levinson, 1996, as cited by Greenhaus et al). Levinson proposed four stages (pre-adulthood, early adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood) to human development characterised by periods of stability and transition, which were necessary to question and review the existing life structure and to accommodate necessary changes before the next stage (Greenhaus et al).

Early adulthood, for example, occurs between the ages of 22 and 40 and is characterised by an entry phase, an age 30 transition and a culminating life structure. The age 30 transition creates the opportunity for reflection, growth and a redirection of ones life (Greenhaus et al., 2000). The more stable period that follows, that of culminating life structure, presents the major tasks of establishing a niche in adult society that are central to the individual and establishing competence in priority life areas.

Levinson's (1996) study was based on a sample of women gathered throughout the 1980s and may not reflect the attitudes of contemporary career women where balancing work and family are no longer unusual (Greenhaus et al., 2000). He found that both genders progress through similar stages, but women experience a clash between the homemaker and career roles and find resolution of development more complex than men do and that, consequently, women have a vaguer sense-of-self than men do. Furthermore, women may overlook their own needs in giving precedence to family and career and may experience difficulty identifying personal developmental goals and tasks (Greenhaus et al.).

Subsequent studies cited by Goodman (1980); Barner (1981); Alexander (1980) and Zubrod (1980), as cited by Caffarella and Olsen (1993), confirm certain aspects of Levinson's work on women, including: (a) alternating periods of stability and transition; (b) the age 30 transition resulting in more realistic thinking, exploring issues such as occupational choices, child bearing and the need for intimacy in their lives; and (c) evolving a more informed sense-of-self and a greater sense of control. Differences (to findings reported for men) include: (a) greater complexity in participants' love and career patterns around themes such as the orientation and balance between career and family and the role of intimacy, and (b) patterns that varied across age cohorts.

Levinson (1978) is credited with being the first psychosocial theorist to identify the potential value of how mentors can assist individuals through difficult times in their lives (Daloz, 1999).

According to Caffarella and Olsen (1993, p. 33) adult development models with a male bias typically emphasises *autonomy* as the "hallmark of adult development" in contrast to the literature on women's psychosocial development that points to the "dominance of connection over separation in women's lives". Josselson (1987, 1996)

speaks of identity as the central issue for the overall development of women and describes it as "a unique process of shifting patterns in competence and connection". This deviates from the views of stage theorists like Erikson (1959, 1968, 1980) as cited by Collins (2001), and Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee (1978), as cited by Collins (2001), who viewed identity development as an early stage in the overall process of adult development. Erikson's work is widely recognized as providing a unique and substantial contribution to the study of identity. His contribution is acknowledged as providing a starting point for exploring human development, however offers little towards enhancing our understanding of the unique aspects influencing the identity development of women.

Women-Centred Approaches

Marcia's (1966) work on men's identity development built on Erikson's (1959) work and later formed a basis for the valuable work on identity development of women undertaken by Josselson (1987), identity being how people make sense of their existence and how they communicate their meaning systems to others.

Josselson (1987) describes identity development as a personal process occurring within an interpersonal and cultural context, attaching significance to: (a) the combination of roles, beliefs and values of each woman; (b) comparisons with others to determine individual uniqueness; and (c) the individual seeing herself in relation to the degree to which she adheres to society's shared beliefs, goals and attitudes. Identity formation is of central significance to women's overall development, which, in contrast to traditional stage theories of development, is described by Josselson as a unique and gradual process, occurring throughout the lifespan. Identity formation in women therefore requires ongoing re-examination and reassessment and remains closely connected to overlapping domains of competence and connection; where competence refers to being effective and doing things of value and connection relates to maintaining ties with others - a relational focus. Josselson (p. 184) describes this as "women bring relatedness to the workplace [and] they also bring working to relationships". This statement embraces the writer's view of the significance of mentoring for women, as a valuable workplace relationship within which women are able to do the work of their

personal and professional development. It also reinforces the value of women for mentoring, given women's preference for egalitarian and co-equal relationships and inclination towards maintaining mutually supportive relationships.

Josselson's (1987) findings confirmed the importance of the structural component of identity development, in accordance with the typology of identity statuses proposed by Marcia (1966), as cited by Josselson (1987), where it was assumed that women progress along a different path towards identity development. Regardless of the identity category, common themes to women's identity development emerged from Josselson's work, as cited by Caffarella and Olson (1993):

1. Identity development for women necessitates becoming a separate person while simultaneously maintaining a sense of being connected to and affiliated with others;
2. A web of relationships was significant in all important life areas - suggesting more spheres within which to resolve identity issues than men who are typically more defined by their occupational role;
3. Careers do not provide a primary sense of identity for most women; Josselson (1987) reports that women who considered occupational commitments to reflect their identity, had found a mentor, pointing to an inclination to develop within and through significant relationships, as suggested in the previous two points.

In relation to women and work, these findings do not reflect on *whether* women aspire to work but rather *how* they work. Even within their domain of competence at work, women are inclined to seek relatedness within their job context.

Other women-centred approaches to women's development are advocated by Chadorow (1971, 1974, 1978, 1987), Gilligan (1979, 1986) and Peck (1986), all cited by Caffarella and Olson (1993), and Jordon (1997) from the Stone Centre as cited by Greene (2003). They are differentiated by having been initiated from a female perspective rather than being grounded in work emanating from more traditional, male perspectives.

Gilligan (1982), as cited by Greene (2003), is credited with being the first theorist to question the traditional assumptions of adult development associated with Freud, Erikson and Piaget and to forge a new developmental psychology for women. She noticed that by considering women in relation to development goals such as autonomy,

rationality and competitiveness, stemming from masculine models, women were inevitably seen as inadequate. Her belief that by commencing research with women to build theories about their lives, a different theory of development would emerge introduced a significant shift in thinking about women's development (Greene, 2003). Gilligan (1979, 1982), as cited by Caffarella and Olson (1993), favours a balanced view towards human development that recognizes the stages of growth towards autonomy of traditional male-derived approaches, while recognising the equally strong motive for human development of empathy and caring, characteristic of women's experience.

Both Gilligan and the Stone Centre writers refer to Chodorow for an explanation of the divergent developmental pathways of men and women (Greene, 2003). Chodorow offered a reinterpretation of Freud's biological essentialism endorsing a social-psychoanalytic theory of human development where typical patterns for male and female behaviour are acquired through family role socialisation (Greene, 2003).

The Stone Centre and the Feminist Interpersonal School, developed throughout the 1990s initiated by the work of Miller (1976), as cited by Greene (2003), also regard women's development as largely relational in focus, and incorporated Gilligan's work. The socialisation of women is thought to account for women's inclination to be more relational, less competitive, more empathetic, and more motivated to foster growth in others, while men were considered to be naturally more individualistic, autonomous and focused on mastery.

Peck (1986), as cited by both Caffarella and Olson (1993) and Ross-Gordon (1999), proposed a significant model of women's development that locates development within the context of women's lives, their relationships and their emerging identity. Peck's approach considers the effects of women's social-historical context, including chronological time and psychological aging interacting with the sum of their relationships, including their identification with different groups and their relationships at work. According to Ross-Gordon (1999) the dynamic nature of the development process is characterised by flexibility - the degree to which new relationships can be incorporated; and elasticity - the degree to which particular relationships are responsive to women's changing needs and motivations. At the centre of women's development is the inner core of self-definition, thought to be unique for each woman according to her

motivations, personality and personal concerns, but also dependent on the sum of social-historical time dimensions and the elasticity and flexibility of her relationships. Peck thus reinforces the significance of relationships in women's development and highlights influence of socio-historical factors on this process.

Although the ability to generalize these alternative, women-derived models of women's development is limited due to their research design and limited diversity of participants studied; it is suggested that four critical themes emerging from Caffarella and Olson's (1993) and Greene's (2003) review of conceptual and empirical studies in this area are significant in understanding women's development:

1. The sustaining power of interpersonal relationships and their centrality in the self-concept of women across age cohorts;
2. The importance of role taking for women and how the roles of mother, spouse and worker intertwine, with very little indication of how they should play out over a woman's lifespan;
3. Diverse and non-linear patterns of development filled with role discontinuities and change as the norm rather than pre-determined expectations and developmental milestones;
4. Cohorts of women experience different developmental issues and patterns.

Review of Theory on Women's Development

Caffarella and Olson (1993) proposed that the more traditional models do not suffice as explanations of women's lives and that women's development is characterised by three major themes:

1. Diverse and non-linear patterns of development incorporating changes, transitions and periods of stability where "multiple patterns, role discontinuities, and the need to maintain a fluid sense-of-self" are the norm
2. Intimacy and identity are key issues throughout women's lives;
3. Relationships and having a sense of *connectedness* to others is central to the overall development process.

Researchers such as Peck (1986), cited by both Ross-Gordon (1986) and Cafferella and Olson (1993), and Giele (1982, 1993) and Parker and Aldwin (1997), both cited by Collins (2001), also recognize the role and complexity of socio-cultural and historical forces on the process of identity development and stress that it is therefore not advisable to universalize women's experiences.

Greene (1993) suggests that an overriding focus on heterosexuality, reproduction and relationships, perpetuated by even the women-centred or feminist theories, offer an extremely restricted version of women's lives.

Caffarella and Olson (1993) cite the need for more systematic research and other data gathering methods, and caution against generalising their conclusions due to the limited diversity of the participants cited in the research and the similarity of the research designs.

It may be impossible for any development theory to encompass the range of possibilities inherent in the complex choices facing women and the potential for change that occurs across women's life course. The above accounts of women's development, based on female participants, however, enrich our understanding of how women's development may occur in ways that differ from traditional, more masculine approaches. These insights should inform our work in the development of women in organisations.

Relevance and Implications for Mentoring

The alternative accounts of women's development referred to above locate women's development within the broader context of their lives, situated within a particular socio-political context, in an ongoing, rather than stage-related, process. Women appear to develop a more defined sense of themselves through their relationships with others. As a result of this and women's tendency to fulfill multiple roles, their identity development and career development are more complex and multi-faceted than traditional theories would suggest, occurring in unpredictable patterns. A potentially valuable role for developmental relationships, such as mentoring, emerges within the work context that facilitates women's ongoing development. The concept of mentoring would ideally encompass an open-minded approach to the ongoing and holistic development of women,

taking into account the context of their lives, their work, their families, their careers and their ongoing development.

In order to inform our discussion on mentoring, a review of literature pertaining to the meaning and experience of work in women's lives, taking into account the interacting influence of family and women's perspectives of careers, will follow.

Women and Work

Women's involvement in the workplace has increased significantly over the past few decades and strategies to get more women into lower level management jobs have, largely, been successful (Armstrong, 1989). Armstrong suggests that the strategies to eliminate other barriers and to alter workplace structures in ways that would accommodate women's lives have been much less successful. According to Symons (1986), as cited by Armstrong (1989), women managers who have stayed in management have done so because they are highly motivated, dedicated and career-oriented. They have however not been prepared to question the existing attitudes and practices of the men in power, and have had to adapt to traditional practices and methods that reflect male lives.

The meaning and experience of work

While it is impossible to determine the meaning of work to all women, due to contextual and individual variables, some themes emerge from the personal accounts of women that provide an indication of the meaning women attach to work and how they incorporate work into the fabric of their lives.

A primary theme appears to be the need to redefine and expand the concept of "work" to incorporate women's own definitions of work that encompasses both paid and non-paid work (Chester & Grossman, 1990). Tomlinson-Keasy (1990) describes how work encompasses the different roles undertaken by women to include facilitating and supporting their husband's careers and their children's growth. Gilkes (1990) describes work in terms of commitment as professionals and activists to the social and political needs of a black community. Women's broader conceptualization of the context of work

also accounts for the fluidity between boundaries between work and family as they integrate and balance demands that overflow from one boundary to another. This exists in contradistinction to the approach that is favoured by men, where work and family life are compartmentalised (Chester & Grossman, 1990). Grossman (1990) cites the example of pregnant therapists as an instance of the way in which women are able to draw on their personal life experiences and integrate these in their professional lives so that they are able to be more reflective and effective.

Another important theme acknowledges the relative emphasis on relational aspects of women's approach to work and the importance of the relational context as it surfaces at work, in the family, between themselves and with others in workplace (Crosby, 1990; Grossman, 1990; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1990). Josselson (1987) cites that where women did consider occupational commitments to reflect identity resolution, they had found a mentor to guide their way, reinforcing the value to women of developing within relationships and benefiting from the knowledge and experience of their work having meaning for a significant other person. Connected to this are issues pertaining to the use of power and work and women's preference for non-hierarchical structures in the workplace (Chester & Grossman, 1990).

Women's relational orientation to work should not diminish the role that work plays as a source of personal challenge, exploration and the development of "sense-of-self" and "personal identity" (Chester, 1990; Grossman, 1990; James, 1990; Schuster, 1990; Tomlinson-Keasey, 1990). Women's accounts of their work experiences suggest that (a) their choices are shaped by their motives, values, attitudes and broader social and economic contexts; (b) that women's identity development continues throughout adulthood; and (c) that women have a wider array of life spheres within which to resolve identity issues, than men do (Chester, 1990; James, 1990). Chester (1990, p. 89) quotes a working women who is also a new mother saying "I've expanded who I am ... I see myself as a mother, which is very important to me, but I also know I can manage and juggle a lot more than I ever thought". This account suggests that women's professional and personal life can integrate in positive ways and contribute jointly to ongoing personal development and a stronger sense of identity.

A final theme is the awareness of the degree to which women's work experience is affected by discrimination and sexism. Women work within a social context and gender based expectations result in discrimination at all levels, personal, institutional and societal, through practices such as labeling, lowered expectations, lack of support or overt harassment (Chester & Grossman, 1990).

The above themes serve as a basis from which to understand the issues women have raised in sharing their experiences about work within the broader context of their lives. A significant aspect of this is clearly the way in which women experience and resolve their involvement in both the work and family domains.

Work and Family

Traditionally, it was assumed that women did not wish to work out of personal choice perhaps not wanting to direct time and energy towards career development or not valuing status, success and productivity as highly as men did (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1993).

Even as women entered the workforce in significant numbers, common organisational assumptions were that women allow family demands to take precedence over work and that work commitment of women is contingent upon their home responsibilities (Falkenberg & Monachello, 1989). Research has shown that while women experience conflict in resolving priority given to work and family roles and are more likely to experience role overload, they remain as committed to work as their male colleagues are (Bruning & Snyder, 1983, as cited by Falkenberg & Monachello).

Today substantial agreement exists concerning the overlap and interdependence of work and family roles (Barling, 1995; White, 1999; Greenhaus et al, 2000). Sadie (1999), as cited by Hinks (2003), categorises the different female roles within the South African context as community managing work (such as food preparation, shopping, housework and family healthcare), reproductive work and productive, or income generating work associated with employment or self-employment.

In considering the interrelated effects of work and family the shifts in family structures and life choices are relevant. These include an increase in two-career or dual worker couples, single parent households, 'househusbands' taking care of domestic work and childless couples (Greenhaus et al, 2000). Dual-worker families and households

headed by single mothers or female 'breadwinners' are becoming more prevalent in South Africa today with male employment becoming increasingly scarce (Hinks, 2003). Women are thus exploring new and untested ways of managing work in relation to their life choices and family commitments.

Research has indicated that the potential exists for the experience of work and careers to be enriched or hindered by conflicting demands of the work or family domains (Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997, as cited by Singh, Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 2003). Long hours, for example, inevitably interfere with family life, whereas employer flexibility may be associated with a positive experience of managing both work and family commitments.

Much of the literature focusing on women at work incorporates varying perspectives on how women perceive and manage the juggling of multiple roles and role demands. Two broad perspectives have been accepted in terms of role theory, namely role expansion and role conflict theory (White, 1999). Role expansion theory is linked to heightened resources and experiences in successfully fulfilling multiple roles (Marks, 1997; Thoits, 1983 as cited by White). Role conflict theory suggests that the competing demands of mothering and working are likely to result in strain and conflict (Voydanoff, 1987 as cited by White).

Other forms of role conflict occur when time, strain or specific behaviours required by one role make it difficult to fulfill the requirements of another role (Brink, 1999). The participant's in Brink's study highly valued their jobs for the freedom, independence and sense of success it afforded them and were motivated to cope with the challenges associated with combining work and family roles, suggesting an appreciation of role expansion.

Having made the decision to work and have a family plays an important part in women's motivation to cope with both their work and family responsibilities (Brink, 1999). Furthermore, several surveys suggest that societal values towards women, work and family are changing and that there are signs of increased tolerance of women combining motherhood with employment (De Meis et al., 1986; Hock et al., 1984; Stewart & Healy, 1989, all cited by Brink).

Relating to the multiple roles that women play and the potential conflict or enrichment that ensues, Bolton (2000) offers some insights into the psychological processes occurring for women in relation to their work-family experiences. Her research was based on in-depth interviews of 117 women between 1993 and 1996.

Bolton (2000) identified three internal dilemmas or 'dynamic tensions' that surface for women as a result of their relational orientation towards work and life in general. She describes these as the identity, task and balance challenges. The identity dilemma addresses women's core sense of who they are in a largely patriarchal society. The task dilemma portrays the tension between focusing on tasks, versus attending to the feelings of people. Balance refers to a meta-challenge in relation to the other two directed at the trade-off between women giving attention to themselves versus others.

These dilemmas provoke internal questioning which influence external decision-making and occur repetitively in a dynamic, circuitous manner through what Bolton (2000) refers to as the ongoing third shift. The first and second shifts pertain to work and home responsibilities, both of which are physically tiring. The third shift refers to the invisible struggle of women where women reflect on their choices and experience a "replay" of the day's events and anxiety in both the professional and domestic spheres (Bolton, p. 1).

Bolton (2000, p. 1, 3) describes the third shift as a "psychologically relentless" dialogue between the twin voices of "self-doubt" and "self-awareness". At best it can assist women in making informed choices at worst, it can be very undermining in over-analysing decisions made. She suggests that this is a widespread feminine phenomenon symptomatic of the era of social transition where gender roles are in a state of flux. Her research suggests that the issues of identity, task and balance are highly relevant to the experiences of contemporary women who are highly reflective of their interconnected work and family domains.

A recent article in the *Weekend Argus*, (12 March 2005), reporting on the attitudes of 1 500 British women with an average age of 29 found that 70% do not want to work as hard as their mother's generation who had juggled motherhood and careers. They and are opting for more traditional social mores and prioritising marriage and children at around age 30. A quarter of the women surveyed intended giving up work once they started a

family and only 1% indicating that a career would be their "top priority" once they had children. These findings suggest a shift in women's attitudes towards life and work towards a simpler, less frenetic lifestyle and that the choices women make will always be rooted in the context of their own experience. It appears as though women's relationship with work varies in different contexts and time periods.

Thus the assessment of balance between work and family is perhaps best described by a third approach to role theory that encompasses both role enhancement and role conflict and that allows for a subjective balance to be found, suited to individual priorities and needs and relative to individual perceptions of actual versus ideal circumstances, as suggested by Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat and Lang (1990), cited by White (1999).

Managing work and family presents many personal and practical career dilemmas for working mothers. Additional barriers are also presented in terms of the manner in which women are perceived and treated in the organisations in which they are employed.

Barriers to Women's Career Advancement

Negative assumptions and stereotypes about women, their abilities, and their commitment to careers have limited women's career advancement opportunities (Mattis, 2002). This view is illustrated in Van der Merwe's (1979) study, as cited by Armstrong (1989), based on a sample of Canadian male and female managers in senior corporate positions. She found that while men may have favourable attitudes towards women managers, they held other very traditional views, such as that women made better mothers if they stayed at home, that women let their emotions influence their managerial behaviour and that the possibility of pregnancy made a woman a less desirable employee. This suggests that women's career advancement is considered through socially derived stereotypes and perceptions that may be difficult to separate out in supporting career growth.

It has been argued that women's style of leadership does not fit with generally accepted norms (Mattis, 2002). Women have been thought to demonstrate a more participatory, personalised and "feminine" management style which has prevented them from moving up the corporate ladder as the style has not been valued by men in power (Armstrong, 1989). This view is contradicted by research indicating that women in

management demonstrate individualism, entrepreneurship and are as aggressive and competitive as men (Symons, 1986; Brown, 1979, as cited by Armstrong). These may be learned rather than preferred or inherent qualities, fitting in with the male-dominated culture, being as they are from women who have remained in management and not from the broader sample of women, some of whom may have left because of not fitting in within their organisation.

Mentoring has been recognized as beneficial to career development for men, however may be even more beneficial to women in helping them to develop career plans and to acquire a more defined sense-of-self-identity. Women have directly or indirectly been excluded from informal networks due to family and home-based responsibilities and have had a harder time finding suitable mentors (Armstrong, 1989; McKeen & Burke, 1989; Noe, 1988). The lack of mentoring and exclusion from informal networks have negatively impacted on women's career development (Mattis, 2002).

Organisational cultures, that discourage a balance between work and family lives, for example by their valuing long hours over performance, have also negatively impacted on women's ability to develop sustain and develop careers (Mattis, 2002). According to Mattis, women have experienced a relative lack of career planning compared to their male counterparts, resulting in women having limited breadth of exposure, particularly in relation to experience at line and general management levels.

According to White (1986), as cited by Armstrong (1989), women value flexibility, control over their time, job satisfaction and being allowed to accommodate their personal lives more than they value a high income. Armstrong suggests that failure to accommodate women in more senior managerial positions may account for why managerial employment has not matched the movement of women into other jobs and helps to explain the movement of women out of corporate management and into entrepreneurial ventures.

Chester and Grossman (1990) have considered the steps that have recently been taken to reduce the institutional and societal barriers to the career development of working women. Their conclusions are significant to the methodology of this dissertation in that they advocate the use of phenomenological research to access direct accounts of

the meaning and experience of work within the broader life context of working women. This approach is applied in the independent research that appears elsewhere in this study.

