

Understanding the Mentoring Relationships of Women in Higher Education Administration

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of mentoring amongst administrative women in higher education from an appreciative perspective. In 1985, Kathy Kram published her book on mentoring entitled, *Mentoring at Work*. This seminal work provided an initial body of knowledge that helped scholars conceptualize mentoring and encouraged a proliferation of research, in what was then an emerging topic for academic inquiry. However, twenty years after Kram advanced her understandings of mentoring, Chandler and Kram (2005) reported that “[t]o date, multiple definitions of a mentor have been advanced, but researchers in the field have not unconditionally accepted any specific one” (p. 5).

Mentoring has suffered from a lack of definitional and conceptual clarity. This lack of clarity has hampered research efforts and rendered research vulnerable to criticism. This lack of clarity has also made implementation of mentoring programs difficult with respect to whom or what exactly is providing the benefit.

This study explored the concept of mentoring through focus groups with administrative women in higher education. The study was conducted within a qualitative paradigm, adapting elements from the work on grounded theory by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Focus groups were used to gather the data, with the questions based on the appreciative inquiry method. The worldview underlying the methodological orientation and study design is best described as constructionist. A constructionist worldview assumes that knowledge is constructed as persons explain or try to make sense of their experiences in the context of conversing with others.

I anticipated the findings of this study would be significant to mentoring research in three ways. In the study, I addressed the lack of definitional and conceptual clarity of mentoring that have presented academic and practical challenges; I employed a methodological orientation and study design that focused on understanding the participants' recollected experiences of relationships that have worked; and the population of interest (administrative women in higher education) was one that had been understudied in mentoring research.

In addition to my academic interest in mentoring I was intrigued by the myth behind mentoring. References to the mythical figure, Mentor, in Homer's *Odyssey* abound and yet two important points about Mentor have gone largely unnoticed. First Mentor was actually a woman. Mentor was Athena. That Mentor embodied both male and female characteristics may be interpreted to suggest that features of both sexes are necessary to mentoring. The second point is that Mentor was only one of the disguises Athena wore in order to provide advice and guidance to Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus. The second point may be interpreted to suggest that it takes more than one kind of person or relationship to provide the full range of support that an individual requires over the course of their career. It was my hope that this study would help reconcile the myth of Mentor with the reality of mentoring.

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DEDICATION

To all those who provide advice, support, and encouragement related to career development and growth – you are the real mentors.

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Chapter One – The Research Question

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of mentoring amongst administrative women in higher education from an appreciative perspective. In this chapter, I present the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions that will guide it, and the significance of the study to the field. I provide a description of the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of this study. I present definitions of terms relevant to the study and I conclude with a summary of the study.

Statement of the Research Question

It was important to explore the concept of mentoring for two reasons. The first reason was because the lack of definitional and conceptual clarity that has hampered research efforts and made research on mentoring vulnerable to criticism (Jacobi, 1991; Allen & Eby, 2007; Gibb, 1994 as cited in Friday, Friday, & Green 2004). One area that has gained the attention of mentoring scholars related to the benefits of mentoring for protégés (Burke, 1994; Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004) and mentors (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997). The benefits attributed to mentoring lead to the second reason why it was important to explore this concept. It is difficult, if not impossible, to duplicate the benefits attributed to mentoring in formal programs if there is lack of clarity about whom or what exactly is providing the benefit.

Lack of definitional and conceptual clarity of mentoring has resulted in a challenge for the academic community. In an early study of role models, mentors, and sponsors Speizer (1981) concluded, “[t]he first step which researchers must take is to establish accepted definitions” (p. 712). Mentorship scholars have acknowledged that

research related to mentorship has been challenged by the lack of a definitive definition of the construct (Jacobi, 1991; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Allen & Eby, 2007).

Jacobi (1991) found the literature related to mentoring, “offers numerous definitions, some of which conflict” (p. 505). More recently, Friday, Friday, and Green (2004) canvassed works from the early 1980s to the early 2000s that examined organizational mentoring, and found numerous instances where researchers noted a lack of consensus of the definitions of mentoring and mentor.

There are consequences to the lack of a definitive definition of mentoring. Allen and Eby (2007) pointed out, “varying definitions create problems in drawing conclusions across studies” (p. 9). As well, research related to organizational mentoring has been criticized for not developing a well-grounded conceptual framework (Gibb, 1994, as cited in Friday, Friday, & Green, 2004).

My own review of the literature revealed few attempts to address the definitional challenge. One exception I found was a study undertaken by Friday, Friday, and Green (2004) that attempted to offer universal definitions of mentor, mentoring, and mentorship. They defined mentor as a wise and trusted counselor; mentoring as the guidance process that occurs between a mentor and protégé; and mentorship as the actual mentoring relationship between a mentor and protégé (p. 637). However, there was no evidence that the definitions suggested by Friday et al. had been accepted or taken up by current mentoring scholars.

Practical challenges have also resulted from a lack of definitional and conceptual clarity of the concept of mentoring. Jacobi (1991) stated, “The result of this definitional vagueness is a continued lack of clarity about the antecedents, outcomes, characteristics

and mediators of mentoring” (p. 505). The antecedents, outcomes, characteristics, and mediators of mentoring are all important to the development of mentoring initiatives, and the lack of clarity in this regard may help explain why organizations that have attempted to implement mentoring programs, have met with limited success (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). While mentoring scholars have engaged in research designed to help organizations establish effective mentoring programs (Haring, 1997; Wasburn & Crispo, 2006), if the research itself is hampered by lack of definitional and conceptual clarity, then the desired outcome may be unattainable.