Conceptualising Women's Careers

The recurring patterns of men's lives being highly focused on careers has resulted in traditional concepts of career that are associated with continuous service and hierarchical progression through an organisation in formal, paid employment (Evetts, 1994; Pringle & Dixon, 2003). This is unlikely to be the case in all but a few women as women may choose to take breaks or delay the start of a career because of child bearing, a lack of early expectations, motivation or advice (Nicolson, 1996).

It has already been suggested that women's broader concept of work accounts for the fluidity of boundaries between work and family. It is also suggested that while work plays an important part in the development of a "sense-of-self" and "personal identity" women are not exclusively defined by it (Evetts, 1996; Josselson, 1987; Pringle & Dixon, 2003). Greenhaus et al (2000) suggest that women may reduce their career involvement in a number of ways in an attempt to alleviate the conflict they experience between work and family. This may result in a voluntarily incurred career penalty, such as turning down a promotion during a period of high family demand, or an imposed penalty on the part of the employer in limiting the investment in women's career development.

If, as the literature suggests it is, a central issue in women's careers is the juggling and interconnectedness of paid and non-paid work, there is room for more contemporary career models that portray women's careers as being multifaceted, synonymous with ongoing change and personal development, whilst incorporating multiple roles and individually determined priorities.

Contemporary Career Perspectives

Pringle and Dixon (2003) suggest that career development theory has in the past two decades lacked a coherent model based on broad representative samples of women. What have emerged are the recurring themes of managing relationships, accomplishment and attachments, and calls for a more relational emphasis (Chodorow, 1976; Gilligan, 1982, Gallos, 1989, all cited by Pringle & Dixon, 2003). A discussion of two contemporary

career models will be discussed in more detail in relation to their appropriateness to women's life experiences.

Protean Career Model

The concept of a *protean career* comprising a series of *learning cycles* like mini versions of the traditional single, life-long career has developed in response to the changing conditions of work (Hall & Mirvis, 1996, as cited by Hall & Kahn, 2000). The protean career may present a more adequate conceptualisation of women's careers due to its cyclical and flexible nature and emphasis on ongoing learning in diverse areas.

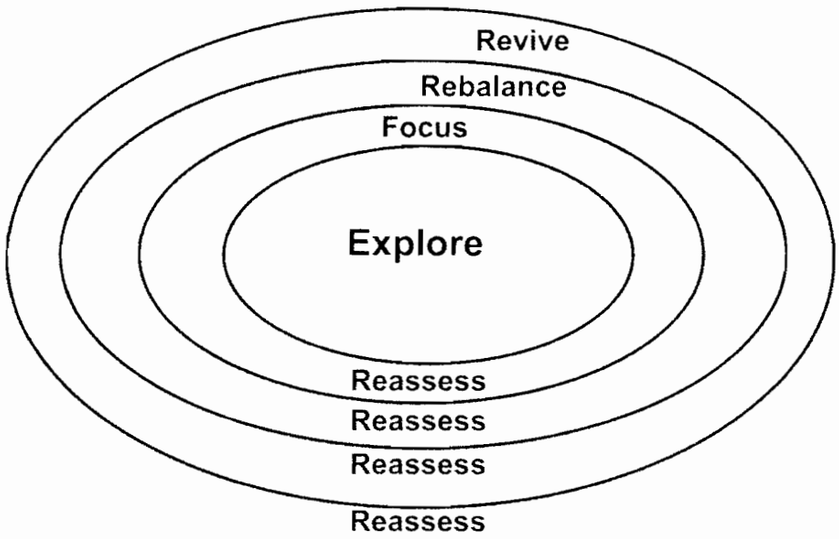
Hall and Associates, 1996 and Briscoe and Hall, 1999, both cited by Hall and Kahn (2002) highlight the value of developmental relationships at work to facilitate the acquisition of specific new skills and higher order qualities, or *metacompetencies*, namely self-knowledge and adaptability. Self-knowledge and adaptability need to work interdependently to facilitate the necessary ongoing adjustments on the part of the individual to organisational changes. Hall and Kahn argue that these competencies are most fully acquired within the context of a "developmental network" (Higgins & Kram, 2001, as cited by Hall & Kahn, p. 57).

Although this approach is not directed specifically at women, rather in response to the pace of change at work, the value of this approach for women's careers is that the learning cycles imply a level of flexibility and multiple careers rather than the traditional uninterrupted linear career concept. If, as Josselson (1987) suggests, women experience a preference to locate their work within a relational context, then developmental relationships, such as mentoring, offer an appropriate way of acquiring relevant insights and competencies for women to manage their careers.

Life-Career Model

Another contemporary perspective on women's careers is provided by Pringle and Dixon's (2003) heuristic life-career model. It depicts an evolutionary process of four facets that give impetus to women's career choices. These are: explore, focus, rebalance and revive, depicted as concentric circles interspersed with periods of reassessment.

Each facet places a different emphasis on the balance between task and interaction, expressed as *agency* and *communion.* The four facets are not intended to be age related, but rather linked more flexibly with dominant life activities, for example retirement, studies, family responsibilities or a decision to travel. Movement between



facets comes about as a result of the interaction between current and past experiences and the internal and external demands on the individual.

Figure 1: Life-career model (Pringle and Dixon, 2003)

This flexible and inclusive model of women's careers encompasses the ongoing and transitional nature of women's identity development not catered for in the traditional theories.

The protean and life-career career models were selected as contemporary perspectives that depict a realistic and flexible career approach to the recent changes in women's lives, accommodating their expectations, experiences, timing of life events and multiple social roles. In conceiving women's careers in this way, the scope and potential that mentoring offers women in developing more fluid career paths is significant particularly in facilitating the acquisition of the necessary career-related competencies, or meta-competencies, of self-knowledge and adaptability. A more detailed analysis of

mentoring follows in the next section exploring historical and more contemporary perspectives of mentoring and its potential for women's development.

Mentoring

On the topic of mentoring research, Clutterbuck (2003) remarks on the extensive, yet incoherent body of research on mentoring, lamenting the overall logic and structure of the research, its relevance and usefulness to practitioners and the total divergence between the conclusions of academic papers and actual experience in the field. Clutterbuck attributes much of these failings to the structure and definition of much of the research. In reviewing the literature on mentoring, this paper will attempt to define a conceptualisation of mentoring that applies to women's work and development experiences and strengthen the argument for mentoring being a vital aspect of women's development within South African organisations.

Conceptualising Mentoring

No uniform definition exists for the concept of mentoring and many studies have failed to identify which conceptualisation of mentoring is being followed resulting in questionable conclusions that do not lend themselves to comparisons with other studies (Clutterbuck, 2003). Americans and Europeans do not even use the same terms pertaining to the mentoring relationship, reflecting underlying differences and assumptions regarding the very nature of the relationship (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002). The word *protégé* is commonly used in the USA but is considered to be patronising by Europeans and suggestive of a one-way, hierarchical relationship (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002).

This study has used the term *mentee*, in keeping with the European tradition and women's preference for non-hierarchical work relationships, to refer to the person being mentored. Various researchers suggest that Americans emphasise sponsorship, helping the protégé "advance up the corporate ladder" while Europeans see this function as "nepotism and favouritism", and "... tend to use a more holistic concept of mentoring that is related to the life cycles and overall personal development of the mentee, irrespective

of his or her rank or advancement patterns" (Clutterbuck & Ragins 2002, p. x; Ragins, 1999 as cited by Headlam-Wells, 2004).

Contemporary conceptualisations of mentoring reflect the diverse approaches described above, to varying degrees. Kram's (1985) original study of 28 mentoring pairs created the basis upon which much of the subsequent work on mentoring has been based. Her work is referred to in much of the literature for, amongst other things, identifying the two broad categories of *career* and *psychosocial* functions that potentially are fulfilled in any mentoring relationship (Kram, p. 22).

Career functions are those aspects of the relationship that "enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in an organisation", made possible because of the mentor's "experience, rank and influence" in the organisational context (Kram, 1985 p. 22). Psychosocial functions are "those aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity and effectiveness in a professional role" (Kram, p. 22).

Psychosocial development occurs as a result of an "interpersonal relationship that fosters mutual trust and increasing intimacy" affecting the individual on a "personal level by building self-worth both inside and outside the organisation" (Kram, 1985, p. 23).

Kram (1985) suggests that mentors potentially play up to nine roles, namely sponsorship, coaching, protection, challenging assignments and exposure (career development functions) and acceptance and confirmation, counselling, friendship and role modeling (psychosocial functions). Kram's conceptualisation of mentoring, specifically psychosocial functions, does justice to the complexity of mentoring, making reference to a mutual exchange and the sharing of experience of a work or personal nature outside the immediate environment catered for by the counselling function.

Kram's (1985) conceptualisation tends however, to associate the underlying purpose of mentoring specifically with the individual's work role, rather than the more holistic approach towards personal growth and development, favoured by Europeans.

Building on Kram's (1985) concept of mentoring, other researchers suggest that mentoring encompass career development, psychological support and role modeling (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Levinson et al, 1978; Noe, 1988; Scandura, 1992, all cited by Scandura & Williams, 2002). Scandura and Williams (2003, p. 241) define mentoring as a "dyadic relationship in which an older, more experienced organisational member fosters

the growth and development of a junior employee into a competent professional". Headlam-Wells (2004) expands on Kram's career development and psychosocial functions and includes "... to develop specific skills and gain inspiration from role models". Johnson et al (1999 p. 384) suggests that mentoring is a cause and effect relationship where "individual change is being stimulated by a purposeful relationship with someone else" and that a mentoring relationship is superordinate to other exchanges such as leadership, managing, apprenticing or coaching. Van Slyke and Van Slyke (1998), as cited by Johnson et al., also suggest that mentoring has focused career development within the boundaries of the organisation.

While attempting to outline the scope of mentoring, these definitions do not fully articulate the boundaries or extent of the mentoring process, perhaps because it is difficult to specify across different contexts. A more recent conceptualisation encompasses a broader *life* scope as suggested by Williams-Nickelson (2005, para. 5): "... [mentoring] changes over time ... within mutually agreed upon and ethical parameters that include the integration of personal and professional aspects of an individual's life". This definition points to the dynamic, interactive and holistic nature of mentoring and the potential that mentoring holds for individual development in a broader sense.

Johnson et al. (1999) propose a similar conceptualisation of mentoring that incorporates the resolution of lifespan development and related work and family tasks. Three underlying premises underpin this view:

1) that traditional age differences (older mentor and younger protégé) are not central to mentoring
2) that there needs to be a shift in accountability where individuals take responsibility for navigating their own careers through various life stages and therefore co-create their mentoring relationship
3) that mentoring is not constrained by work boundaries, having the capability to impact all facets of life.

Clutterbuck (2003, par. 15) suggests that a precise definition of exactly what kind of relationship is being measured is necessary, as are contextual variables in order to build a "richer, more complex model than currently exists". Mentoring has the potential to be a

dynamic and personalised process facilitating both internally driven (emotional and psychological) and externally driven (job and career related) development within an organisational and a broader life context.

The multiple layers of identity comprise a sense-of-self-esteem, a concept of gender, a concept of self and a sense-of-self in relation to others (Gerdes, 1988). At the heart of the mentoring process is the identity of the mentee interacting with the identity of the mentor, shaping the concept of self and sense-of-self in relation to others. In this way it is a dynamic process.

Mentoring is also dynamic in that it shifts according to changes in the environment and the individual's lifespan development and may guide an individual through various reassessments and transitions to explore and address specific development needs.

Given the potential scope and depth of the mentoring relationship, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect every mentoring relationship will address all development areas. The scope and direction of the mentoring process, although largely crafted by the mentoring pair, is potentially impacted by a variety of organisational, personal and contextual variables and other developmental relationships.

It is suggested that the above broader, more life encompassing approach to mentoring is most appropriate for women who tend to confront more complex issues in terms of integrating and separating their work and personal lives. The interconnected nature of home and family or work-related challenges stimulate development opportunities that are difficult to isolate. The development process for women thus would realistically tend towards the resolution of a blend of work, home and family issues.

Formal and informal mentoring

Within the South African context, mention has been made of the challenges of overcoming the legacy of job exclusion on the basis of race, the Bantu education system and the psychological trauma of apartheid (Hinks, 2003). Hinks cites the shifting role of women becoming increasingly economically active, in the face of diminishing employment opportunities for men; and the neglect of gender issues in favour of issues

pertaining to race. Such trends suggest a role for formal mentoring to support the implementation of our progressive labour market reforms and legislation pertaining to gender.

According to Catalyst (1993), as cited by Ragins (2002a), formal mentoring has been introduced as a strategy to promote the advancement of women and racially disadvantaged people in organisations. Ragins suggests that while the popularity of formal mentoring programmes has increased substantially, so has the debate as to their value, use and effectiveness.

Formal mentoring programmes are typically initiated by decision-makers in organisations with specific organisational objectives in mind. Other characteristics of such programmes, identified through research, include the voluntary assignment of mentees to mentors, top management support, an orientation programme, clearly stated responsibilities for both parties, and an established duration and contract (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Douglas, 1997; Fagenson-Eland, Marks & Amendola, 1997; Noe, 1985, 1988; Cunningham, 1993; all cited by Scandura & Williams, 2002). Formal programmes are more limited with respect to role modeling and counselling and are more focused on helping the mentee meet job or role demands rather than life demands (Ragins, 2002a).

By contrast, informal mentoring relationships typically develop spontaneously. They tend to have a longer duration and often result form a more personal bond arising out of common interests, goals and accomplishments (Young & Perrewe, 2000). A number of studies have found that employees with informal mentors advance faster and farther in organisations than those lacking mentors (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Scandura, 1992; all cited by Ragins, 2002a). Research by Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998), as cited by Ragins (2002a), found that 91% of 461 top-ranking women executives in American Fortune 1000 companies had one or more informal mentors during the course of their careers and had identified mentoring as a specific strategy used to break through the glass ceiling. Informal mentoring is therefore an important intervention in the advancement of women and other disadvantaged groups.

Formal mentoring programmes have emerged to replicate the positive outcomes for employees and organisations of informal mentoring amidst the challenges and changes of contemporary business and the need to fast track the careers of certain groups.

They have gained momentum and are found to be particularly suited to career development, socialisation and employee training (London & Moore, 1987, as cited by Scandura & Williams, 2002). Other benefits identified include facilitating matches that may otherwise not have happened, for example between individuals from minority groups thereby breaking down stereotypes between people in the workplace, and also having the programme provide some structure and support to mentoring pairs (Kram, 1986).

According to Kram, (1985), formal mentoring programmes are not without their risks or pitfalls. These potentially include mismatching mentors and mentees when assigning them to mentoring partnerships; confusion and anxiety about roles and responsibilities; and a lack of the requisite interpersonal skills and competencies to effectively conduct a mentoring relationship resulting in negative or even destructive consequences (Kram). Others in the organisation who are not selected may feel excluded or demotivated, if they perceive their career as not receiving equivalent attention, or they may feel threatened by the new alliances which form (Kram, 1986).

Kram (1985) indicates a preference for spontaneous, rather than assigned, relationships and a network of relationships rather than a single all-encompassing one. This view is supported by Headlam-Wells (2004) who argues that keeping abreast of the pace of change and knowledge inherent in many work environments today requires more than one person to address an individual's needs. Kram's concept of a *relationship constellation* may comprise a unique combination of mentors, bosses, special peers, collegial peers, information peers, subordinates, outside work friends and family members.

A constellation of developmental relationships potentially contributes in different ways to the individual's developmental needs. Firstly such diverse support appears highly conducive to women's tendency to develop in an integrated way across professional and personal boundaries. Secondly such relationships support women's tendency to develop within relationships. Thirdly, such relationships may become an integral part of the support system that women need when juggling work and home priorities.

Perhaps, as Kram (1985) suggests, the risks associated with formal mentoring can be minimised by mandating voluntary participation and relevant education and training. She stresses the value of formal programmes in encouraging and reinforcing the value of mentoring activities. In terms of formal or informal mentors, a network of mentors, perhaps blending formal and informal, would create the most ideal situation for the mentee.

Contemporary Perspectives of Mentoring

Several contemporary perspectives of mentoring will be reviewed in relation to their applicability to women's ongoing personal and professional development.

Social Exchange Theory and Interpersonal Relationship Theory

The application of exchange theory and interpersonal relationship theory to mentoring was undertaken by Young and Perrewe (2000) and provided a comprehensive view of mentoring by addressing the exchange of mentoring behaviours along with associated antecedent factors and outcomes. The exchange of behaviours is specifically considered in relation to the expectations each party forms about the relationship and the mentoring partner resulting in perceptions and feelings that feed the cyclical process of evaluating and engaging in the relationship. The model addresses mentoring at the organisational, dyadic (mentor-mentee pair) and individual levels. The dyadic focus on the exchange between mentors and mentees as a unit, to identify the dynamics and role behaviours critical to the exchange, is a central feature of their model. Young and Perrewe recognize the value of future research examining the context of mentoring relationships, that is, formal or informal relationships, as well as the stage of development of mentor-mentee pairs, particularly longitudinal analyses of such relationships.

The application of social exchange and interpersonal relationship theory appears to be highly relevant to assessing the dynamics of the mentoring pair as they establish the rapport and exchange of ideas and behaviours unique to their mentoring practice. The dyadic focus, however, falls beyond the scope of this paper, which has limited in its focus to gaining an in-depth understanding of experiences particular to women as *mentees* only. Three other contemporary models are outlined below that provide scope for a broad

conceptualisation of mentoring deemed appropriate to women's careers, choices and life development experiences discussed previously.

The Mentoring Model

Johnson, Geroy and Griego (1999) propose a model that locates mentoring within its environmental context placing the mentor and mentee at the centre and recognizes three interactive constructs that surround the mentoring interaction and shape the mentoring relationship, namely socialisation processes, task development and lifespan development.

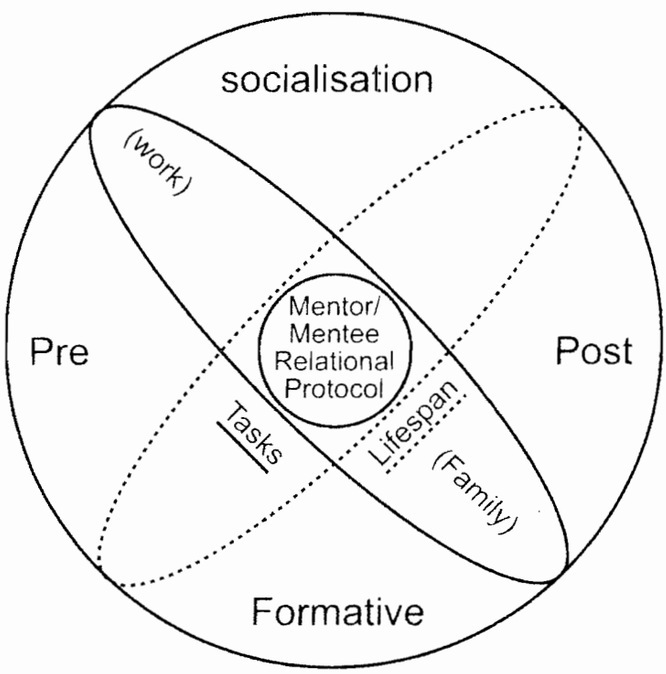


Figure 2: The mentoring model (Johnson et al, 1999, p. 386)

The socialisation construct (Johnson et al, 1999) recognizes that the mentoring relationship takes place within an environment and that the individuals, both mentor and mentee, are at different phases within the socialisation process. A pre-formative stage relates to someone who is relatively new to the environment and is exploring and

adapting to it. A formative phase implies a degree of entrenchment where the individual has limited choice (of mentor) and is likely to be assigned one as part of a formal mentoring programme. A post-formative stage implies that the individual has more choice (of developmental relationships) and that an internal locus of control emerges making them more in control of establishing their own, presumably informal, network of mentors. This construct needs further resolution, as the article appears to confuse socialisation as an individual stage and an environmental structure in relation to choice of development relationships. In the first instance, reference is made to a person entering a new environment, such as a workplace, as being in the *pre-formative* stage, adjusting to their new environment; whereas thereafter reference is made to an environment that has a *formative structure*, where the individual may encounter less choice and be assigned a mentor. The relevance of mentioning socialisation is interpreted in accordance with Green's (1997) awareness of the bigger picture or context for mentoring, also reinforced by Kram (1985) in examining mentoring from a systems perspective. It is also helpful in suggesting that as individual's mature in their environments they will exercise increasing influence as they co-create their developmental relationships.

Task development suggests the need to develop skills in both the work and family domains, being central constructs that occupy our lives (Johnson et al, 1999). One of the dimensions of task development, work skill development; relates to Kram's (1985) career and psychosocial functions; whereas the other dimension, family skill development, refers to specific competencies and self-insight necessary to cope with change, personal conflict, stress and balance work and family life.

The way in which the two areas of task development are resolved in women's lives have significant implications for the mentoring relationship. Johnson et al (1999) suggest that insights into each partner's choices on both of these dimensions, such as how and when women choose to combine work and family, is strongly related to the success of the mentoring relationship. Given women's tendency to integrate professional and personal experiences, suggested by Chester and Grossman (1990), it is likely that in course of mentoring issues pertaining to either or both domains may need to be addressed.

understanding specific conflicts, crises and development needs associated with the identity development of an individual at any given stage. Johnson et al propose that lifespan development is also crucial to change and growth unfolding within the mentoring context. This is particularly relevant for women in terms of the ongoing identity development described by the women-centred development theorists discussed previously.

The core of the mentoring relationship, referred to by Johnson et al (1999) as the relational protocol, embodies the outcome of the interaction between the mentor and mentee, in a symbiotic relationship, shaped by socialisation, task and lifespan development. The outcomes may range from positive developmental experiences to dysfunctional, damaging experiences. The dimensions provide a means of analysing the relationships successes and failures and take into account the potential for individual differences to have a significant impact on the outcome.

McKeen and Burke (1989) identify the careful selection and matching of mentors and mentees to ensure as a critical component of successful mentoring. Applying Johnson et al's model to the selection and pairing process would require a conscious exploration of the differences and similarities on task (work and family), socialisation and environment contexts and lifespan stages for each mentoring pair to develop a protocol for successful mentoring.

Basic Model of Understanding

In Green's Basic Model of Understanding, used as a basis for consulting practice, the core of the mentoring process is identity, "an awareness of who one is - the strengths and weaknesses, competencies, core values, potential, past experiences, current reality and future concerns and aspirations" (Green, 1997, p. 29). Green (1997) emphasises the concepts of the "bigger picture" and a learning culture, which occurs as a result of the individual identities [mentor and mentee] interacting with the learning process within a bigger context.

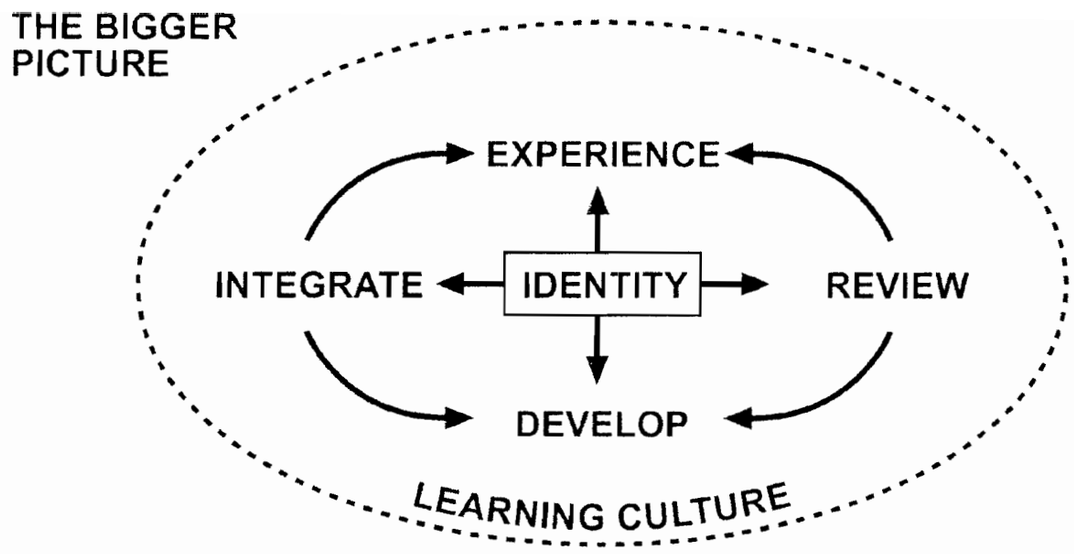


Figure 3: Basic model of understanding (Green, 1997, p. 30)

Internal and External Model of Development

Wales (2000) proposes a concise and highly applicable Internal and External model of Development that identifies the development of internal qualities (self-awareness, confidence and openness to feelings) that provide support for the resulting external developmental outcomes of mentoring (leadership and management, challenge, understanding difference, stress management, home/work balance). The link between the two is facilitated through the communication skills of the mentor and mentee in their interpersonal interaction. High quality communication skills facilitate the delivery of ideas, concepts, knowledge and vision into the behaviours and competencies of management. Communication is also considered essential to achieving a satisfactory balance between home and work life, since advocacy and enquiry are essential to negotiating and achieving the necessary equilibrium (Wales).

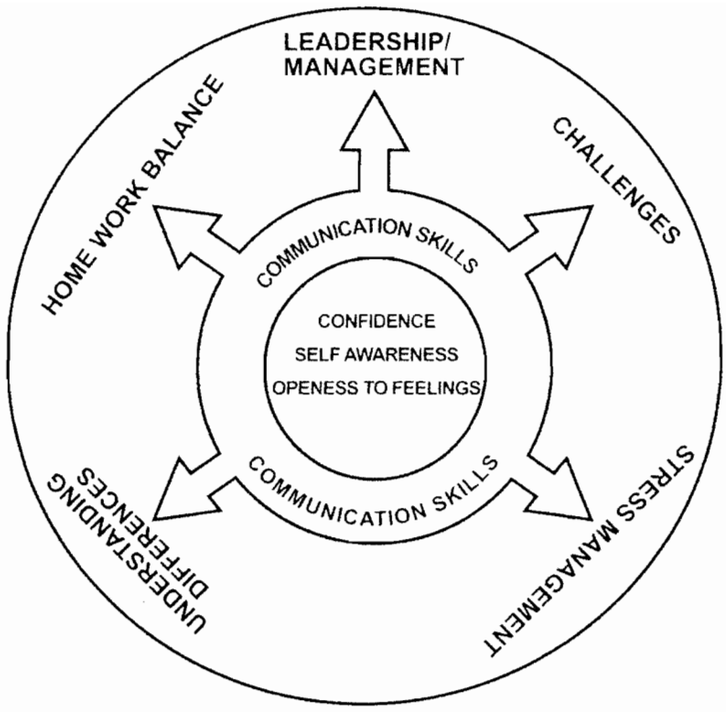


Figure 4: Internal and external model of development (Wales, 2000)

The four models described above strengthen the argument and provide the conceptual links for a more holistic interpretation of mentoring, appropriate to women's unique and varied life, work and life experiences and ongoing identity development. Young and Perrewe (2000) inform us of the relevance of individual expectations in shaping the mentoring experience, and the merits of considering the individual, organisational and 'dyadic' levels of analysis. Green (1997) describes the interaction of the individual identity and the learning process within the broader context within which learning takes place. Johnson et al (1999) incorporate the continuous and multi-dimensional interactions between individual identities in the mentoring relationship within the context of their lives - their work, their organisations and their personal development priorities. Wales' (2000) model emphasises the need for internal development to support external development, the latter being what most organisations hope to achieve through formal mentoring programmes.

Important considerations emerge for women from the above models, that appear relevant to the experience of being mentored, and inform the analysis of the research undertaken elsewhere in this report. Internally, women's own expectations of the mentoring process, their level of self-awareness and their sense of 'self' are likely to affect the mentoring experience. Their personal orientation towards managing work-life balance and work-family conflict in relation to their priorities and roles will influence their experience. At an inter-personal level, all the above factors, who they are paired with as their mentors and the mutual expectations mentoring partners hold of one another in terms of their observable and assumed differences, will have a bearing on their mutual exchange. The above models suggest those contextual factors such as the organisation's culture, climate and support for the mentoring process will also have a significant effect on the mentoring experience. The next section concludes the review of mentoring literature with perspectives on mentoring and women within the South African context.

The Case for Women and Mentoring

Benefits of Mentoring

The absence of women from the higher levels of management has been documented both internationally and locally in the recent Women in Corporate Leadership Census (Burke, 1997; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Fagenson, 1993; Hakim, 1996; Jacobs, 1999; Schein et al, 1996, all cited by Headlam-Wells, 2004; Kalideen, 2004; Pile, 2004). The number of women seeking management positions is increasing as a result of their increased educational opportunities, employment and affirmative action programmes (Noe, 1988).

Having a mentor has been linked to various benefits cited in literature, such as career advancement (Lunding, Clements, & Perkins, 1979; Roche, 1979; Scandura, 1992; Strumpf & London; Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher, 1991, all cited by Burke, McKeen & McKenna, 1994), higher pay (Roche, 1979; Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher, 1991, both cited by Burke et al) and greater career satisfaction (Burke, 1984; Rile & Wrench, 1985, both cited by Burke et al). Levinson and his colleagues (1978), cited in McKeen & Burke (1989), proposed that in his sample of men, that mentoring had a constructive role to play in their achievement, via identification with their mentors who served as role models. Henning and Jardim (1977), cited by McKeen & Burke, reported that all the successful

women managers in their study had a male mentor who performed significant functions in their careers. This was supported by Morrison, White and Van Velsor's (1987) study that reported that 100% of women who reached the highest level had received assistance from more senior colleagues, in contrast with an earlier study indicating this to be the case in only 55% of successful executive men. In addition, women who failed to reach the highest levels cited such help as a critical asset that they had lacked.

Other studies (Fagenson, 1989; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Vennecombe & Colwill, 1995; Vinnecombe & Singh, 2003; all cited by Headlam-Wells, 2004) have confirmed that women who have a mentor do better as they "gain reflected power, feedback and access to resources and senior manager through their mentor". Studies by Kanter (1977), Morrison et al (1987) and Dreher and Ash (1990), all cited by Burke et al (1994), suggest convincingly that mentoring may be critical to the advancement of women. Schein (1996), as cited by Headlam-Wells, suggests it may even be more important for women than for men to have the assistance of a mentor.

Burke (2002), as cited by Headlam-Wells (2004), indicated a gap in research literature on professional and managerial women pertaining to descriptions and evaluations of initiatives to support their career development over their lifespan. Women are being fast-tracked, but are the mechanisms for social change to support these changes for women keeping pace? The majority of working women continue to juggle the responsibility for the bulk of domestic work and child care work in addition to their day jobs, falling prey to a decline in their quality of life as a result of stress health-related symptoms (Hochschild, 1989 and Walters, 1993 both cited by Brink, 1999). If organisations hope to retain women it would be helpful to deepen our understanding of women's work-life experiences in order to offer career development initiatives, such as mentoring, that are supportive and facilitate the resolution of such issues.

Complexities of Multiple Roles and Careers

Specific complexities faced by women in relation to managing their careers, family and personal lives may account for why mentoring may be particularly helpful to women.

Kram (1996, p. 166) proposed that an area of complexity that exists where an individual's career stage and chronological age are "out of sync", such as when women

return to work after a career break for family reasons, or where women choose to change careers to suit family demands. Women may also start careers later, have more frequent interruptions and fewer advancement opportunities (Noe, 1988). Williams-Nickelson (2005) refers to the uncertainty women face about the sacrifices they choose to make for their careers, causing heightened levels of anxiety. According to Williams-Nickelson women are remaining childless based on career constraints rather than choice. Headlam-Wells (2005) refers to the sense of isolation women often experience, being the minority in most companies.

Hinks (2003) refers to the constraints of having dependants, both young and old, and the lower capital investment in the development of women as disadvantages encountered by women in the labour market. Where women perceive their roles as unsatisfactory, due to poor role quality, negative health consequences ensue in the form of lowered self-esteem, depression and lack of pleasure (Baruch & Barnett, 1986, as cited by Brink, 1999). Conversely positive role experiences are associated with a decrease in psychological symptoms (Barnett, Marshall & Singer, 1992, as cited by Brink, 1999).

The synergies between contemporary approaches to women's careers and models of mentoring, proposed by Green (1997), Johnson et al (1999), Wales (2000), and Young and Perrewe (2000), are encouraging in the breadth and scope that they offer, being more inclusive of women's careers and development in a general life sense.

Chester and Grossman (1990) and Josselson (1987) provide strong evidence of women's preference to form relationships as a natural part of how they work and develop. In keeping with their views and the complexities facing women described above, it is proposed that effective mentoring may be of considerable value in: (a) supporting women's ability to explore personal choices, assisting women in making the best choices in relation to their careers and other roles as caregivers; (b) assisting personal and career related transitions; (c) assisting women in assuming control over their life and work circumstances (d) positively influence their personal and work-related development, and (e) indirectly shaping organisations towards integrating the values and perspectives of a more diverse employee base in future.

Considerations in Mentoring Women

O'Neill (2002) suggests that involving women in mentoring relationships and removing the barriers that keep women and other disadvantaged groups excluded from power, could be a prime way of increasing the pool of skilled managers. This is particularly relevant within South Africa, where the majority of employable people have received unequal educational and employment opportunities in the past, resulting in a shortage of technical and management skills as well as limited exposure to organisational contexts. It is also particularly relevant to women, who by virtue of social norms and role expectations, have historically been regarded as less than equal in competing for opportunities in the workplace.

Kram (1986, p. 177) identified demographic characteristics including gender, race, ethnicity, education, socio-economic class and age as factors "shaping the complexion of mentoring alliances" and that mentoring alliances are more easily formed with others who are similar with regard to these key demographic characteristics.

Warrihay (1980), as cited by Noe (1988), found that as women advance to senior management, a shortage of female mentors to offer support was acutely felt, while mentoring relationships across genders may be complicated by perceptual and situational factors (McKeen & Burke, 1989; Noe, 1988). In this regard, Tsukudu (1996) commented on racial and gender influences in forming developmental relationships within the South African context. She suggests the need for a paradigm shift for white male mentors to effectively assist both women and black managers in their upward mobility in organisations and that mentees need to assert themselves more in their mentoring relationships.

Mentoring women may result in unique situations requiring information and involvement from the mentee to arrive at acceptable solutions. An example of this may arise for a mentee, where as a result of a woman interrupting or delaying her career, she may have considerable life and work experience and be an expert in certain areas. This may possibly limit her choice of suitable mentors and affect the dynamic between her and her mentor around issues of expertise, authority, life experience, developing rapport and sharing a mutual exchange.

Structured peer developmental relationships hold potential as an important alternative where mentors are scarce and where women express a preference for interaction with mentors who are of a similar level within the organisation (Kram, 1985; McKenna & Burke, 1989; Noe, 1988). Kram and Isabella (1985), as cited by McKeen and Burke (1989), found that peer relationships address similar functions as traditional mentoring, but emphasise different issues and vary in importance with the career stage.

While traditional mentoring relationships may not been readily available to women, they have also not been particularly sensitive to women's needs suggesting a need for more specific models for mentoring women. These models need to take into account obstacles or barriers to women establishing mentoring relationships to assess their applicability to contemporary work practices and experiences. Noe (1988) identified six barriers to women establishing mentoring relationships, some of which may still be applicable in today's workplace which are described below. Additional obstacles will be discussed in the private research documented elsewhere in this document.

1. Lack of access to information networks, which may result from poorly developed networking skills, limited contact with potential mentors, a preference for non-hierarchical relationships or the intentional exclusion of women by male managers;
2. Tokenism associated with affirmative action initiatives have a negative side where women's success is linked to the policy and not their ability;
3. Stereotyping where women are not perceived as having the necessary qualities for managerial success, or the interest in developing as a manager;
4. Socialisation practices that undermine women's self confidence in relation to ability (Broverman, Voge, Broverman, Clarkson & Rosenkranz ,1972, as cited by Noe, 1988);
5. Norms regarding cross-gender relationships where internal and external dilemmas surface for the mentoring pair in relation to how they manage the levels of intimacy in the relationship (McKeen & Burke, 1989). Clawson and Kram (1984) as cited by McKeen and Burke (1989) refers to *unproductive closeness* and *unproductive distance*. A tension exists around how they are perceived by others in the organisation and the damaging affects for both the person and their careers of the

gossip that may be associated with their mentoring relationship (Berry, 1983; Clawson & Kram, 1984; Fitt & Newton, 1981; all cited by Noe, 1988).

Internal tensions for the cross-gender mentoring pair include the potential for romantic involvement which has been noted to occur in 10% of cross-gender pairs with the potential for anxiety, confusion and damage to lives and careers (Fitt & Newton, 1981, as cited by O'Neill, 2002).

6. Reliance on inappropriate power bases surfaces as a result of women's traditional tendency to accept power imbalances and more dependent behaviour (Johnson, 1976; Mainiero, 1986 as cited by Noe, 1988). Noe suggests that women tend to emphasise their own weaknesses or incompetence and to develop a power base indirectly through personal contacts rather than directly through issuing orders or requests, bargaining with concrete resources and stressing own competence levels.

The barriers to mentoring of women, cited by Noe (1988), are also potential inhibitors of women's general mobility and career advancement in organisations. This stresses the need for a personalised and holistic development initiative, such as mentoring, to facilitate the acquisition of the relevant insights and skills that will equip women to overcome real and perceived obstacles in order to operate effectively, with a sound understanding of the existing organisational culture. Where women feel empowered to influence their personal and career development, they may initiate relevant shifts to the culture to suit their preferred style. This requires a well-developed sense-of-self-identity in both a professional and personal sense, relying on a significant level of self-awareness, confidence and psychological acumen to overcome any resistance that may be encountered.

Mentoring and Diversity

The recent introduction of the Employment Equity Act, citing women as a designated group for advancement, has catapulted South Africa into the 21st century with regards to labour legislation, giving effect to South Africa's obligations as a member of the International Labour Organisation.

Mentoring and diversity are therefore two highly relevant topics within the South African context and their combined potential opens a worthwhile area for significant future research and practice. While diversity, in it many forms, was not specifically the focus of this study, it is important to consider this aspect when discussing mentoring, women and transformational quest of organisations in South Africa.

A significant contribution in the literature on diversity and mentoring has been made recently by Clutterbuck and Ragins (2002) in conducting their own studies, extensively reviewing the literature, expanding on existing models and concepts and highlighting areas of future research. Despite the complexities of diverse mentoring pairs cited by Ragins (2002a) and Clutterbuck (2002a), the potential and richness of mentoring relationships is significant, where inherent differences, such as gender, can be overcome and existing gender and racial paradigms can be transformed. To date few, if any, studies have been done focusing specifically on the developmental needs of women within the South African context.

Given our cultural diversity, historical background and the legislative impetus for developing women and achieving more diverse workplaces, research into the developmental needs and experiences of specific groups of women on the fast-track in organisations is needed. In this regard, Clutterbuck and Ragins (2002, p. xii) make a strong point that "mentoring is a key element in the effective management of diversity in organisations, and that diversity is an integral part of every successful mentoring relationship".

Conclusion

In concluding the above discussion on mentoring, several points are worth highlighting in relation to the potential of mentoring as a means of developing women. The broader conceptualisation of mentoring as a dynamic and personalised process potentially facilitating internal and external development is relevant to the complexity of balancing work, home and family demands in women's lives. The development of self-identity is considered to be a critical and ongoing aspect of women's development associated with the integration of multiple and diverse roles within a volatile work and societal context.

Contemporary models of formal mentoring depicted previously are helpful in conceptualising how a broader conceptualisation of mentoring could address the interconnected life and work development issues as they arise for women (Johnson et al, 1999; Green, 1997; Wales, 2000).

The potential that mentoring offers in establishing high quality relationships encompassing diverse mentoring pairs suggests optimistic outcomes for the challenges facing South African organisations who are grappling with the legacy of apartheid imposed structures in the face of contemporary labour legislation.

Objectives of this Study

The primary objective of this study was to explore the mentoring experiences of women who had been mentored within a corporate context. Very few studies have been conducted on women's experiences within the South African organisational context (Hinks, 2003).

The timing and relevance of this research is motivated by the increased feminisation of the workplace, the impetus to develop women and their careers globally, and specifically within the South African context through the introduction of labour legislation, specifically Employment Equity Act and the Skills Development Act, 1998. Clutterbuck (2003) reports that although the topic of mentoring has been extensively researched it has not been particularly well researched. He proposed that there would be significant value in conducting research using more specific definitions of mentoring, within more defined contexts, in order to build a richer, more complex model than currently exists.

It was felt that psychological insights into women's experiences of work and being mentored would be valuable in informing the process of women's development in organisations. It was also envisaged that the research would surface some practical guidelines or recommendations to the participating organisation to support their formal mentoring programme implementation.

The next section, Method, lays the theoretical foundation for the approach and analysis of the research undertaken. It will provide the relevant insights into the

underlying assumptions prefacing the presentation of research findings and analysis. These assumptions include the worldview and role of the researcher, being located in the post-positivist paradigm and a subjective and interfacing component of the research; the nature of the research, being intuitive and holistic and the exploratory and inductive nature of the design and analysis of the research. The qualitative nature of the findings, presented as themes, is considered unique to the participants in this study with intrinsic value to women located in other contexts.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

The exploratory nature of women's experience of being mentored located this research within the post-positive, interpretivist paradigm seeking qualitative information and attempting to describe the meaning given to the phenomenon of mentoring as experienced by women within the context of their everyday lives

Post-positivism implies considering knowledge within the broader context of participants' worlds and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations (Cresswell, 1998). It relates to "bringing to the surface" concealed issues such as would occur for individuals during difficult transitions (Cresswell, p. 79). O'Leary (2004) describes the post-positivist view of the world as ambiguous, variable and multiple in its realities; the nature of research as intuitive and holistic; the researcher as participatory and collaborative; the methods as inductive, dependable and auditable and the findings as idiographic, transferable, valuable and often qualitative.

An interpretivist stance is more concerned with understanding the world as it is at the level of subjective experience (O'Leary, 2004). An interpretivist approach aims to access the internal reality of the participant's subjective experience, attempting to obtain first-hand accounts from participants and describing what is discovered in rich detail. It also places great value on the cultural and historical context of the situation within which participants are functioning (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; O'Leary, 2004). Dilthey, as cited by Miles & Huberman (2005, p. 8) refers to human functioning as a "*text*, a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning" which can be interpreted through acquiring empathy or deep understanding of the participants' experiences.

Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research, in contradistinction to interpretivism, seeks to describe and illuminate the meaningful social world as prescribed by the interpretivist paradigm (Blumer, 1956; Cicourel, 1964; Silverman, 1975, all cited by Silverman, 2005). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), as cited by Silverman, a defining characteristic of qualitative research is that it can provide a broader version of theory than

simply a relationship between two variables; where a theory refers to mechanisms or processes by which the relationship among the variables identified is generated.

According to Kirk and Miller (1986), as cited by Silverman (2005), qualitative research fundamentally depends on observing people in their own contexts. Silverman subscribes to the view that field research should be theoretically driven rather than determined by technical considerations, such as what can be measured and what can be sampled. Furthermore, Silverman suggests that qualitative research should attend to common-sense assumptions about research issues, providing clarity on the definitions of variables and establishing relevant research problems.

Cresswell (1998, 15) defines qualitative research as:

> ... *An inquiry process of understanding based on* ***distinct methodological traditions of enquiry*** *[such as phenomenology] that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds* ***a complex, holistic picture****, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. [Author's own emphasis]*

A qualitative approach was selected for this research in accordance with criteria suggested by Cresswell (1998), who suggested that a qualitative approach would be appropriate where: (a) the research question is of an exploratory nature; (b) theories are not readily available and variables are not easily identified; (c) there is a need to develop a detailed view of the topic; (d) information is to be obtained from participants in a natural setting; (d) there is a preference for writing in a literary style; (e) there are sufficient time and resources; (f) audiences are receptive and (h) the researcher is willing to be an active learner rather than an expert in the process.

Cresswell (1998) argues that a hallmark of qualitative research today is the deep involvement in issues such as gender, culture and marginalised groups. To this extent, this research on women's experiences has evolved into the area of the psychology of women, often with feminist psychology roots, providing the conceptual lens suggested by Cresswell as relevant to qualitative research, to explore issues of gender and marginalisation. Feminist research approaches embrace many of the post-modernist

tenets that serve to challenge the status quo and recognize the centrality of gender in shaping our consciousness (Cresswell).

Qualitative research has a particularly valuable role to play in psychological research. In this instance the aim was to understand working women's experience of formal mentoring and how being mentored has impacted on issues to do with self-identity, experience of work, careers, personal growth and work-life balance.

Phenomenological approach

Phenomenology is "the study of phenomena as they present themselves in direct experience" (O'Leary, 2004, p. 122). As a methodological approach to research the researcher seeks to access the lived experience of participants' everyday experience, capturing the essence or meaning of the experience, in relation to the phenomenon of interest (Becker, 1992; O'Leary).

The following assumptions, about human nature and human living associated with phenomenology guided the selection and analysis of the data (Becker, 1992).

1. Each person is unique - one can't assume the nuances and meanings that another experiences;
2. Contexts are relevant in order to understand people;
3. People are interpersonal beings, creating and co-creating their lives, and are naturally reflective and self-reflective
4. The quality of people's lives improve when they clarify their values and act in accordance with them;
5. Experience is a valid and useful source of knowledge;
6. Our everyday worlds offer important insights into the essential nature of events by analysing how it occurs;
7. In processing their interactions and experiences, people are able to transcend the facts of their lives, beyond the accumulation of internal and external forces;
8. People are active participants in living in ways that are meaningful to them - responding to life's circumstances, exercising choices and through reflection, clarifying the meaning of our lives.

A phenomenological approach guided the research process, which, in keeping with the research aims, intended to provide a *richness* of data that reaches the level of *meaning, feeling* and *value* insight into how the individual thinks about their world and how they construct the *reality* of that world which is less likely with an empirical approach (Cresswell, 1998; O'Leary, 2004; Riley, Wood, Clark, Wilkie & Szivas, 2000; Smith, 2003).

In conducting this research the researcher analysed detailed transcripts, obtained from in-depth interviews, in an attempt to identify the essential themes of individual's unique experiences. Trying to understand the content and complexity of the meanings attached by participants to their experiences of being mentored required iterative reviewing of transcripts, and an evolving process of interpretation. Smith (2003) refers to this dual nature of analysis as *interpretative phenomenological analysis*.

It was assumed that through continuous readings of the transcripts with an awareness of the researcher's presuppositions that the *essence* of a participant's account would be captured leading to a "practical understanding of meanings and actions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8).

Research context

The research was conducted in a national media company, selected because they had recently run a pilot mentoring programme and were amenable to the research being done. By locating the study within a single organisation it was intended that practical guidelines to the mentoring of women would be valuable to future participants in mentoring in the rest of the organisation. Interviews were conducted with four Johannesburg-based and four Cape Town-based participants.

Sample

A non-random strategy of sampling was used to identify participants in this study. The requirements for participants were that they be employed women in a corporate organisation who were on or had recently participated in a formal mentoring programme.

Eight women, of a total of 27 participants, had participated in the media company's piloted mentoring programme. All eight women were interviewed individually as participants for this research project. The table below provides a summary of their biographical details obtained during the interviews as well as a brief description of their mentor. As can be seen from the table below, participants ranged in age from 26 to 35 years, at the time of the interviews. Six participants were single, one was married and one was divorced. Participants came from diverse cultural backgrounds, with either English or Afrikaans as their home language. Brief details about participants' mentors emerged during the interviews and have been recorded in the table below.

Table 1: Biographical profile of participants

PARTI-CIPANTS	AGE	RACE	HOME LANGUAGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN
#	28	White	Afrikaans	Married	One child, aged 2
#	32	White	Afrikaans	Single	None
#	35	Coloured	Afrikaans	Divorced	2 children, aged 13 and 9
#*	29	White	Afrikaans	Single	None
#*	30	Coloured	Bilingual	Single	None
#*	31	White	English	Single	None
#*	31	White	English	Single	None
#	26	Coloured	English	Single	None

Reference to specific participants withheld to protect their identity within their organisation.

* Single participants who were financially supporting older and/other family members

Interviews were conducted in English by agreement, except in one instance, where a dialogue in both English and Afrikaans seemed most natural. To ensure that questions were phrased and probed in a similar way, the interview guide had been translated into Afrikaans in advance of the interviews. The Afrikaans questions were referred to when needed during the interview and the responses were translated in the transcript.

Research Design

A phenomenological methodological approach and in-depth, face-to-face interviews was considered to be the most appropriate method of exploring the individual's lived experience of the participants. In-depth interviews, lasting up to two hours, were conducted with the eight female participants who had participated in the pilot-mentoring programme. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with six of the participants. Constraints pertaining to time, cost and availability described below necessitated that in-depth, telephonic interviews be conducted on the final two participants. Careful consideration was given to the appropriateness of using both face-to-face and telephonic interviews, referred to as a *"mixed modal"* approach, by considering the practical implications and guidelines surfaced by previous researchers (Genovese, 2004; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Woltman, Turner & Bushery, 1980). This method was deemed appropriate because it would offer similar quality of information and would be preferable to excluding the contributions of two potential participants.

Securing Cooperation from Participants

The criteria for participants were that they either were being mentored or had recently been mentored within an organisational setting. Access to the participating organisation was granted through the human resource development manager (HRD manager) who also contacted the eight participants first to obtain their permission to proceed. Initially six women agreed to participate. A letter thanking them and outlining the requirements and nature of the research was forwarded to them via email (Appendix B). Appointments were made via email and confirmed telephonically prior to the meeting. Four participants

were interviewed in Cape Town and two in Johannesburg. Two participants were not available to be interviewed initially, but were contacted later by the HRD manager to assess their willingness to be interviewed telephonically. Both women agreed to participate in telephonic interviews, when approached for participation the second time. The researcher contacted them telephonically to thank them and to outline broadly the purpose of the study, which was also emailed to them, along with a copy of the interview guide (Appendix A). Both participants seemed positive and willing to proceed on this basis.

Interview Guide

The interviews were oriented around a central statement encompassing broadly the research aims and stressing the exploratory nature of the research aiming to understand participants' your life experiences as a working women and how being mentored had impacted on salient life areas.

A brief review of literature in the areas of women and work and mentoring generated appropriate themes to include in an interview guide (Appendix A) for use in the in-depth, semi-structured interviews, such as: (a) the concept of mentoring and what it meant to participants; (b) their experience of the programme itself; (c) their personal experience of being mentored; (d) their experience of work in relation to work-life balance and career advancement; and (e) their sense-of- self, including roles, responsibilities and priorities. Questions were phrased in an open-ended manner and arranged under the broad themes mentioned to try and elicit as much from the participant's personal experience as possible. Additional probing questions were included under each broad theme to guide more detailed discussion, where necessary.

Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted prior to the formal interviews with a participant from another organisation. This step served to establish the suitability of the interview guide in terms of whether it sufficiently addressed the relevant themes in terms of the level of understanding and insight required and to identify any other relevant themes. The pilot interview confirmed the relevance of the themes identified and few changes were made to

the interview guide. The questionnaire was refined by simplifying the questions where necessary, and clustering the questions more appropriately under the relevant themes.

The findings of the pilot were not included in the study due to the nature of the research pertaining to a formal mentoring programme, conducted within one organisation. The pilot participant had referred to her formal and informal mentoring relationships, neither of which was part of a specific programme within her organisation. It was considered that by limiting the participants to one organisation, the findings would be of more benefit to the particular organisation. In addition, it was decided that containing participants to one organisational context would allow for richer descriptions thereby adding to a more comprehensive insight to the phenomenon in question.

In-depth face-to-face Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants using the interview guide (Appendix A) as a basis from which to explore relevant themes. Every effort was made to alleviate any concerns or discomfort that participants may have had at being interviewed. Freedom was allowed to explore what was relevant to the participant to ensure complete understanding of her experience and conceptualisation of mentoring and its effects on her and her work-life balance, personal growth and career development. There was no particular ordering of themes, although generally the interviews commenced with a preamble about the research aims, recording, likely duration of the interview and confidentiality, followed by biographical information.

Developing a sense of rapport and trust was vital to obtaining in-depth information. The writer presented herself as a student and mother with a professional background in the area of Human Resources, clearly distinguishing her research aims from an organisationally initiated feedback process. Her interest in women's experience of work was mentioned as was the intention to surface helpful guidelines to future participants in their company's formal mentoring programme rollout.

Power and Control

Brannen (1988) views power and control in the interview situation as a dual process between the interviewer and participant. While researchers are in a position to exploit the

participant, in-depth interviews allows the respondent to control the interview by dictating the content and form of the data. Lee (1993) cites Mishler (1986) who views power dynamics solely in terms of the status differential between interviewer and participant, neglecting situations where equal status may prevail or where the interviewer has a lower status. He also does not account for how status differences manifest themselves in power terms within the interview. Lee also cites feminist writers who argue that interviewers hold more power as a result of the participant's 'obligation' to disclose information, whereas the interviewer need reveal very little, giving the repeated call for 'establishing rapport' a spurious and instrumental character. Feminist writers prefer an interviewing style that provides reciprocity and a process of mutual disclosure (Oakely, 1981 & Finch, 1984, both cited by Lee). This was found to be the case, where participants appeared encouraged to respond after receiving brief insights into the writer's own experiences.

Sensitivities

Traditionally, approaches to interviewing have taken a restricted view of the role of emotions, generally manipulating them to achieve rapport or observing the respondent's mood in order to gauge validity of response (Owens, 1996). The assumption has been that the interview is a neutral measurement device and that the disclosure of information has no effect on the respondent or researcher. More recently, feminist methods have drawn attention to the importance of relationship in the research setting. In addition, it has been recognised that interviews in sensitive areas require different approaches from ones where the topics under discussion have no great emotional content (Lee, 1993).

In the context of research in the area of organisational psychology, dealing as it does with the individual within a group or organisational setting, sensitive topics may, amongst other things, evoke emotion in participants. Given the situational and even cultural nature of sensitivity, it is possible for any topic to be a sensitive one. With this in mind, participants were invited to indicate if the interview seemed too intrusive, to ask any questions of the researcher during the interview and to offer any thoughts about how they experienced the interview process.

Potential benefits for participants being able to discuss sensitive topics include catharsis, self-acknowledgement, sense of purpose, self-awareness, empowerment, healing and providing a voice for individuals who may feel overlooked (Hutchinson, Wilson & Wilson, 1994, as cited by Hubbard, Brackett-Milburn & Kemmer, 2001). Interestingly, most participants commented on finding the interviewing process helpful in digesting their experiences of mentoring. In some instances the interviews appeared to help participants overcome their deeply-felt disappointment, sense of isolation, or sense of failure; in other instances the interview helped to clarify future steps or intentions regarding mentoring, or feeling a sense of affirmation at the positive outcome of their mentoring experience.

Potential risks of disclosing topics of a sensitive nature may include reliving an array of negative emotions, which may affect the participant's current sense-of-self or well being. Brannen (1988) discussed a range of issues that may arise for the participant when participating in qualitative interviews that are highly sensitive or personal in nature. Typically these interviews are stressful for both parties, respondents are more easily identifiable due to unique nature of the data and identification carries the risk of sanctions of stigma from various sources.

The following strategies to reduce participant distress and afford them a degree of protection were taken into account, such as:

1. staying attuned to the participant's emotional state throughout the interview;
2. pacing the interview so that the more personal topics emerged gradually;
3. ensuring that the interviews were conducted in comfortable, private rooms and that, where practical, refreshments were available;
4. debriefing after the interview and where necessary discussing appropriate strategies to address issues that appeared unresolved;
5. responding supportively and immediately to events described that evoked distress in participants.

Telephonic Interviews

Careful consideration was given to the use of telephonic interviews in relation to delaying the project substantially. Riley, Wood, Clark, Wilkie and Szivas (2000) suggest that

telephonic interviews require the same amount of planning and often need a more structured approach than face-to-face interviews do. Challenges presented by Riley et al. include the interpretation of responses, which may more easily encompass misunderstanding or inconsistencies; the development of trust and rapport; and ethics in terms of having access to confidential, emotive of personal information. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) raise as a central issue whether telephone interviews can stand in for face-to-face interviews without reducing the quality of the data obtained and other objectives of qualitative research. Saunders (2003) suggests the use of telephone interviews as a viable follow up method to clarify interview data, once researchers integrity and competence have been established. Riley et al. suggested providing participants with an outline of the interview guide. Cresswell (1998) argues that telephonic interviews are the best source of information when no other direct access is possible.

After reviewing the literature and the potential advantages and disadvantages discussed by Sturges and Hanrahan (2004), Saunders et al. (2003) and Cresswell (1998) the following steps were taken to maximise the data quality while minimising the imposition on participants:

1. Participants were again contacted telephonically by senior HRD manager from the organisation who had coordinated the mentoring programme, who was known to participants;
2. This was followed up with contact by researcher comprising similar telephonic and email contact as for the other participants;
3. Consideration given to the research question, which did not preclude telephone interviews as being impractical or not providing comparable data to in-person interviews;
4. The face-to-face interviews were all conducted first, creating a benchmark from which to assess the quality of telephone interviews;
5. Absence of visual information and sensitivity to the potential pitfalls of telephonic interviewing was discussed with both telephonic participants at the start of the interview;

6. Participants were invited to indicate any concerns or discomfort in relation to the interview process at any stage;
7. Attention to verbal cues was given during the interviews, during the transcribing of interviews and in the analysis of transcription.

Both telephonically interviewed participants were asked to discuss why they had turned down the first opportunity to be interviewed and had accepted in the second instance. In both cases participant's perception of their mentoring experience as negative and foreclosed in terms of duration had lead to an initial feeling of not having much to offer. Upon reflection, both had felt that their experiences, however limited, might be of value. Participant A felt equally comfortable with being interviewed telephonically or face-to-face. Participant B expressed a preference for face-to-face but found the telephonic interview acceptable. Both participants mentioned feeling that the interviews had been helpful in terms of reflecting on their experiences, resolving their uncertainties and planning a future approach towards being mentored.

Further Considerations in Adopting a Mixed-Modal Approach to Interviews:

The face-to-face interviews, while probing and potentially personal, had not surfaced levels of sensitivity that were intensely emotionally painful to the extent that face-to-face contact would have been absolutely preferable or necessary. In assessing the possibility of telephone interviews, it was felt that they were preferable to losing the contribution of participants that one would not otherwise have had contact with. A final consideration was the contemporary technological developments in telephone usage where most people nowadays, and certainly business people, own telephones and have instrumental and expressive conversations telephonically on a daily basis.

Confidentiality

Participants were assured in the covering letter and again at the start of the interview that the information that they provided would be treated confidentially and not linked to them personally. It was communicated that all identifying data would remain with the researcher only and that access to raw data would be made available to this researcher's

academic supervisor only. The small sample size has precluded the inclusion of complete transcripts that would potentially allow individuals to be identified within their organisation.

Data Recording

Interviews were tape recorded for purposes of clarity, completeness, to note any verbal cues and to obtain an accurate account of participants' experiences. Participants were informed about the intention to record the interviews in first contact with the researcher by email letter. They were given the opportunity to refuse having the interview recorded. Permission to record was also obtained from each participant just prior to starting the interviews. Written interview notes were made directly after the face-to-face interviews by the researcher and during and after the interview in the case of the telephonically interviewed participants. These notes supplemented the transcriptions and providing an initial sense of the key themes for each participant.

A portable dicta-recording machine was used for recording purposes. In the case of the face-to-face interviews, these were conducted in a closed office or boardroom that allowed for suitable auditory conditions. The same recording equipment was used for the telephonic interviews, which were conducted from the researcher's home, with the addition of an ear microphone located between the earpiece of the telephone and the researcher's ear, which adequately picked up both voices in the interview.

Data Consolidation

The recordings were transcribed directly by the researcher using a playback machine providing a detailed typed account of each interview. Handwritten notes that were taken either during or after interviews were attached to the transcripts to supplement the tape recordings.

Transcripts were emailed to participants with a covering note, and in some instances with specific questions, requesting that they clarify and verify the information obtained. Several of the participants made small changes by way of clarifying what they had intended.

Data Analysis

O'Leary (2004, p. 185) advised that in order to keep a sense of the overall projects the analysis needs to be conducted in a "critical, reflexive and iterative" fashion. Specific guidelines suggested by O'Leary reinforced the need to stand back from the detail of the research, and think critically about the content and direction of the findings. Reflexivity entailed the writer giving constant consideration to the participants, herself and the integrity of the research process in the decisions that were taken. Working in an iterative process entailed weaving between the different voices in the research process, including those in the literature, each of the participants and my own in on-going circles in order to embrace the strategic and creative thinking process, which O'Leary describes as being central to the research process.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the typed transcripts, guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, an idiographic approach to thematic analysis that entails annotating transcripts with summaries, notes and associations before identifying emerging themes (Smith, 2003). A master list of themes was produced for each interview after which the themes were consolidated on a single master list, with references to location in the text. An iterative process of engaging with the text and the literature served to clarify the key themes and identify emerging patterns and associations. Every effort was made to stay as close as possible to the original text in keeping with the phenomenological approach. The researcher analysed participants' transcripts at each of the stages, using the technical outline provided by Smith as a guide. The analysis surfaced various themes and connections between themes for each interview and across interviews. Further analysis revealed master themes and sub-themes and directed a more focused review of relevant bodies of literature, which developed the literature review included in this study.

Reflexivity

O'Leary (2004) suggests periodically positioning oneself, as the researcher, outside the research process in order to critically reflect on the process and consider the factors that may have affected the research project at each stage. She suggests that one's ability to relate to participant's accounts depends on one's own conceptual framework as well as the interpretative work brought to the project. The writer found that being conscious of her own feelings about work, identity, career and mothering and their interconnected effects in her life were helpful as a preparatory step to conducting the interviews. It assisted her in bracketing her own experiences in a way that hopefully allowed her to understand participant's accounts from their own perspectives. Some of the ideas expressed during the interviews and in the subsequent review of the literature revealed penetrating personal insights and understanding regarding her own situation pertaining to identity, work and family dilemmas.

During the analysis it was important to separate the writer's personal interaction with the research with the themes generated by the participants in order to generate a true account of their experiences. The voices expressed in the literature, those of the respondents and the writer's own, guided the analysis in an interactive and meaningful way towards a comfortable resolution of the common and unique experiences expressed.

Oakely (1981) and Finch (1984), both cited by Lee (1993), argue that trust is most likely to be established between women researchers and respondents as a result of 'shared identification'. The writer felt that her gender and personal experience in a corporate environment helped her relate to participants in terms of their struggles and achievements pertaining to their work, development, family and the balance attained between these things. She was conscious of juggling her research obligations with her own family commitments while conducting this research, constantly striving for a balance that was highly elusive. Several identity-related issues surfaced for her in relation to her own roles as a work professional and a mother, which necessitated reflection to find a more sustainable resolution. In this sense the writer was an active participant of the research process.

The risk exists that the research was contaminated by the writer's own experiences, but hopefully enough attention was given to the voices of the participants for the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

Rationale of Research Design

The methodological aim of the research was to provide a richness of information that accessed participant's levels of meaning, feeling and value giving insight into how they think about their world, as individuals with particular reference to their experiences of mentoring.

The research commenced with the single focus of understanding women's experiences of being mentored and evolved into a more holistic interpretation of women's life and work experiences. This was appropriate in relation to the content and complexity of women's lives, their ongoing development, their work and their experiences of being mentored.

It was meaningful to get the contribution of all the female participants on the mentoring programme in order to fulfill the research aims within the context of the particular company. A mixed-modal (face-to-face and telephonic) interview approach was helpful in overcoming practical constraints of time and cost whilst adhering to research aims and respecting participant's choices and availability. The use of e-mail was also beneficial in verifying the information obtained from participants without imposing again on their work schedule. The quality of data obtained from the interviews can be attributed to the high level of rapport enjoyed in most of the interviews and did not appear to diminish in relation to the method of interview, whether face-to-face or telephonic.

Having laid the theoretical foundation and approach adopted in conducting this research, the next section reviews participant's accounts of their experiences captured under the relevant themes that surfaced during the interviews. In keeping with the phenomenological approach, every effort has been made to reflect the original dialogue, as per the transcriptions, so as to convey the essence of participant's experiences. The emerging themes are relatively 'close' to the transcript texts, rather than theoretical abstractions of the original dialogues.

CHAPTER THREE: DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Two main types of mentorship have been identified within organisational settings, namely formal and informal (Kram, 1985, Scandura & Williams, 2000). This study has explored the experiences of women within a formal mentoring programme taking into account the broader context of women's lives, their work, their families, their careers and their ongoing process of development.

The chapter has combined the findings of the study with a discussion of those findings. This was felt to be an effective way of dealing with the complexity and overlapping nature of the themes that surfaced as part of the mentees life and mentoring experiences as it is likely to read more coherently and avoid repetition in many instances.

The quality of each mentoring relationship was experienced as a unique blend of characteristics and outcomes that evolved from the interaction between individual factors, the organisational context and the interpersonal interaction between the mentor and mentee. Individual factors comprised issues at the intra-personal and personal levels. At the intra-personal level salient factors included the mentee's level of self-awareness, personal development and identity as well as the mentee's affect, understanding and expectations of mentoring. At a personal level, the analysis explores mentee's experiences of work, career and work-life balance as significant factors to participants' development and mentoring experiences. At an inter-personal level, the mentor-mentee pairing, building rapport and establishing a basis for deepening the relationship in order to engage constructively with the mentor on a variety of personal and work-related issues (depending on needs) were significant. These factors interacted differently for each individual, within their specific contexts. The analysis gave priority to how the relationships were perceived by the mentees in terms of their experiences, and how these related to their personal and professional development.

This discussion draws on the work of Kram (1985) and Noe (1988) as well as a selection of contemporary mentoring models referred to earlier (Green, 1997; Wales, 2000; Johnson et al, 1999; Young & Perrewe, 2000). Collectively these models have supported the relevance of intra-personal, personal, interpersonal and contextual characteristics pertaining to the experience of mentoring.

Adopting this format, the discussion commences the analysis at the intra-personal level, with a discussion of participant's orientation to mentoring including their understanding of mentoring and their expectations of the formal mentoring programme, followed by insights to participant's self-awareness, personal development and self-identity. At a personal level, career development and work-life and, more specifically work-family balance of the mentees is discussed. The analysis continues, at a contextual level, to discuss mentee's experiences of the nature of the business, organisational culture, their job contexts and the mentoring programme mandate. The final section discusses the mentees experiences of their mentoring relationship, including the pairing of mentors and mentees, the scope and focus of their relationships and the nature of the interaction between them.

Intra-Personal Level

One of very few studies exploring the underlying psychology of mentoring Wales' (2000) study of senior executives' experience of mentoring. In that study, Wales cites evidence that an awareness of how an individual's inner world impacts on personal and professional effectiveness has helped people be more objective and deal with the world in a better way. She also found evidence of the effects that mentoring had on an individual's inner being, increasing self-confidence and self-esteem.

A review of the literature has attempted to raise issues pertaining to women's life experiences and personal development as a basis for better understanding their experience of mentoring. The next section explores each participant's internal orientation to mentoring and the potential effects it may have on the internal experience of women.

Affect, Understanding and Expectations of Mentoring

It was thought that participants' affect towards mentoring would have a bearing on individual expectations and outcomes to the process. Fagenson-Eland, Marks and Amendola (1997), as cited by Young and Perrewe (1997), support this view. All participants, but one, indicated a high level of personal motivation at being selected to participate on the pilot-mentoring programme. Participant E described being selected as

"a psychological boost at having been identified as someone with potential in the company while Participant B mentioned *"I was very impressed when my name was chosen among all of the candidates ... I felt honoured"*. Participant H, the exception, was already benefiting from a small network of informal mentoring relationships, and did not have an explicit need to participate in the formal programme, although she participated willingly.

Kram (1985) suggested that mentees usually have an idea of what they expect from a mentor, usually centering on career and social support. Kram's model of career and psychosocial functions is widely referred to in the literature on mentoring. Career functions relate to aspects of the mentoring relationship that enhances career advancement, such as sponsorship, coaching, protection and providing exposure and visibility to the mentee. Psychosocial functions enhance effectiveness in a professional role and include friendship, counselling, role modeling, acceptance and confirmation. Both refer to facilitating development within the work role.

Participant's expectations of the mentoring process were generally in accordance with Kram's (1985) conceptualisation of mentoring functions, being related to job and career development. Individual differences in how mentee's conceptualised mentoring surfaced in accordance with their perceived individual needs, reinforcing the idea of mentoring being a personal exchange between the mentor and mentee (Pringle and Young, 2000). In several instances mentorship was strongly linked to acquiring improved skill and productivity in an operational sense, to better fulfill her existing function in the organisation.

Participant A, for example, understood mentoring to encompass having a senior person provide on-the-job support, which would include relevant job knowledge, advice and assistance in overcoming job-related obstacles, alternative approaches to solving problems and assistance in planning your day and becoming more productive. Her particular need was to cope with her own job plus standing in for two other people over an extended period without necessarily having the expertise to perform in certain functional areas.

Participant A: ... mentoring is also very much about what you are doing now and not just life skills or successes. You need to match the two to have the practical tools to get through what you want to go through now.

In a similar vein, participant C mentioned *"helping the mentee set up a path to reach a certain goal ..."* with the expectation that she would be able to work independently afterwards.

Participant E thought of mentoring as a way to find out more about the company and being exposed to *"how managers think"* and not necessarily being problem centred or needing to fix something. Participant G related mentoring to fast-tracking people with potential into certain positions and mentioned *"improving skills"* toward *"being a manager"*, *"learning more about the company"* and that it would have been a good *"stepping stone"* in terms of future internal applications for positions.

Other participants linked mentorship most strongly with career growth. Participant B saw mentorship as a means to *"build me into a leader and into a management position"*, and envisaged a process that would support her ongoing development into management positions, requiring skills for understanding and dealing with people, mentoring others, solving problems and coping with different situations at work.

Participant F's conceptualisation of mentoring was *"still quite vague"* but spanned both current operational and future career-support, in that mentoring would *"give me the skills at present to cope with a job that I'm doing and a job that I aspire to do one day"*. Participant D gives a more personal emphasis to mentoring as being *"professionally a support structure"*, helping someone in just *"finding her way"*, and being *"person specific"* and *"one-on-one"*.

In a general sense participants understood mentoring to be a positive development intervention with the potential to offer personalised support to them in an operational, job-related sense as well as to support their overall career development in keeping with Kram's (1985) career and psychosocial functions.

Participant H expressed a more holistic interpretation of mentoring as a way of being guided in "*various and sometimes unexpected ways ... you would think career and*

then ... on a more personal level sometimes, it could be family ... or toning down your aggressive nature ...". Perhaps because of her positive experience of a longstanding informal mentoring relationship, which is analogous to a professional friendship and therefore more open-ended than traditional formal mentoring relationship, and being a working mother, with the associated conflict of demands, Participant H expressed a more holistic role for mentoring. Her concept of mentoring potentially includes engaging at career, behavioural and family levels.

In probing issues such as sense-of-self, personal priorities and work-life balance several other participants expanded their views on the areas that mentoring may impact, during the course of the interview, to include personal growth, identity-related development areas and the issue of work and family needs. This finding supports the view expressed by the writer elsewhere in this report that mentoring holds more potential for women than simply job or organisationally-related development.

> Participant F: *[As a result of being mentored] I've realised that I'm not as organised as I thought I was and I can cope with more than I thought I could. Those have been the biggest insights into my personal growth and letting go of things.*

Participant B, a single, working mother indicated initially: *"I would rather not bring my personal life into the job"* and later suggests that depending on the mentor's background and experience, she may be willing in future to discuss both personal and work-related issues.

Previous research suggests that mentoring encompass career development, psychological support and role modeling (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Kram, 1985, Levinson et al, 1978; Noe, 1988; Scandura, 1992, all cited by Scandura & Williams, 2002), which does not necessarily extend to personal and identity development and work-family domains. More recent literature on mentoring, with a distinctly European outlook, defines the concept of mentoring, most appropriately for women, in relation to both the personal and professional aspects of an individual's life (Williams-Nickelson, 2005).

Noe (1988) makes reference to mentors often having a dual interpersonal role, facilitating exchanges about work and non-work experiences. This seems particularly applicable to the ongoing development of women's identity, the relational emphasis given in all areas of their lives and the interconnected nature of their life roles and priorities (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Josselson, 1987). These findings suggest that a more holistic approach to mentoring that encompasses lifespan development and work-family domains, as proposed by Johnson et al (1999) and discussed elsewhere in this study, may be appropriate and necessary if the intention is that women are to be afforded the opportunity of developing to their fullest potential in organisations.

Self-Awareness, Personal Development, and Self-Identity

The participants in this study fell between the ages of 26 and 35 in what Kram (1985) describes as the early career stage. This career stage highlights the need to resolve important issues around self, career and family as the young adult attempts to develop competence in the work sense, while providing for self and/or family members. New roles, as a single or married adult and potentially a parent are taken on concurrently to adapting to various roles in the work sense, presenting developmental challenges in the work/career and family domains. Noe (1988) suggests that mentoring may help women to develop career plans and to develop a more defined self-identity.

Self-awareness, personal development and self-identity were salient to participants' accounts of their work, their careers and balancing their life priorities. Overall participants demonstrated a significant level of self-awareness in describing their choices and approaches to personal and work-related challenges.

Participant B defined herself very much through her work role, enjoying the positive feedback, personal stimulation and sense of being successful obtained through her job however indicated that she would prefer to be a stay-at-home mom, if she could. Participant B indicated that she is primarily defined by her role as a mother. This may possibly be reinforced by her single-parent status. Her responses suggest that she may experience a conflict of identity should her work demands exceed her personal resources to care for her family over an extended period.

Participants' D and F had sustained high levels of involvement in their work over an extended period and were now consciously committed to redefining who they were in terms of non work-related areas of their lives and *"getting the balance better" (participant D)*. They described this as a process with associated disappointments and dilemmas, but felt it necessary in order to sustain their work commitment and feel more balanced and harmonious as human beings.

> *Participant F: The insight didn't come easily - it was with great disappointment to other people [turning down a promotion] but I had to stay with what I felt was best for me ... [My mentor] helped with the insights I needed.*

Participant F carefully considered a difficult career decision together with her mentor, who was also able to strengthen her resolve to select a preferred option and deal with the consequences of her decision. This was done in a way that preserved her sense-of-self-esteem, in the face of the adversity that she encountered in relation to her decision. Participants' D and F's responses support the view discussed previously of the unfolding identity of women throughout their lives, where other life and career priorities override the traditional expectations of linear career progression and an intense focus on work as a primary aspect of life.

Psychological insights, offered by Bolton (2000), are helpful in understanding the dynamics of women's unfolding identity and choices. She describes the twin voices of self-awareness balanced with self-doubt as a phenomenon particular to women fulfilling significant roles at work, home and in the broader community. It is especially prevalent in contemporary women where social roles and gender stereotypes are in a state of flux. Women are inclined to continually question their choices around how they resolve work and family demands, and in the absence of clear guidelines or role models, these issues can be both psychologically exhausting and personally enriching. This tendency of women, to reflect on their life and work experiences and the connections between them, were evident in the numerous responses from participants on themes such as self-awareness, personal development, self-identity and work-life or work-family balance.

Josselson (1987) describes the interpersonal and culturally defined nature of identity which develops through a combination of roles, beliefs and values that serve as the core of being, making a person recognizable to others. Of the three basic dilemmas facing contemporary women, namely task, identity and the balance between them, Bolton (2000. p. 33) describes the identity challenge as the most basic. The identity challenge pertains to the choices someone makes about who she is at work and in other life domains, based on her self-concept, gender concept and self-esteem (Gerdes, 1988).

The interrelated nature of self-awareness, self-identity and career development was evident in participants' descriptions of their work and personal lives. The nature of women's identity and career development has been acknowledged as being more complex than traditional approaches to development and careers associated with men (Evetts, 1994; Pringle & Dixon, 2003; Levinson as cited by Greenhaus et al, 2000). This view is aptly illustrated by Bateson (1989), as cited by Bolton (2000, 33), in pinpointing the nature of women's experience of life and career: "Women compose a life from different themes and roles, forming a richer but much more varied mosaic than men's linear progress through life and career".

Two participants spoke about being very strongly defined by their work role, but considered this to be limiting their personal growth, career development and opportunities to develop relationships both inside and outside of work. As single women, unencumbered by the complexity of balancing work and family demands, they provide insights into their experience of their identity in relation to their work and express the salience of maintaining relationships in their lives; beyond simply achieving what is required on the job.

A participant expressed dissonance in terms of her roles at work. Her expressed need to fulfill a more affiliative role, as a mentor herself to others in her work environment, was not being effectively met due to her being immersed in the operational demands of her work. She reflected on the effects of her recent work demands on her self-identity, life priorities and sense-of-self-esteem.

> *Participant: I see myself very much as a leader, as someone people are looking at for ... you know, help and advice on how to do things or maybe just to*

bounce things off ... with my work being basically the largest part of my life at the moment that's basically who I am ...

Where I am now, I'm barely being able to influence myself positively so that's basically my first priority to look after the people around me, whether it's in the working environment or friends or family ... to be able to fulfill that mentorship gift ... that thing in my life that I seem to be good at.

This participant's expressed need to mentor is evidence of Josselson's (1988) concept of "relatedness" that women bring to the workplace and the ongoing need for "revisions" to expand women's identity. A link is apparent between her immediate work situation and her sense-of-self-esteem. She sees herself as a leader and someone that other people confide in and approach for help. Her perceived inadequacy and lack of control over her work situation highlights her sense of alienation and prevents her from performing in accordance with her self-concept. Regrettably her mentoring experience did not help her work towards a better situation due to operational demands and time constraints. However, everything she said suggested a need to allow time for reflection on herself, her needs, her work and her work-life balance in a holistic way in order to gain a better sense of herself, her purpose and to be able to respond purposefully to her needs.

Participant: I think it [mentoring] had the potential to [help] but I think with um everything that happened it never got to be helpful in that sense, but it definitely has the potential to.

Greenhaus et al. (2000) suggests that career success is likely to produce alienation and feeling of failure for people who disregard their own needs to develop personal relationships and perform work that is satisfying, in identity terms.

Another participant described a situation where her personal development and work-life balance is stunted and she mostly has to decline opportunities for fun, recreation or family contact or to help somebody out. She describes herself as being unhealthily involved in her job to the extent that her sense-of-self feels threatened.

Participant: *So far as personal development - it's sort of stunted completely, because I'm here all the time ... I'm completely consumed! ... I've become 'ego-involved'. I've reached a dangerous level. It means you put your whole personality into it [work] and see it as a personal failure ... 'performance' is just doing your best, however you perform. In sports psychology when your athlete becomes ego-involved, its time for them to resign."*

The same participant expressed a sense of personal and social alienation as a result of her preoccupation with work and a sense of resignation and inability to change her circumstances. Her mentoring experience served to validate her feelings of being overwhelmed by the work demands in her life: *"It [mentoring] helps to overcome those completely unnatural days where you have to do three jobs, because there's somebody there who understands what you are doing"*. She also described feeling more confident and empowered by the knowledge and approach to work challenges that she had gleaned from her mentor. Little was offered in terms of her mentor unlocking any of the broader and longer-term issues pertaining to her identity development, work-life balance and career development. In relation to this she commented that mentoring had the potential to address these areas, but that *"... its probably a case of the more mentoring I get, the more it will equip me to do a job somewhere else, out of the company"*.

Both these participants had become very immersed in their work as a result of increased work demands and pressure over an extended period. Both situations resulted in a feeling of powerlessness to change circumstances at work and a lack of affiliative satisfaction. Both participants shared a sense that they had been too accommodating of others at their own expense, or stated differently, not placing enough emphasis on maintaining their sense of 'self'. Deteriorated personal lives and poor life quality in general cannot be blamed entirely by work circumstances the situation described by these two participants however, their circumstances point to the need to integrate work and non-work lives in a manner which is sustainable to the self. Josselson (1987) and Pringle and Dixon (2003) describe this as finding the appropriate balance on the continuum between task and relatedness, or put simply, doing and being.

The above experiences emphasise the importance of work-life balance for women and the need to maintain relationships both in and beyond the workplace. This lends support to the views of Josselson (1987) that the hallmark for achievement for many women may well be the balance among work, relationships and other life interests.

The responses of all the participants suggest an awareness of, or having actually embarked on, a quest to become more authentic at work. Bolton (2000) suggests a paradox confronting women and their development at work, where the more women seek to be authentic at work through developing closer relationships, the more they risk becoming excluded or isolated, as their relational needs are regarded as threatening, inappropriate or uncomfortable by men in the workplace. The interpersonal emphasis surfacing in relation to women's development throughout the participant's experiences and in the literature discussed suggests a significant role for mentoring relationships in organisations as a means of facilitating personal growth through life and career transitions, while providing a basis for instrumental support, organisational knowledge and skills.

Personal Level

Work-Life Balance and Careers

Levinson and his colleagues suggest a clash between homemaker and career roles and the challenges that this presents for contemporary career-minded women. It is suggested that, in the quest to resolve these issues and their complex interrelationships with one another, women may experience difficulty in identifying goals and tasks to become their own person. As a result, they have a vaguer sense-of-self and overlook their own needs for personal time because the needs of family and career take precedence (Levinson & Levinson, 1996, as cited by Greenhaus, 2000).

These issues are articulated differently by Josselson (1987) who argues that women's identities are distinctly more compounded and difficult to articulate than men's are as they orient themselves in more complex ways and balance many aspirations and involvements. Marshall (1989), cited by Pringle and Dixon (2003), suggested the central issue to women's careers as the struggle for balance between agency, or doing, and

communion, or being. These two views depict the relative emphasis given by career theorists to men's and women's careers in terms of paid work and relationships respectively.

Pringle and Dixon (2003, p. 4) state that women's career models are "an amalgam of personal development" because [women] are not exclusively involved in, nor defined by, involvement in paid work". The insights from the discussion on personal development and self-identity in the previous section were that women may be defined by their work for a time, as indicated by both Participant's D and F, but inevitably other aspects of their identity demand to be acknowledged. Levinson (1986) refers to a period of appraisal at around age 30. In terms of women's careers, Pringle and Dixon (2003) suggest an evolutionary rather than age-specific process of career development, which seems more appropriate, given the substantial degree of choice that women exercise in the timing and nature of life events.

Pringle and Dixon's (2003) Life-Career model referred to in a previous section, links career progression with transitions associated with dominant life activities, which may or may not be age-related, such as retirement, studies, family responsibilities or a decision to travel. The flexibility and inclusivity of this model of women's careers accommodates a more realistic approach to recent changes in women's lives, in terms of their expectations, timing of life events and tendency to adopt multiple social roles.

In general, the participants did not articulate a definite idea of how they saw their careers progressing, which was significant, considering their evident commitment to their working lives and that only two of them were, at the time, juggling motherhood and work responsibilities. Participants were distinctly more preoccupied with and expressive about how to obtain a balance between their careers and family or personal lives, once again lending support to the view expressed by Josselson (1987) that achieving balance may be the hallmark for achievement for most women.

Participant D, who is single and who has been highly career focused, feels that her primary roles as a work professional and a provider for her extended family are complementary and mutually supportive. She questions, however, whether this happy status quo is sustainable once she has a family, as she intends. Participant D indicated that she would value the freedom and choice to stop working to raise her family.

Participant D: I think that scares a lot of people because I am not this, I thought I was in my middle twenties, manic workaholic.... I don't know if I create the impression that I am, but I always knew that eventually I want a life. Now I want the family, you know. ... On the other hand, somebody said to me that the possibility that I would not work is zero, because I would need to be involved in the action. So I will just see how it goes. Its just something that I fear.

Participant D's response demonstrates the inter-connected nature of her work and family domains, which are also intertwined, with her sense-of-self, as referred to the women-centred theorists discussed elsewhere in this study. She expresses fear at the anticipated conflict between work and family demands which suggests that, although she clearly identifies with the idea of herself as a mother in future, the integration of this role with her work identity is far from resolved.

Reflecting on the recent break up of her ten-year relationship with the man she planned to marry, which she describes as a mini-divorce, participant D's response illustrates again the fluidity of the boundaries between her personal life and her work and the significance of relationships in terms of her evolving identity.

Participant D: ... That [breaking up] was difficult and also because at the age [of 30] ... it's a self-esteem thing. You can't throw yourself in your work and you are not sparking, then it's like: "God, I want to have a family and I'm thirty! The clock is ticking! [Exaggerated] I just spent ten years on nothing!

Participant D's response suggests a strong influence of self-imposed and socially determined expectations of women of her age. The interconnectedness between her sense-of-self and her work is evident, where work is considered to be an inadequate distraction from her sense of failure and disappointment with her personal circumstances. The significance of her romantic relationship and its part in supporting her desire to be a mother is seen as an investment that did not yield the anticipated returns. It appeared as though this event had brought her existing work-life balance and work-family priorities

into question, demonstrating the interconnected nature of work and family issues for her self-esteem and sense of well being.

Managing Multiple Roles

Two of the participants were working mothers and both expressed evidence of role conflict, role enhancement and the mitigating effects of perceived role quality in relation to their well being.

Participant H, who is married with one child, acknowledged multiple-role conflict and time-based strain but appeared not to be negatively affected by it. Her responses indicate that her identity and roles are in alignment and have integrity with her self-concept, and that the integration of her work and family roles create an acceptable balance for her.

Participant H defines herself primarily as a career woman *"I define myself by the work that I do"* and *"I am also a mother and a wife"*. She indicates that in terms of work-family balance and time for herself *"the self, there is no time"*. When asked about which role affords her the greatest sense-of-self-esteem, she indicated: *"The business work part. Ag, and the mothering ... different feeling and both very fulfilling"* suggesting that her identity is primarily, but not entirely, defined by her work, and that her positive experience of both roles have a meaningful and positive impact on her well being.

Her responses support the findings of Barnett and Baruch (1986), as cited by Croome (1997), that the perception of the quality of roles is directly related to women's psychological well being. Participant H acknowledges the conflict in her choice to pursue both her work and motherhood, but clearly enjoys the benefits of both. She suggests that she is unlikely to ever *"get the balance right"* and seems at peace with prioritising time at work over time spent at home or with her child. She quoted her informal mentor who had influenced her thought process that contributed to her sense of peace in this regard as saying:

> *You're not going to walk the dog at 5pm. It's not going to happen! But when you rest, rest well. Go have holidays. Spend quality time even though you don't have the quantity. Make peace with it, because that's who you are. You are a workaholic, but when you rest, rest well.*

She indicates her intention to become better at finding more time for herself. She strives to minimise the conflict and guilt that she experiences at the end of a busy workday.

> *Participant H:[I am working on] not to feel guilty – [I am] never going to be happy with the time I spend with my child and not with my child, but also love the adrenaline from work. Love the pace. When I'm there I forget about it, then when I am in the car at 7 or 8 o' clock at night [and I think]... it was an hour today [with my child]. And that's not good enough. So it's a constant battle.*

Participant H's responses closely resemble the 3rd shift described by Bolton (2000). In this instance the participant's internal dialogue appears to be constructive, leaving her feeling more resolved and at peace with her decisions than cast in self-doubt. Her responses also support the view of Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat and Lang (1990), as cited by Croome (1997), that role enhancement and conflict can co-exist. It is noteworthy that the process of resolution was strongly influenced through her personal contact with her informal mentor who had worked through similar issues in much the same way.

In addition to her formal mentor, her informal mentor provided a template for her in terms of coping with the work-family juggle. Participant H also made use of the complete range of support systems as suggested by House (1981), as cited by Greenhaus et al (2000). Instrumental, emotional, informational and appraisal type support systems were incorporated to assist her in managing her multiple demands. They included a full-time nanny, a flexible spouse, an understanding boss, two informal mentors, a strong team of staff members, a *"wonderful"* PA and a leadership forum of five women who meet monthly to discuss work and life issues. Participant H appears to have resolved her work-life balance challenges that encompass aspects of role enhancement and role conflict in a way that suits her subjective perspective of a manageable balance, suggested by Tiedje et al. (1990), as cited by White (1999).

Given the ever-changing demands of young families and work circumstances, and her subjective experience of the quality of both her primary roles, her existing 'balance' is likely to be under constant review creating opportunities for shifts in how she prioritises her roles.

As a single-working mother, Participant B experiences a heightened sense of conflict and enhancement in fulfilling the requirements of her roles as a single parent to two children and a working woman. She relies on the financial benefits of working in addition to significant personal benefits: *"... I love what I'm doing ... I think I'm doing extremely well ... that just gives me the 'oomph to go on'"*. Her responses are indicative of both role conflict and role enhancement obtained from being substantially invested in both her work and family roles, which while mutually supportive, also create moments of conflict and overload.

> *Participant B: I honestly and truly don't know where do I get the strength, I'm sure it's from above, to go on and to do what I'm doing on a daily basis ... to what I have achieved up to now, as a single parent. And I'm proud of who I am and the complements I'm getting ... its motivating, you know, to give me that to go on ... there are times when you feel you've had enough, just feel like quitting. You get those days.*

Participant B's responses demonstrate the personal value attached to positive work experiences in relation to her sense of achievement, self-esteem and motivation to overcome difficulties encountered in managing her multiple roles. These benefits occur despite her indication that she identifies herself as first and foremost a mother and would most prefer to be at home with her children.

White (1999) refers to the ongoing debate between role expansion and role strain as far from resolved. It appears, as illustrated by Pringle and Dixon (2003) in their Life-Career model and as suggested by Tiedje et al (1990) in Croome (1997) and White (1999), that the changing experiences of women in relation to balancing careers and families are unique and individually determined. This potentially validates a flexible, more creative and individualist approach towards assisting their career development.

Insights into the life and work experiences of participants D, B and H in this section point to the relevance of integrating work and family life in a way that facilitates optimal well being for women. Failure to achieve an acceptable level of integration may result in negative psychological symptoms, an inadequately formed sense of identity and an inability to sustain desirable multiple roles, such as working and mothering. Giving up work, for example, may be damaging, where a woman incorporates work as a meaningful part of her identity. Similarly prioritising work entirely over family commitments may also not be sustainable. Within an organisational setting, this suggests a significant role for mentoring as a means of assisting women in working through the relentless task of balancing their work and family roles as an integral part of their professional and personal development. The personalised development opportunity that mentoring ideally offers is unique, situated, as it is, within a relevant organisational and interpersonal context with the potential to facilitate both professional and personal support.

Contextual Level

As this research was conducted within the field of organisational psychology, it was considered important to explore participant's subjective experience of organisational life in relation to the influence that contextual factors may have on the mentorship process.

According to Clutterbuck (2003) a wide range of contextual factors can affect the mentoring relationship and programme including the clarity of the programme mandate and the supportiveness of the organisational environment. Programme clarity would typically encompass the extent to which the objectives, desired outcomes of the programme, roles, responsibilities and other expectations of the mentors and mentees are formulated, communicated and understood by the mentoring pair. Clutterbuck found a direct link between such clarity of purpose regarding the programme goals and the clarity of purpose experienced in the individual relationships, which in turn has a critical influence on factors such as whether the relationship:

1. gains momentum;
2. defines and facilitates the mentee's desired transition; etc

3. relates daily on-the-job issues to the overall objective
4. satisfies expectations of both parties

The supportiveness of the environment refers to the level of management support for the programme and condoning the time needed for mentors and mentees to meet (Clutterbuck, 2003).

Young and Perrewe (2003), from an interactionist perspective, and Kram (1985), from an open-systems viewpoint, concur that environmental and individual factors interact to produce outcomes in human interaction. These perspectives provide relevant insights into the complexities and conditions that facilitate or impede the development of a successful mentoring relationship (Green, 1997; Kram).

The research findings indicate that contextual factors were salient for participants at four different levels: (a) at the broader organisational level, including organisational culture, transformation process and communication practices; (b) at the business unit level; (c) at a job-specific level and (d) at the programme-specific level.

Organisational culture

No single definition exists for the term organisational culture, leading to a great deal of confusion and ambiguity in the literature (Bagraim, 2001). Themes that surfaced in this study suggest a complex view of organisational culture is appropriate, expressed by Alvesson (1993, p. 118) as a "multiple cultural configuration" mixing different levels and kinds of cultural manifestations in overlapping patterns. In support of this view, Bloor and Dawson (1994) entertain the complexity and potential for conflict and confusion, where contradictory interests and practices between individual alliances to professional sub-cultures and business unit sub-cultures, business unit strategies and methods of operation interact with corporate programmes with unpredictable outcomes. Evidence of the complexity of this organisation is evident in the ensuing discussions on transformation, communication, business units and diverse job demands.

Common themes amongst participants at the contextual level were that the nature of the work in their company, and industry, is fast paced and characterised by cyclical daily, weekly or fortnightly print deadlines. This resulted in scheduling difficulties (in

terms of coordinating meetings with their mentors) often culminating in irregular meetings or last minute cancellations of postponements.

> *Participant B: [My mentor was] on the move all the time. We hardly had any contact. She was running from office ... she was just very busy. And my, um, appointments were always cancelled or postponed.*

Of equal significance was that the accepted way of working is very delivery-focused, contrary to the requirements of mentoring, that requires time away from the job and the need to discuss, reflect and integrate learning as essential components of the mentoring process. Participant D and A refer to this point and the impact it had on their respective mentoring relationships.

> *Participant D: ... mentoring ...within work time ... is a good thing and a bad thing. It forces the mentoring to be about what you are doing and where you are in your environment but it is very difficult to gain everything from it if you can't sit back and think about it ... because you are rushing off to the next meeting or something else is a priority.*

> Participant A: *I didn't actually even get time to think about what was happening, what the [mentoring] programme was that I was in at the time. It was ... I had to make time to go through this [mentoring] and I saw it as a necessary thing that I wanted to do. But in the end I just couldn't even do that.*

The responses of participants D and A reinforce the idea that the opportunity to reflect on issues is an essential part of mentoring. Some important considerations surface in timing the mentoring process, such as whether the mentee is in a position to make the commitment to mentoring, and whether she is in control of her time and able to manage her existing workload effectively. Participant A's response suggests that incorrect timing of mentoring in an environment that is entirely deadline and output driven can place

additional pressure on mentees and result in a sense of failure at having not done it justice.

Organisational Transformation

An aspect relevant to the organisational context that surfaced is the socio-political reality faced by previously disadvantaged groups. Understanding organisational effects on individual performance and the complexities encountered by individuals in relation to their gender or race has particular relevance to mentoring as a means of overcoming such obstacles at the individual and broader organisational levels.

Green's (1997) view of mentoring suggests that conscious and unconscious phenomena interact directly on individual experience within the broader context of a learning culture and that individuals in turn impact on the organisation. In this regard, participant D, cites her role in shifting perceptions about women and race within her work context.

> *Participant D: I see myself as an agent of change in a very subtle way - by just being here I change the history. And also socialising and working with people, it doesn't need to be anything concrete or big, but I do change, um ... perceptions.*

According to Ragins (2002a) a key conflict faced by many minority employees is whether to be assimilated into the dominant culture or whether to maintain their individual identity at the cost of being isolated or feeling devalued. Mentoring relationships create an opportunity to explore differences between people at a deeper level than usually encountered in the daily work routine, serving to challenge existing perceptions and stereotypes and increase the acceptance of differences between people, as suggested by participant D in the above response.

Transformation processes are not limited to gender and race only. Participant H made reference to the organisation's progress on the aforementioned dimensions, but indicated that more change was needed in the area of incorporating contemporary family values. She referred to the company as demonstrating *"still old values"* in this regard,

and expressed the need for flexibility in accommodating reasonable family demands, particularly for women who are required to work long hours as a regular part of their work.

Other references to the organisation's transformation indicated that the various business units were at entirely different stages of transformation. A new business unit was described by a participant as *"empowering"*, in both a personal and a career sense, and integrated in terms of race and gender since its inception. Her response is indicative of an environment that would be open to changes in behaviour or practices that were facilitated through the mentoring process. In contradistinction older, more established business units, described as having a dominantly Afrikaans, white male culture, were described as *"backward in their thinking"* and resistant to changes in individual behaviour and approach to work brought about through the mentoring process. A participant described herself and her mentor as *"trying to go forward"* while the others in her business unit were *"just not getting on board"*. Another participant described the bigger company as *"turning towards the new way"* and commented on the substantial amount of change to which her business unit was exposed.

These responses suggest that the participants' concepts of transformation extend beyond racial integration to issues of family values and the willingness of people to accommodate new practices. Instances of alignment and support between management, staff and their mutual business goals were greatly appreciated and enjoyed by participants who had had that experience, and in contrast, discord and a lack of alignment to mutual goals seemed to weigh heavily on participants who were party to that. It appears that the prevailing business unit culture and degree of organisational transformation to which individuals: mentors, mentees and other employees, have been exposed potentially affect their perspectives towards the aims of transformation. These perspectives, in turn, influence the quality of the mentoring relationships, how well the changes facilitated by the mentoring process are received and the degree of success with which they can be implemented.

Organisational Communication

Several participants expressed the view that communication between the various business units was poor and that despite being a media company, individuals often felt quite alienated from the rest of the group. Participants felt disappointed that, as a result, the inherent expertise of the organisation was lost as a means of support to staff. Within business units, participants made reference to functional segmentation and professional sub-cultures, which precluded an exchange of ideas and general business expertise and resulted in a lack of overall appreciation for how the business functioned. Participant A experienced a sense of isolation, being based away from the company's head office.

> Particpant A: ... *we are very much removed from the rest of the group and from Head Office and the things that happen there. It's sometimes difficult - we almost feel that we're getting the crumbs on this side - with not being able to communicate as freely with Head Office and not always knowing what's going on with respect to career planning and training and things like that.*

The physical distance as well as a sense of being excluded, appeared to work against mentees having clear objectives for the mentoring programme, which, in turn, affected their ability or inclination to filter those objectives into the mentoring relationship. These factors also appeared to mitigate against participants being aware of or making use of support to assist mentoring pairs overcome any relationship difficulties or making appropriate use of other company resources and materials available to the mentoring participants.

An interpretation of women's relational tendencies in all spheres of life, suggested by women-centred authors of developmental psychology, such as Gilligan (1982), as cited by Greene (2003), and Josselson (1987) would, in the workplace, amount to needing to feel embedded in the organisation; having a clear sense of its purpose; and knowing how one is to contribute to the overall goals of the company. Feeling excluded and experiencing a sense of isolation at work may, in all likelihood, cause women to question the value of their work, their contribution to the company, and whether and how their work is contributing to their sense-of-self and overall well being. While this research has

proposed that mentoring would be a constructive process for processing and resolving such matters for women, the general communication practices of the company may set the tone for how the communication may occur within the mentoring relationship. Reflecting on this aspect may be a valuable component of the early stages of the mentoring process.

Business Unit Differences

Participants described considerable differences in their experiences of their business units in relation to the culture, climate, structure and general level of management support. The differences suggest variations between the business units in terms of their values, the degree of transformation that they had undertaken, their approach to work and the levels of support that managers are able to offer employees in performing their tasks.

In addition, mentors and mentees each bring an accumulation of individual and work related experiences to their relationship, originating from their past experiences in different parts of the business and previous work environments. Within the organisation mentees will have developed a sense of the how relationships are conducted within the company and this may also have a bearing on their expectation of their mentoring process.

A climate that encourages the fostering of supportive work relationships will facilitate mentoring more readily than one that is highly task oriented and where employees compete for opportunities. As Kram (1985) suggests the latter kind of work environment makes for strained and potentially destructive relationships.

Participant G identified organisational culture differences between her business unit and her mentor's business unit as having had an impact on her mentoring experience. Although not very clear about the nature of the impact, the differences appeared to have a bearing on establishing rapport, although interpersonal and gender differences, may also have contributed to this:

> *Participant G: With [our business unit establishing rapport is] not a problem but it is a culture difference and we learned that lots now that the way [my mentor's business unit] works is totally different to the way we*

work ...we're this black empowerment, cool, everybody [relates] ... and they're still backward in their thinking.

Participants E experienced her environment in a very positive way indicating a manageable level of job demand, generally not needing to work long hours and feeling supported and motivated. She described this as her most positive work experience.

Participant E: My business unit is fun. I look forward to coming to work in the morning. The people I work with are excellent. The management structure is excellent. [My direct boss] is very supportive ...

Her supportive environment meant that fewer obstacles surfaced for her in developing rapport with her mentor and that she found time to reflect on her learning and the implications for future career steps.

Participant A expressed reservations about the way her business unit was structured and the lack of management support that she was able to draw on.

Participant A: I don't think ... that we are running a proper structure that's conducive to getting [help on operational side of my job] either from mentorship or from a manager ... They fixed the structure afterwards, but I don't think its been fixed properly ... and I'm not getting enough from my manager to be able to do my job ...

Participant C also experienced a general lack of support, specifically from top management, within her business unit. She was made to feel indispensable and cited the cause as being *"very bad personnel management ...I think it comes from the top and I think it's always been like that ...I'm not very positive about it changing ..."*

In contrast to participant A, participant C indicated that her business unit climate had no negative impact on her mentoring experience: "*...that didn't change our relationship at all, no I think it brought us closer, ... at least we're trying to go forward and these people are just not getting on board."* Participant F concurred with this view.

She identified no particular effect of her work environment on her experience of being mentored, which she described *"an independent process - not in any way incorporated into the business unit ... very much independent"*. However, environmental aspects such as an increased emphasis on developing the business, restructuring exercise and an additional project which was allocated to her, pointed to emotional and functional development areas which directed the content of the mentoring discussions. Participant C's mentoring experience may have been quite different and more developmental for her, in relation to her broader career and work-life balance needs, had she and her mentor been more supported and less directed at providing operational support to one another as needed to cope with daily pressures.

The experiences of participants varied substantially in relation to the diverse impacts that their different business units had on their mentoring process. While it is difficult to draw conclusions about how much and how directly the business unit environment impacted each mentoring pair, it is relevant to acknowledge the potential impact that the mentoring environment may have on the mentoring experience.

Alvesson (1993, p. 118) introduces the concept of *"cultural traffic"* to indicate the interactive effects of cultures within cultures. Where a mentor and mentee are situated in different business units, this presents an additional challenge and highlights the level of self-insight and organisational understanding needed to overcome obstacles and differences in mentoring. Alvesson's view of cultural traffic is particularly appropriate for complex organisations, such as the organisation in this study, where business units vary considerably in terms of their history, founding values, life-cycle stage, demographics, objectives, target market, and operational cycles. This view is supported by Bloor and Dawson (1994, p. 279), who outline a conceptual framework of organisational culture as the "dynamic outcome of a number of interacting and nested factors" encompassing the potential for various departmental sub-cultures rather than a single unified culture.

Job-Related Influences

Job related factors included job demands such as long hours, rigid and constant deadlines, difficulty co-ordinating schedules between mentor and mentee, job stress, as well as

having to perform two or more jobs concurrently over an extended period. At the time of mentoring and the interviews, Participants A, B and C were experiencing overwhelming job demands. In these instances, particular mention was made of the lack of management support in relation to operational challenges. Participant A and B's responses suggest that their heightened operational challenges and work demands negatively influenced their ability to fully engage in their mentoring process, and contributed to the premature termination of their relationships in both instances, resulting in a significant sense of failure with damaging effects on their self-esteem. These findings suggest that excessive operational demands work against a successful mentoring experience, detracting from the mentoring pair's ability to commit the requisite time and energy. The situation may come about or be aggravated by a perceived lack of management support. The optimal timing of mentorship in the work, and possibly the personal life, of an individual should be an important consideration. Much of what is relevant to this section has will be elaborated on in more detail in the section covering mentoring experiences and the analysis of the mentoring relationships to avoid repetition.

Programme Mandate

The company-provided programme guidelines included having a one-hour meeting every two weeks. A brief orientation was offered to mentors and mentees providing an overview of the programme requirements. An additional one-day skills training programme was offered to mentors only covering the basic skills needed and contextualising mentoring within the organisation's objectives and strategy. A development toolkit, or manual, comprising behavioural competency models was made available to mentors. Additional resources, by way of books, courses and videos were also circulated to mentors. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire after six months outlining the value of their experiences and whether they wished to continue.

Participants did not indicate a consistent recollection or understanding of the programme objectives and requirements, which, when recalled were perceived as guidelines rather than as requirements. Programme specific themes that participants raised included various process-related factors such as the appropriate pairing of mentor and mentee, briefing and training of participants, support for the mentoring pairs, and

resources such as the programme materials or 'toolkit' and their usage. These are raised by Clutterbuck (2002b) as being a potential source of problems accounting for failure in formal mentoring programmes.

Clutterbuck (2003) suggests that being both over or under-managed, for example, can contribute to failed mentoring relationships. In this study participants were largely left to their own devices. Participants did not report any third party intervention, such as by the programme coordinator, during the six-month pilot period, even where relationships, in a couple of instances had stopped functioning. Clutterbuck cites the level of support offered to the relationship as a significant contextual factor relevant to successful mentoring.

Participants held differing views about the programme objectives. They had not all attended a briefing session and some were not sure whether their mentor had attended any training. Usage of the programme manual and resource toolkit varied from not using the materials at all, to relying quite heavily on them to structure the sessions. Participant A described herself as being *"a bit blind"* in terms of knowing what the objectives were and what was expected of her. Participant G linked the programme to affirmative action and indicated that it was *"for AA people ... mostly female ... or a mix of people ... I'm not sure"*. She mentioned that mentioned that her mentoring lacked a plan and an overall objective: *"I didn't have any of that ... just like a headless chicken ...I prefer to know what's meant to be done ... so that I know what I'm going to get out of it.* Participant E expressed the following:

> *Participant E: I found that there were no objectives. It seemed to be very unstructured ... I pretty much expected it to be more focused, more structured with a specific goal in mind. And there doesn't seem to be a specific goal in mind.*

In all four instances, participants C, D, E & F, all of whom had perceived their mentoring to be successful, little attention was given to programme objectives. The lack of specific programme objectives appeared not to feature as critical to the success of their mentoring experience. This aspect may have been as a result of the quality of their mentoring

relationships, but also downplayed by an implicit understanding that as a pilot group, they were to "go with the flow". Another possibility, in keeping with Johnson et al's (1990, p. 386) basic model of understanding mentoring, is that where individuals are embedded or socialised within their work environments, "their internal locus of control provides momentum and they tend to be masters of their own ship". Given the considerable tenure of these participants within the organisation, their entrenchment within their work context potentially contributes to clearer picture of their needs and they are more able to co-create their own mentoring process as a result.

Another aspect that would have a bearing on the value of a programme mandate, would be the level of self-awareness of the mentees. Each of mentees above was insightful into their work and life situations. Participants D and F had described their intention to achieve greater balance between their work and life balance, while participant E had always prioritised work-life balance as a personal priority. Participant C although very operationally focused was also aware of the negative effects to her personally of her 'workaholic' approach.

The experiences of participants A and G suggest that a programme mandate, with specified objectives, roles and outcomes would be valuable in certain instances, particularly during periods of heightened operational demand or where the individual may be in the establishment phase of their careers (Kram, 1985). In keeping with Johnson et al's view (1999), clearly understood programme objectives may also be necessary where mentees are less fully embedded within their work environment; or where, at the point of mentoring and in relation to their other life roles, they have a vaguer sense-of-self in their roles. This may occur, for example, when an individual is assimilating the identity of a new position or becoming a parent for the first time.

The diverse reactions of participants' to the programme mandate, as experienced during this pilot programme, raise important issues to be taken into account in the company-wide rollout in terms of the appropriate degree of clarity, structure and requirements to impose on mentoring pairs.

Implications of Contextual Issues

Organisational culture, history, structure, processes and objectives create contextual implications for mentoring, exerting both direct and indirect influences on the experience and possible outcomes of the mentoring experience. In the task oriented, deadline driven organisation in question, the above findings suggest practical constraints to mentoring, that requires time to be committed to developing rapport, reflecting on one's experiences and the processing and integration of what is learnt. The findings of this study support the views expressed in previous research that an appreciation of the organisational context of mentors and mentees is a necessary component of the relationship, in addition to more individual characteristics (Clutterbuck 2002b, 2003; Green, 1997; Johnson et al, 1999; Kram, 1985; Young & Perrewe, 2000).

The nature of mentoring relationships may possibly be plotted on a continuum of formal to informal, where formal mentoring is entirely structured and controlled by the organisation and informal relationships develop naturally between individuals without any organisational involvement. The findings of this research suggest, that formal mentoring relationships can strongly resemble informal relationships in nature, where the only organisational involvement pertains to some basic guidelines and the approval of the pairing of individuals, which come about as a result of the mentees' personal preferences and influence. This phenomenon suggests considerable differences in the needs of mentoring pairs in relation to developing an appropriate programme mandate.

The above discussion points to the complexities of this organisation and the consideration and care that is needed in interpreting the organisational context to create a programme that attempts to ensure positive experiences for mentoring pairs.

The focus of the discussion now turns to the interpersonal level where a more detailed analysis of participants mentoring relationships will ensue. Participants were asked to reflect on their personal experience of being mentored in terms of what surfaced for them, how their mentoring relationship developed and what the current status of their mentorship was at the time of the interviews. A variety of themes will be discussed in two inter-related sections, namely mentor and mentee pairing and mentoring experiences, which explores in more detail the nature of each of the mentoring relationships.

Interpersonal Level

Clutterbuck and Ragins (2002) are well versed in the emerging area of mentoring and diversity, drawing on their combined experience in Europe and the USA as academics and practitioners in the field. The subsequent analysis of mentoring draws heavily on their work as the depth and breadth of their insights appears unparalleled in the contemporary literature; and because the concepts of diversity and mentoring offer a serendipitous parallel to the writer's emerging understanding of the diversity, unpredictability and potential richness of women's lives and their ongoing development.

Mentor and Mentee Pairing

One of the factors believed to be critical to the success of formal mentoring is the careful selection of mentors and pairing with mentees (Burke & McKeen, 1989; Clutterbuck, 2002a; Forret, Turban & Dhougherty, 1996, as cited by Scandura & Williams, 2002); Ragins, 2002a, 2002b). However the literature does not provide a ready solution for optimal choices. Involving mentors who are both willing and able to mentor as well as involving both mentor and mentee in making appropriate selections are important aspects of this process (Burke & McKeen, 1989; Ragins, 2002a, 2002b). Scandura and Williams (2002, p. 243) recommend "not mandating partnerships" and "trying to allow each party to select the other" as the imposed structure of the relationships could account for fewer benefits accruing to mentees of formal programmes than informal programmes. Healy and Wechert (1990), as cited by Scandura and Williams (2000), also favour a more natural selection process and question whether this type of relationship can be mandated or even co-ordinated. Mismatches often occurring in formalised mentoring may result in dysfunctional relationships with the potential for personal damage to ensue (Scandura, 1998 as cited by Scandura & Williams, 2000).

Clutterbuck (2002a), however, suggests that allowing mentees complete freedom of choice of mentor may not result in optimal choices either. Mentees tend to choose people that they like and may be too close to for optimal learning to take place, or alternatively attach themselves to a high flyer, who may not necessarily have the desired competencies to be a good mentor (Clutterbuck, 2002a). Clutterbuck suggests that the

most pragmatic solution would be to guide the mentee's selection by offering a shortlist of three potential mentors. This necessitates a pre-mentoring phase where the mentee can formulate and discuss their development needs and expectations with prospective mentors before finalising their selection.

Participants in this study were paired with a variety of mentors, by the programme co-ordinator, resulting in a diversity of same-gender (female mentors), cross-gender (male mentors), same-culture (white English speaking mentors paired with similar mentees) and cross-cultural pairs (different race groups and cultures).

Perspectives on Being Mentored By Men

Of the four participants who described their mentoring experiences as positive, Participants C and D, who were mentored by men, indicated that they personally knew and specifically wanted the mentor to whom they had been assigned. Clutterbuck (2002a) suggests that mentees are more committed to mentors whom they have chosen. Participants C and D perceived knowing their mentor as critical to their successful experience. Participant C indicated *"...if it was a strange person who did not know what my job entailed it would have been a lot less positive for me ..."*. Participant D reported that being matched with her particular mentor is what attracted her to the programme in the first instance and what contributed to a positive outcome for her. She felt that knowing him, trusting and liking him allowed them to be productive in the relationship right from the start, possibly leapfrogging some of the groundwork necessary in the initiation phase and moving into a more rewarding cultivation phase. Kram (1985) describes the initiation and cultivation phases as the first two initial (and productive) phases in the mentoring relationship, followed by separation and redefinition of the relationship. Participant D felt that being paired with a suitable mentor considerably eased the road forward and ensured a more productive relationship.

> *Participant D: If you get the right combination [mentor and mentee] then you shouldn't need all that support, planning, programme ... It helped a lot that we knew each other and that I liked him and trusted him because there was none of*

the initial obstacles and getting to know each other to get over with. I have found before that that takes some time.

Participants' C and D's emphatic preference for someone they knew could be related to them both having quite specific work-related objectives to guide their mentoring process, and clarity that their assigned mentors would help them in these areas. An established and constructive work relationship lowers the risk associated with mentoring and the relationship can become productive sooner as rapport and the basis for the relationship is already established. Furthermore, previous contact could have elicited empathy for and sensitivity to the mentee's experiences and development needs as well as insights into the mentor's particular strengths and experience. The appeal of knowing one's mentor may also resemble what has been described previously as an informal mentoring relationship. Informal mentoring is generally considered to be more spontaneous, desirable, effective and the benchmark for formal mentoring relationships (Burke & McKeen, 1989; Johnson et al, 1999; Ragins & Cotton, 1999, as cited by Scandura & Williams, 2002; Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998, as cited by Ragins, 2002b).

Perspectives on Being Mentored By Women

Participants E and F were assigned women mentors whom they did not have significant contact with prior to being mentored, but who were associated with their business units, albeit in entirely different and senior capacities. Participant E indicated that establishing rapport was facilitated by *a "sense of openness from both sides"* and that initial expectations were revised and aligned early on in the process: *"she [her mentor] adapted her mentoring process to fit my expectations"*. Participant E also indicated that it took about six months to understand one another on a more personal level. In terms of establishing rapport, participant F indicated:

Participant F: In general my shyness and hesitancy in confiding were initially issues for me ... as I learned to trust [my mentor] and the process, I began to open up about how I was feeling and how I was personally affected by certain work situations"

Participant E and F's experiences support the argument for same-group mentoring (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990, as cited by Clutterbuck, 2002a) which are characterised by empathy, rapport and higher levels of psychosocial support. Both participants E and F appreciated their mentors' *"attentiveness"*, *"warmth"*, *"interest"* and ability to discuss issues pertaining to personal growth and their own experiences as working women.

This was not the case for participant A, whose mentorship lasted for only two sessions. She failed to establish rapport with her mentor, despite having a high regard for her and their hailing from similar cultural backgrounds. Participant A described her relationship as a *"mismatch"* in terms of what she felt she needed operationally in order to cope with her current job challenges.

An important priority for participant A related to whether her mentor had insights into her work environment challenges. This appeared to impact on the kind of help the mentor could offer and the ease with which rapport developed. Their mentoring process was curtailed after two sessions. During the interview Participant A increasingly acknowledged the potential that had existed for her mentor to offer more personal support and perspectives but that this was superceded by their respective work environments being *"worlds apart"*. The operational expertise and insight participant A felt that she most needed was considered lacking even though at the time of mentoring and during the interview she said that she was *"... DESPERATE for mentoring"*. She described her needs at the time of being mentored as *"more basic"* affecting her ability to focus and get anything out of the programme. Participant A indicated: *"... out of those two sessions, the biggest thing that I got ...was ... to share what was going on, on my side ... and ... get it off my chest, almost"*.

Relevance of Mentor Gender

Previous research is contradictory regarding the benefits and outcomes associated with having either a male or female mentor. Studies conducted by Dreher and Cox (1996) and Ragins and Cotton (1998), both cited by O'Neill (2002), cite increased instrumental help such as income advantages and better career prospects with having had a male mentor. This is contradicted by other research indicating no gender differences in kinds or amounts of help received from male and female mentors (Burke & McKeen, 1997;

Gaskill, 1991; Ragins & Cotton, 1999, all cited by O'Neill, 2002). Participants' accounts of their experiences in this study suggest that support provided by male mentors tended to be of a more operational nature and that female mentors were more inclined to offer psychological and emotional support, where the mentees were open to this possibility.

It is worth noting that where participants had expressed a strong preference for the particular mentors to whom they were assigned, and who, in this study, happened to be male, their expressed development needs were of a more operational nature. It would, however, not be advisable to accept these findings as reliable indicators of appropriate pairing practices as they could just as easily be coincidental or confounded by other influences.

Women mentees are likely to seek different outcomes from mentoring relationships at different times in their lives and careers and can benefit in different ways from being mentored by both men and women. The findings of this study more strongly support other findings obtained by Klaus (1981), as cited by Scandura and Williams (2002) that suggest that the clearly articulated understanding of individual development needs and realistic expectations should guide the selection of the most appropriate mentor, rather than a predisposed view towards gender differences in support provided by mentors.

Perspectives on Experience and Status Gaps

Participant G's mentoring experience with a significantly older and senior man was disappointing for her because a personal relationship failed to develop. She expressed her experience as ... *it was basically just a five minute thing talking ... finished klaar!"* and felt that it should be more about a friendship and *"... getting to know me and [having] conversations".* She described the tone of her mentoring relationship as *"formal"* and *"professional feeling"* and *"not like a friendship, which I thought it should have been"*, clearly lacking the desired level of intimacy which would cater to a richer and more developmental experience.

Participant G's experience highlights the possibility that the status and experience difference between her and her mentor were too great, interfering with the ability to discuss issues of relevance to the mentee. Several times, she indicated that she expected

more guidance and direction than she had received from her mentor. Clutterbuck (2002a) suggests that where the experiences and issues faced by the mentor and mentee are so far removed from one another, no point of contact can be established. In his experience, both parties need to feel comfortable with the differences in experience and status and that a common mistake is for the most senior staff to mentor the most junior. Josselson (1988) argues that this is particularly relevant to women who tend to prefer non-hierarchical relationships.

A related obstacle for participant G, to the experience and status gap, appeared to be the tension in establishing the appropriate level of intimacy in a male-female mentoring pair, a phenomenon described by Burke and McKeen (1999) as *unproductive distance* or the converse *unproductive closeness*, which limits the development potential of the relationship.

Insights into participant G's experience that support the view expressed by Clutterbuck (2002a) are that in order for rapport to develop, an optimal, most likely moderate, gap between the mentor and mentee's experience is desirable. In the case of cross-gender couples, the size of the gap may have an effect on how comfortably an appropriate level of intimacy can be established in the relationship.

Perspectives On Diversified Mentoring, Peer Mentoring And Learning Maturity

Diversified mentoring relationships are defined by Ragins (1997), as cited by Ragins (2002b, p. 24), as "relationships comprising mentors and protégés who differ on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, disability or other group memberships associated with power in organisations".

Clutterbuck (2002a) refers to *learning maturity*, being the capacity to maintain personal control relatively comfortably and establish rapport in potentially stretching learning situations.

Learning maturity in a diversified mentoring relationship is most aptly demonstrated by participant H, who was paired with a male mentor from a diverse racial, cultural, organisational and personal background and who, in her opinion, lacked the qualities of seniority and tenure traditionally associated with a mentor. Her mentoring relationship resembled that of a collegial peer described by Kram (1985) which typically

allows for information sharing, levels of self-disclosure and trust; self expression and expression of work-family issues, to a point. Participant H linked the uniqueness of their pairing with their cultural differences and the different ways in which they had grown up:

> *Participant H: The cultural differences and the growing up – we spoke a lot about that. He grew up on the Cape flats and I grew up on a farm in the Free State ... farm girl and Muslim man. It was extremely significant and insightful for both of us I think. And also me being able to tell him how [the company] works a bit ... [both benefited] ... it was a two-way street.*

A little more effort seemed necessary in order to explore the basis for this relationship, and the positive outcomes were somewhat unexpected to the mentee, revealing the potential for richness of learning associated with a diverse mentoring pair. Despite their differences, common ground and rapport were established through:

> *Participant H: ... a love for books, I guess, ... We could philosophise. And [we] wanted to know about each other's backgrounds. Because he's a new person [to the company], I wanted to know about him and that started us talking. He spoke a lot ... a lot to share.*

The ability to bridge these differences and co-create a rich learning opportunity can be attributed to the secure sense of identity of both the mentor and mentee, described by Wales (2000) as confidence, self-awareness and openness to feelings, manifesting in mature behaviour in the learning context.

> *Participant H: I think that was a bit difficult in the beginning. And then it was overcome as we went along.*

Several more unexpected and beneficial outcomes surfaced for this participant in her relationship with her mentor pertaining to work-family balance, tackling further studies and assisting her with certain business skills.

Mentor-Mentee Pairing: a Synopsis

Participants' experiences in this study suggest that mentor-mentee pairing is typically complex and unique to the individuals and circumstances within which they will be mentoring. Many possibilities emerge from different mentor-mentee combinations, which underscore the richness and potential of mentoring as a means of developing women. A careful analysis of intra-personal, personal, interpersonal and contextual factors can guide the optimal selection and pairing of mentors and mentees.

Guidelines to support optimal pairing between mentor and mentee are proposed below:

1. The mentee articulating personal development needs as a basis for resolving realistic expectations pertaining to the scope, content, and timing of mentoring outcomes;
2. The mentor having sufficient insight into the work-related challenges and environment of the mentee to express empathy, yet also draw the mentee's attention towards the 'bigger picture';
3. An optimal experience and status gap between the mentor and mentee that allows the mentee to identify with the mentee's experiences, while having sufficient other experience to place issues into perspective for the mentee;
4. In the case of cross-gender pairing, a means of resolving any tensions pertaining to the appropriate level of intimacy in the relationship;
5. The mentor taking into account the level of self-awareness and personal maturity of the mentee in terms of her ability to articulate the above and determining his or her role in facilitating, for the mentee, the requisite level of self-insight to ensure effective mentoring and ongoing development.

Mentoring Experiences

Each mentor pair had the potential to explore specific issues which were salient to the mentee in relation to her overall life development, her self-insight, her work context, family circumstances and the interpersonal connection between herself and her mentor. The next section explores what materialized in the mentoring process of six of the participants providing insights into the nature of each of their relationships and a general

sense of what may be significant areas that women may want to explore within a formal mentoring programme.

Personal and Career Growth

Participant E portrayed a balanced and self-contained account of a single woman in harmony with her work and personal life by comments such as *"I've been quite comfortable work-wise", "[I feel]...very comfortable where I am at", "I am sorted out", "I try to keep my life as simple as possible"* and *"I haven't really experienced the whole juggling of family life [with work]".*

Josselson (1987, p. 21) states that "identity is always bound to one's sense of connection to others" and that within the context of development within ongoing relationships, aspects of the past self become freed and reworked. Participant E's experience resonates with Josselson's view when she indicates that being mentored initiated a process of analysis and self-discovery for her. She actively participated in shaping her own learning in the mentoring process. Her mentor's interest in her career and personal growth provided affirmation of her self- and career insights, facilitated through their interpersonal connection.

> *Participant E: [I benefited] most strongly psychologically because it's a boost to know that someone is interested in your personal growth and your direction and who is interested to help you with that ... it's made me more aware of myself and the way that I deal with things...*

Participant E was in the fortunate position of being on top of her current job, and having a clear sense of what her next career move would entail. Her mentoring relationship afforded her the opportunity to reflect constructively on the reasons for being turned down for a promotion within her department. She resolved to find out more about the company, be exposed to management level of thinking and to develop the requisite behavioural competencies in preparation for her next move. Mentoring was conducted in an open-ended, unstructured way, without a specific goal in mind, however satisfied participant E's needs to expand her career horizons. Participant E's expressed interest in

her mentor's career success, as a role model, served as a valuable frame of reference during participant E's reassessment of both her personal and career options.

Participant F's mentoring process followed a semi-structured format, balancing the effective use of the mentoring manual with practical guidance and counselling in dealing with a difficult career decision and juggling additional project responsibilities with her existing job, which she experienced as very challenging.

> *Participant F: I find myself thinking "wow, I can't deal with this now but I'll file it in the back of my mind for when I do see her [my mentor] - then discuss it with her". And it's nice to know that there's somewhere to go with those confusing thoughts. Some back up and support in dealing with that.*

Participant F describes a balanced mentoring relationship covering career and personal growth towards an enhanced sense of self-awareness and more balanced approach to life and work. Her mentor was described as being very *"present"* and responsive to a range of problems, both personal and work-related. Encountering difficult issues pertaining to job and career-related crises, Participant F developed *"a better sense of self-awareness"* as a result of their contact.

> *Participant F: Mentoring has definitely raised awareness within myself ... I have to take responsibility for being a participant in the mentoring process, I find myself looking out for things and being more aware, which I think has helped me in coping better in general.*

Through her mentoring Participant F clarified her preferred career direction in the face of opposition and uncertainty and embarked on a journey towards a better work-life balance.

Applying Pringle and Dixon's (2003) Life Career Model, discussed elsewhere, Participant F's scenario suggests an evolution from a post-*focus* phase towards a *rebalancing* phase, reflecting a conscious need to explore opportunities previously pushed aside for other peoples' expectations and work priorities earlier in life. This phase is characterised by a strong desire for congruence between one's values and activities.

The process of reassessment between the two facets or phases is characterised by uncertainty. Josselson (1987, p. 182) identifies tolerance of uncertainty and risk-taking as having a "profound influence on identity formation and how one organises one's life". Participant F's risk-taking and tolerance of uncertainty at other's reactions at her decision not to pursue the career options intended for her were very helpful lessons in asserting her sense-of-self in relation to her career choices and work-life balance.

Both participants E and F responses suggest the value of mentoring for taking stock of one's career and sense-of-self and the value of having a trusted other, in the mentor, to validate one's views and guide the often complex transitional process between different life and career phases.

Exchange of Ideas and Developing Business Acumen

Participant D approached her mentorship with very specific needs in the form of exploratory questions, broadening her business exposure and acumen in relation to how the business operated as a whole and how to assess the feasibility of new ideas in a business sense. With realistic expectations and a clear sense of her needs she too was able to co-create her mentoring relationship together with her mentor, taking responsibility for the way in which it developed and its outcomes. She was specific about her choice of mentor and found a reciprocal exchange in the sharing of ideas and learning. She described her relationship as *"close"*, offering *"a safe route"* within which to explore business concepts and ideas beyond her immediate job, and suggested a balanced approach between professional support and emotional safety.

> *Participant D: One of the things I wanted to do was [to know], if I have an idea, be it editorial or business, how do I measure whether it can be successful ... through mentoring I have seen all the things I need to take into account...we talked about a lot of ideas. I think personally it was... having that support system, but in a professional way, ... feeling that you had somebody to go to for advice ... without it being that you failed now or you can't cope now ... So this was a safe route and this I appreciated.*

Their relationship and exchange was enriched by their differences, being a cross-gender, racially diverse partnership, coming from different social and economic backgrounds, as well as having generation and marital status differences. These differences, which could potentially have presented obstacles to another mentoring pair, allowed them to explore ideas from another's perspective (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002).

> *Participant D: A nice thing was that he always used to make me feel, on a personal level, that it was not him lecturing me. On some things, yes, he was guiding me, but on other things ... he was also learning from me in that exchange. What I bring ... those differences meant I could highlight stuff that he didn't understand and for me it was an exchange more than a ... it made me feel that it deepened the relationship... When I needed guidance, I was guided and when it was an exchange ... that was very good.*

A recurring theme in Participant D's description is that of an *"exchange"* that characterised her mentoring. This concept of an exchange is supported by Young and Perrewe (2000) who apply exchange theory to mentoring. Holmes (1991), as cited by Young and Perrewe (2000, par. 45), indicated that mentoring is the *"accumulated exchange of behaviours between a mentor and protégé which comprises the relationship"*. The emphasis is on the giving and receiving of tangible and intangible costs and benefits, where the relationship is sustained through the benefits outweighing the costs. Collins (2001, p. 21) states that connection in women's identity development entails working at relationships so that they are *"mutually beneficial and equally fulfilling"*. This suggests that, for women, ideal partners are *co-equals* allowing both parties to develop within a supportive context.

On-Line Support

Participant C described her mentoring relationship with someone who was also a friend, as unstructured and informal. It's impetus stemmed from an existing friendship and difficult and overwhelming job circumstances, in the absence of other managerial

support. At the time, Participant C's most pressing need was operational support in terms of standing in for another person in a senior job and emotional support in terms of understanding the challenges of the job.

> *Participant C: Our personal relationship is completely aside, but our work relationship, I think we really helped to make it easier for one another, which is the way I like to work, I like teamwork. We have to support each other for the common goal.*

Although many areas that she identified as primary concerns in her life were not addressed in the relationship, such as longer term career planning, immediate job transfers, and a personal journey in the area of work-life balance, this was not mentioned as lacking. She still found her relationship to be ultimately satisfying and claimed that mentoring assisted her in the area of most pressing need by identifying with her job-related challenges and offering insights and understanding. She described it as, *"we discuss it and he says forget it and then it makes those things you really don't want to do seem bearable - because he's been there..."*. By way of assistance in dealing with an adverse work environment, she and her mentor formed a supportive alliance in challenging the status quo and finding inventive ways around the obstacles encountered in an environment resistant to change.

> *Participant C: That [the environment resisting change] didn't change our relationship at all, no I think it brought us closer, because we sit and bitch and moan about, at least we're trying to go forward and these people are just not getting on board.*

Josselson (1987) offers a way of understanding her complete satisfaction with her mentoring experience through her concept of anchoring. Josselson suggests that "for a woman to anchor herself importantly in her work, her work has to matter to someone who matters to her". Participant C's friendship with her mentor and relative lack of other relational components in her life, describing herself as being defined by her work role to

the exclusion of all else, coupled with she perceived as an unsupportive work environment, created an opportunity for mentoring to provide a relational oasis of sorts. This in addition to the operational support offered by her mentor.

Exploring Identity

Participant G perceived her mentor, by his actions, to have invested very little in developing their relationship, having structured - through his personal assistant - more of an orientation programme entailing visits to other departments and exposing her to other areas of the business. Her personal expectations were to focus on behavioural issues, such as her *"people skills and that kind of thing"*. Behavioural development is unlikely to evolve in a vacuum, with limited interpersonal interaction and where hardly any time was given to reflecting on her, her work, or even on her exposure to other parts of the business.

Participant G appeared puzzled about her mentoring experience, hesitating in answering quite a few of the questions asked, as if searching for answers that she did not have. She described her experience as *"... so disappointing ..."* offering as a reason that perhaps her expectations were unrealistic. Participant G's expectations for mentoring were general in that she saw it as *"improving skills, learning about the organisation and building her to become a manager"*. Essentially she envisaged her mentor helping her identify what she needed. She indicated that she expected her mentor to *"give me general stuff that [he] thinks would benefit me and teach me stuff I don't know ... there's lots ..."*.

Two issues surface in this situation, namely her relatively passive involvement in determining the content of her mentoring and her related vaguer sense-of-self in the process. She appears to be in an exploratory stage of developing her work identity. Given the centrality of identity in the overall development of women suggested by Josselson (1987, 1996), participant G may have benefited most from establishing a deeper, more personal relationship with a mentor, with whom she could identify, and who could facilitate for her a clearer understanding of her role and behaviour in various work situations. This could have been a start towards developing an enhanced sense-of-self

within the work context and a more active role in co-creating her future mentoring experiences.

Avoiding Life Issues

When asked what felt unresolved about her mentoring, participant B indicated that she had expected more from her mentor and expressed a concern that certain protocols had not been followed.

> *Participant B: My expectation was that um, we should have actually had a programme to follow ... (mentors) just wanted to structure it according to their experiences, but you can't just do it from your life experience, we should actually follow a programme ... not [be] unprepared. ... There was just no, no follow-up or whatever ... it [mentoring] just fizzled out. [Also] ... don't cancel the appointment ... You should make up the time for it and continue it and not just forget about or you know, because you're losing out on that time now.*

Participant B's experience was to a large extent dominated by both her and her mentor's operational requirements and her mentor's move to a different job, which made scheduling and attending meetings difficult. She indicated that while her mentor was a good match in terms of her academic ability, knowledge and experience, something was missing from their relationship, on a personal level. Participant B appeared unresolved about her own needs within the mentoring process. She contradicted herself, indicating in the first instance that her mentor would *"tell me how to run my life in, uh, different situations at work"*. When asked whether the mentoring sufficiently addressed work-family challenges, which were significant as a single-working parent with two children, she indicated *"I would rather not bring my personal life into the job"*. Thereafter she indicated that *"there was definitely room for more [personal discussion]"*.

Issues of identity and work-life balance were important to participant B who talked about juggling the demands of a busy job with keeping fit and *"seeing to the kids"*.

She describes a *"hectic lifestyle"* and *"frustration"* juggling work and children as a single parent.

Her failure to open up issues of a more personal nature can be attributed to a number of possible causes, including: (a) her readiness to discuss personal issues with a relative stranger, (b) it may have felt threatening to expose personal issues within a work context, (c) she may not have perceived her mentor as willing to discuss personal issues, or as identifying with her situation (d) she may have lacked the skills to establish a personal connection that would enable discussion about broader work-life issues and allow her to influence the content and outcome of her mentoring. Regardless of the reasons, the failure of the mentoring process to discuss the central issues in participant B's life, her single-parenting and work-family juggle, resulted in a sense of something missing for her and probably contributed to the termination of the formal mentoring process.

Participant B's reference to the lack of a formal structure to her mentoring may have been a question of personal preference, but also demonstrates her own passivity in the mentoring relationship, in that she was not able to articulate her needs and expectations as a starting point for further discussion. A link emerges between the mentees having a sure sense-of-self and clear expectations of her mentoring process, and the extent to which she can shape the mentoring experience and perceive favourable outcomes to the process. It appeared that where mentees were less sure about themselves and what they needed from their mentoring process, they were more inclined to place emphasis on the significance of having clear structural guidelines to shape the content and process of the mentoring meetings. In the absence of self-determined impetus within which to ground the mentoring process the mentee may find value in guidelines to direct the relationship in various ways whilst attempting to establish a deeper, more personal connection with the mentor.

A Synopsis of Participant's Mentoring Experiences

The above accounts portray the inter-connected nature of women's professional and personal development and suggest the significance of issues pertaining to work, career, family, identity, roles and organisational context as integral parts of women's

development experiences. Failure to establish a personal connection and to co-create the mentoring process works against the mentee perceiving mentoring as a positive and fulfilling experience. The ability to influence the mentoring process appears to be strongly linked to the mentee's insight and ability to articulate her professional development needs and personal challenges within the broader context of her life and other roles. The potential that mentoring holds to effectively explore these issues resides with the mentoring pair and the skill and courage that each partner brings to their mentoring relationships to address the things that matter to women.

Conclusion

The participants' experiences suggest that women can derive substantial benefit from a diversity of mentoring relationships. As a development experience, formal mentoring offers the potential, if carefully considered, to assist women's development within the broader context of their lives and various personal challenges. Josselson (1987) found that women are predisposed to develop within relationships. A high quality mentoring relationship potentially offers a more personalised and deeper connection, than may ordinarily be encountered in daily working life, within a relevant, confidential and supportive context.

The findings of this study support the relevance of interpreting mentoring experiences at the intra-personal, personal, contextual and inter-personal levels, where psychological, contextual, circumstantial and inter-personal factors interact in the complex process of facilitating development in another's life.

For the individual, the affect for, understanding and expectations of mentoring intertwined with self-identity and self-insight and work-life circumstances determine what the individual brings to the relationship in terms of complexity, insight, initiative and openness to change.

Organisational factors, such as culture, communication, transformation, job environment and programme mandate, each appear to exert significant influences the mentoring process and outcomes. It is therefore suggested that such contextual issues be

considered in the conceptualising the mentoring programme as well as being included as suggested content for the mentoring discussions.

While the choice of mentor appears critical to the success or failure of the inter-personal mentoring experience, no single formula can guide the optimal selection of available mentors due to differences in individual development needs and the diverse development opportunities that occur between people. The choice of mentor together with the mentee's self-awareness and broader insights into her development areas work together to determine the mentoring outcomes. Guidelines to support the optimal pairing between mentors and mentees have been provided.

The active participation of the mentee in creating and shaping her mentoring process was evident in all participants who had benefited significantly from their mentoring experience. To the extent that the mentee's self-awareness and skills to co-create the experience are limited, lacking or blocked; more guidance and structure will be required on the part of the mentor to engage and develop this.

The findings suggest that prior to being mentored, a pre-mentoring analysis would be helpful. This would ideally require mentees to give careful consideration to their perceived development areas in relation to work, career and work-life balance as well as any other personal demands to inform their perspective of their own needs before committing to a particular mentor.

The inter-connected and relational emphasis given to their work and personal lives is evident in the salient themes that emerged from the women in this study, as is the emphasis on their evolving personal identity, related as it is to a need for balance and integration of other significant roles. The findings of this study therefore strongly favour a more holistic concept of mentoring for women, in accordance with the European tradition, related to the life cycles and personal development of the mentee.

CONCLUSION

This research has responded to a request from writers in the field of women and work to understand women's work experiences from their own accounts of work and the meaning they make of it within the context of their lives. Working individuals are increasingly required to direct their own career and personal development within uncertain, fast paced and changing organisational contexts. The current impetus to develop and advance the careers of women needs to be done with a contextual understanding of the broader social and family roles that women play within their society. In South Africa this is done against the backdrop of the historical and psychological effects of apartheid.

The adult development of women occurs in ways that are not adequately described by traditional male-based models of adult development. In contra-distinction to the development of men, women's identity development is ongoing, evolving through significant relationships in unpredictable, non-linear patterns, in response to the multiple roles undertaken and their changing demands. For women, the boundaries between their personal and work life are relatively fluid, and a particular emphasis is given to attaining balance between work and other life priorities.

Contemporary career models recognise the need for a more fluid model that accommodates women's changing expectations and multiple social roles through periods of reflection and reassessment. Thus insights into women's work and life experiences have been necessary and helpful in interpreting their experiences of mentoring; particularly in relation to exploring the potential that mentoring offers for advancing the working lives and careers of women.

Summary of Key Findings

The considerable body of literature on mentoring lacks the psychological depth necessary to ensure the most beneficial experiences for women. The findings of this research suggest that mentoring is shaped by individually determined intra-personal, personal, contextual and inter-personal factors that interact to produce enriching or disappointing outcomes for the mentee.

The relational emphasis given by women to their personal and professional development, in response to their changing life circumstances, aligns well with the dynamic and personalised development opportunity offered by formal mentoring, taking place, as it ideally does, within a relevant interpersonal and organisational context.

Diversity mentoring offers a significant opportunity to overcome some of the obstacles experienced by women and other minorities, in developing careers and integrating successfully into organisations, to explore the richness of and increase the tolerance for more diverse workplaces.

A critical aspect of effective mentoring on the part of the mentee resides with her ability to co-create her mentoring experience together with her mentor in a way that meets her personal and professional expectations and affords her a quality development opportunity.

A holistic approach to mentoring that accommodates the inter-connected nature of women's personal and professional lives appears to be a particularly effective method of facilitating the ongoing development of women.

Recommendations to Participating Organisation

The following recommendations and practical guidelines are a combination of suggestions offered by the participants in this study in relation to their experiences of the pilot mentoring programme and insights on the part of the writer in relation to a holistic perspective of participants' experiences. Recommendations are grouped loosely into items that form part of a pre-mentoring phase, laying a solid foundation for the future pairing process and the ensuing relationships. These are referred to under *preparation.* Items that pertain to the organisation's role in facilitating the mentoring processes between mentoring pairs and the programme at large are referred to under the heading of *process.* Items that pertain directly to the developing mentoring relationship have been grouped under the heading *relationship.*

Preparation

1. Develop individual mentors' and mentees' understanding and conceptualisation of mentoring.
2. Explore the individual motivation and expectations of mentoring process from both mentors and mentees perspectives prior to selection of mentoring pairs.
3. Clarify individual expectations in relation to organisational and human resource development requirements from a company perspective and address discrepancy up front.
4. Communicate specific goals and requirements of programme in relation to the company's objectives or strategy.
5. The programme facilitator ought to outline the role requirements of mentors and mentees to participants. It is important to establish in the first instance that mentees are required to actively participate, or co-create, their relationship with their mentors, rather than be passive recipients of the process.

   The role of mentors should be positioned as responding to the mentee's needs taking into account issues of a personal and inter-personal nature as well as the situational or contextual factors that have a bearing on the individual's personal or professional development.

   At an individual level, this could relate to the mentee's level of emotional maturity, psychological awareness, career development or family and life circumstances. At a situational or contextual level, this could relate to their job or organisational context, or helping mentee to integrate and process learning in practical ways and in relation to other development activities.
6. Clarify the role of the proposed formal mentoring relationship in relation to existing developmental relationships such as with a current or previous manager or another informal mentor.
7. The role of coordinator should be formalised to monitor and intervene in mentoring pairs needing assistance of a practical or psychological nature.
8. Establish a level of support for the mentoring pairs across the organisation and within their respective environments or business units, especially from the mentee's

manager, who may otherwise feel excluded from the process and fail to be supportive of the meetings or changes to the mentee's way of doing things.

Relationship

9. The respective roles of both the mentors and mentees should be discussed between each mentoring pair as part of a contracting process, including areas such as appropriate boundaries for the relationship and other sensitive areas that may surface for cross-gender or racially diverse mentoring pairs.
10. Intermittent process checks, entailing reflection by the mentoring pairs, should be formalised and be stipulated as a programme requirement. Assistance to mentoring pairs should be provided by a programme co-ordinator, when needed, to overcome obstacles or facilitate a constructive termination process if this was deemed to be the most suitable outcome of a troubled relationship.

Process

11. Careful thought should be given to the matching of mentor and mentee guided by the pre-determined needs of both parties and based on a appropriate levels of self-awareness and insight on the part of both parties.
12. Structured resources such as manuals, literature or training material should be readily available and its location and usage explained to both mentors and mentees in equal detail.
13. The facilitator should also assume an educational role in terms of defining the potential scope of mentoring, and communicating the process requirements such as establishing boundaries, the contracting process, and etiquette for canceling or rescheduling meetings and termination procedures. Other areas such as describing the relationship phases and conducting skills training on a group and individual level are also required.
14. The organisation has a role to play in committing to the time required to conduct mentoring meetings and for the mentee to internalise and apply the learning. Given the varying operational demands on employees this suggests that certain times may

suit individuals better than others and choosing an optimal time to commence mentoring is advisable.

15. Interaction between mentees (and between mentors) may be constructive - in terms of reflecting on their experiences, possibly serving to overcome difficulties, or motivate individuals - even if only with one other person, providing confidentiality around personal issues can be maintained.
16. Accord an appropriate level of flexibility in terms of requirements around the programme structure and support that ideally applies to each mentoring pair.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research Design

The limitations of the research design and process have been considered in relation to the trade-off made for other advantages. One of the common difficulties associated with phenomenological research lies in interpreting the complexity of people (O'Leary, 2004). The writer has already referred to the challenge she perceived in attempting to do justice to the different voices of the participants, the literature and to herself whilst interfacing with the research process. It was easy to identify with the participants. It was more challenging to manage the tension between identifying with the participants and their issues without losing critical perspective.

A further tension resulted from surfacing the specifics and in-depth nature of individual accounts in relation to the need for brevity and the academic demand to draw out the common experiences of women in a coherent argument. Each person's account represented a case study on their lives.

The writer is also cognizant of the limitations of a single interview as the only method of data collection, being very circumscribed by the participant's views and feelings on the day.

It must also be conceded that mentoring evolves over time and that this research excluded the benefit of reviewing the experiences, effects and potential benefits of mentoring that may have occurred over a longer duration than the pilot experience allowed for. However, given the significant focus on the details of the mentoring relationship, other indications are that the timing for conducting this research was

appropriate, particularly in those cases where the relationship had terminated prematurely.

The fact that the interviews were conducted prior to a more comprehensive review of the literature meant that the conceptual framework for the research had evolved considerably, in relation to the findings, at the time of writing, resulting in a sense that certain areas could have been probed more deeply. It is hoped that the requirements for an exploratory study of this nature were sufficiently met.

The research findings are arguably not applicable to broader populations, stemming, as they did from research aims that sought to surface instead, in-depth insights into a small sample of women, and recommendations relative to their organisational context. This could be a limitation, however, it is argued, that the exploratory nature of the topic warranted an in-depth and rich account of a smaller group of women to generate a diversity of themes, rather than to survey a larger sample. Furthermore, the issues explored during the interviews resonate with the supporting literature, which suggests that these findings may be universally experienced and therefore, applicable to other women, depending on their context (O'Leary, 2004).

It is evident that this research only tells one side of the story and that the voices of mentors, men and black women are noticeably absent. These may provide fruitful ground for future research in this discipline.

Contribution to Field of Organisational Psychology

This research is valuable to the field of organisational psychology in a number of ways. In terms of its approach, being a qualitative piece, it is suited to the exploratory nature of the topic. The psychological focus at the level of the individual offers valuable insights to organisations that seek to better understand individuals in order to retain and enhance the potential of their employees. This is particularly relevant where a better understanding of women's work experiences may assist the development of women in organisations.

Mentoring is an area of growing interest in organisations world wide, particularly with respect to formal mentoring programmes. As this study has already highlighted,

formal mentoring programmes have significant potential within the South African organisational context. Literature drawn from diverse disciplines has enriched the interpretation and findings of this research. This serves to emphasize the diverse theoretical perspectives that underpin the field of organisational psychology and that salient insight, pertaining to human experiences, often emerges in the confluence of diverse theoretical perspectives.

Personal Reflections of Writer

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers are not detached from the research process, but rather affect and are affected by the research interaction, often in unnoticed ways. A personal journal served to record my personal experiences and events throughout the research process. Given the phenomenological influences in this research, it seems appropriate to add my own reflections, in the first person, at the conclusion of this research process in terms of what it has meant to me. A review of the ad-hoc recordings of my research journal and my current reflections reveal both a personal as well as a research journey.

I approached this study as a professional practitioner in the field of Human Resources management, both as a corporate manager and a free-lance consultant, having taken a career break to focus on the needs of my pre-school children and to undertake further studies.

In selecting this topic, I was responding to my interest in the development of people and an instinct that women's experiences in the workplace are in some ways different and more complex, and possibly less understood than men's are. The research process stimulated reflection on my career and lack of mentoring in male dominated work environments. This proved helpful in understanding my sense of isolation at the time and my need to adapt my style to fit in. Being promoted rapidly and needing to learn from those around me compounded this.

Issues of work-family balance were most prevalent during the process of writing up the research, which typically necessitates a considerable amount of focus, resilience

and comfort with ambiguity. I found that my ability to work effectively in a sustainable way diminished when I isolated myself from my family for periods of concentrated work.

Valuable insights into my future view of work have materialised. Whereas in the past I had been primarily defined by my work, my priorities have shifted and I feel more comfortable integrating work in a way that will allow me to fulfill other aspects of my identity and multiple other roles.

I believe that I have achieved greater personal resolution about my own work-family perspectives. I attribute this to engaging with the research process, the participants and the literature.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Broad Opening Statement:

This research is of a qualitative nature, not setting out to prove anything, rather it is exploratory, aiming to understand your life experience as a working woman and how being mentored has impacted on issues to do with yourself, your career and your family life.

Biographical profile:

Name:

Age:

Race:

Home language :

Family structure: Marital status:

Dependents and ages:
⇨ Nature of support offered: e.g. financial / emotional:

Nature of employment (full / part-time):

Tenure with present company/group:

Job title : Time in position:

Position description:

Unique characteristics of job e.g. shift work etc:

Mentoring:

In general:

- What does mentorship (the concept) mean to you?
- Describe any expectations you have of being mentored (of self as mentee and of mentor).

Being mentored at Media 24:

- What attracted you to the mentoring programme at Media 24?

⇨ What were the programme's objectives in your opinion?

- Describe the organisational context within which your mentoring process was rooted.

⇨ How did this facilitate / hinder your mentoring relationship?

- Who else or what else facilitated or hindered the success or failure of your experience of being mentored? [Programme coordinator / way programme was perceived in organisation etc.]
- How relevant was the training you received? Your mentor received?
- Is there anything else you would recommend to enhance the programme?

Reflecting on your personal experience of 'being mentored':

- what surfaced for you? (e.g. kind of support - job related / personal development / expanding your network. i.e. concrete/instrumental help and/or psychosocial support)

⇨ How beneficial has it been to you so far? In what way has it been enriching?

⇨ Has mentoring improved your handling of challenging tasks/situations in your job?

⇨ How have you been able to make better use of job or career related opportunities or overcome some career/personal barriers?

⇨ Were there any negative outcomes for you?

⇨ what, if any, obstacles had to be overcome? How?

- How did your relationship develop?

⇨ were there any unique aspects that characterised your relationship with your mentor?

⇨ [e.g. gender/race/also your manager or other similarities/differences/challenges]

⇨ What impact, if any, did this have on your relationship?

⇨ What strategies were used to overcome these challenges/differences?

⇨ were you able to find common ground / establish rapport easily? How was this achieved?

⇨ what differences had to be worked through?

⇨ does anything feel unresolved?

⇨ how has mentorship differed from other developmental relationships you may have experienced, for example with a family member / friend / coach / colleague or manager?

- Where are you at with the mentoring programme at present … still being mentored or terminated after six-month pilot? Reasons…

Work-Life Balance:

In general,

- How are you experiencing work in relation to your personal growth?
  - ⇨ To what extent is your work supporting your career aspirations?
  - ⇨ How you see your career advancing?
- What are some of the challenges you experience in relation to :
  - ⇨ managing work and family/other demands
    - ⇨ pursuit of personal aspirations
  - How has mentoring helped with some of these challenges?

Level of satisfaction with work-life balance:

- How satisfied are you with your work life, family life and the balance you currently have between your work, your family and time for yourself?
- How has mentoring directly or indirectly affected your work-life balance?
- What aspects of your life do you value the most, the things you strive to make time for?
- How has mentoring directly or indirectly affected what you value most?

Focusing on yourself, as an individual:

- How do you define yourself in terms of the various roles you fulfill (for example, career woman / wife etc)?

⇨ Which roles accord you the greatest sense-of-self-esteem?

- What are your priorities in terms of your responsibilities?

⇨ How do you experience managing your priorities - complementary or contradictory. WHY?

- How and how well are you supported in managing your commitments?
- Overall, how well do you feel you manage your commitments?
- What feels unresolved? What would you change?
- How could mentoring assist you in this?

Is there anything I haven't covered that you would like to raise?

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Ms (name of participant)
(name of company)

Dear (name of participant)

Mentorship research project

I understand from (name of HR Development Manager) that you have agreed to assist me in an exploratory study I am preparing to conduct among participants in the Media 24 Mentorship Programme.

Thank you for this.

My research has two broad objectives:

- To understand your experiences of mentoring for inclusion in a thesis I am preparing in pursuit of a Masters' Degree in Organisational Psychology, which addresses mentoring as part of a focus on career and challenges facing working women in South Africa.

- That my recommendations be considered in the setting of guidelines for the further development and sustainability of mentoring at Media 24, and for mentoring generally, and also be of benefit to you, personally.

To achieve the above, I will need to have two contacts with you, firstly to have a conversation in person of approximately one to two hours, and, on a later occasion, to verify your information and to record any subsequent thoughts you may have had.

For sake of accuracy I would like to tape-record the initial session if you have no objection, otherwise I will take notes.

For your convenience, and to minimise any disruption to your work time, it is suggested that our initial meeting should take place in a suitable private room at your offices during working hours by arrangement with myself.

Please be assured that all information provided by you will be treated in full confidence and not linked to you by name.

In order for me to set up an interview programme, I would like you to indicate whether (date and time) would be convenient for you. Please would you let me know as soon as possible, preferably via e-mail to (email address).

Thanks again for your support and interest, and I look forward to spending productive time with you.

Best wishes

Beverley Whitehead