The practical challenges are troubling because of the importance that has been attached to mentoring. In his work, *Seasons of a Man's Life*, Levinson (1978) suggested that a mentor relationship is the most important relationship of young adulthood. While Levinson's work related exclusively to men, researchers have examined the importance of the mentor relationship to women. Scanlon (1997) reviewed 20 years of mentoring literature related to women and found that having a mentor or mentors was valuable to women's career development, increased knowledge, and self-reliance.

Ragins, Townsend, and Mattis (1998) identified career strategies used by successful women executives and CEOs and found that 91% of their sample reported having a mentor at some time in their careers and 81% saw their mentor as critical or fairly important in their career development. Benefits not only accrued to the person who received mentoring, but also to the person who provided the mentoring. Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs (1997) studied the outcomes associated with mentoring for the mentor and found, “they [the mentors] believed they often learned as much from the protégé as the protégé learned from them” (p. 87).

Mentorship scholars have acknowledged academic challenges that have resulted from a lack of definitional and conceptual clarity. I have also observed practical challenges in the workplace that have resulted from the same lack of clarity. I thus concluded from the literature and from my own experience that the lack of definitional and conceptual clarity of mentoring was a challenge that needed to be addressed by further exploration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of mentoring amongst administrative women in higher education from an appreciative perspective. To do so, I sought to understand the nature of mentoring relationships described to me by a purposefully-selected group of women. Through analysis of their descriptions, I identified concepts and themes; suggested what the concepts and themes revealed about how mentoring relationships were experienced; and, proposed practical implications for workplace mentoring.

The Research Questions

Guiding this study was my simple desire to learn more about mentoring from the perspective of administrative women in higher education who had experienced mentoring relationships. As I listened to women describe their experiences in mentoring relationships, I gained insights into the concept of mentoring. Consistent with the purpose of the study, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the nature of the experience of the mentoring relationship that is described by administrative women in a higher education context?
2. What do the women's descriptions of their experiences reveal about mentoring?

3. What might findings contribute to the understanding of mentoring including practical implications for future mentoring initiatives?

Significance of the Study

I anticipated the findings of this study would be significant to mentoring research in three ways. The study addressed the lack of conceptual clarity of mentoring that has presented academic and practical challenges. It employed a methodological orientation and study design that focused on understanding the actual experiences of participants that have worked. Finally, the population of interest was one that has been understudied in mentoring research to date.

Lack of Definitional and Conceptual Clarity of the Concept of Mentoring

Mentoring research has proliferated since the publication of Kram's book *Mentoring at Work* (1985). In the updated work, Kram (1988) defined the mentor relationship as "the prototype of a relationship that enhances career development" (p. 2). However, Kram also recognized "mentor relationships are relatively unavailable to most individuals in organizations" (p. 133). In recognition of the scarcity of mentor relationships, Kram introduced the notion of relationship constellations that included a variety of relationships that supported career development. It was interesting for me to discover that Kram acknowledged in her own research that, "it became apparent that the word *mentor* had a variety of connotations, and that from a research point of view it would be best not to use it" (p. 4). If Kram did not use the word mentor in her research on mentoring, then I questioned what exactly it is that has been the subject of such intense interest since 1985.

Research since the publication of *Mentoring at Work* (Kram, 1988) has explored numerous dimensions of mentoring including mentoring functions (Jacobi, 1991; Sosik & Lee, 2002); types of mentoring relationships (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999); mentoring models (Haring, 1997; Wasburn & Crispo, 2006); the benefits of mentoring for protégés (Burke, 1994; Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004) and for mentors (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997); and, new ways of conceptualizing mentoring (Higgins & Kram, 2001). In spite of or perhaps because of the proliferation of research related to mentoring, I believe that our society's understanding of the concept of mentoring has become more ambiguous. However, through listening to women describe their experiences I gained insight that led me to a deeper understanding of their concept of mentoring.

Methodological Orientation and Study Design

Two components of the methodological orientation and study design were unique to this study, the first of which was the use of focus groups as the method of data collection. The second component was the use of Appreciative Inquiry as the basis for the focus group questions.

While qualitative research is often the paradigm chosen for mentoring research, Scandura and Pellegrini (2007) articulated the need for “a broader array of research designs” (p. 85). Qualitative research related to mentoring has typically relied on individual interviews as the data collection method (Kram, 1988; Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997). Employing focus groups as the data collection method, rather than individual interviews, addressed the need to broaden the research design. As well, one advantage that focus groups have over individual interviews is the synergy among

participants. Morgan (1997) stated that, “this process of sharing and comparing provides the rare opportunity to collect direct evidence on how the participants themselves understand their similarities and differences” (pp. 20–21). This process is one of the most valuable aspects of focus group discussions.

The use of Appreciative Inquiry in mentoring research is also relatively rare. In my review of the literature, there was only one study that combined Appreciative Inquiry and mentorship (Wasburn & Crispo, 2006). The researchers applied Appreciative Inquiry to the mentoring process and suggested a new model of mentoring as a result; however, it was not used as a method of investigation. As well, the study of women in academia and women in corporate environments has typically emphasized the challenges and barriers they faced (Hornosty, 2004). The use of Appreciative Inquiry aimed to celebrate the positive aspect and the successful events. The use of Appreciative Inquiry, which takes a positive, generative approach as the basis for the focus group questions, was unique to this study.

Unique Population

The population of interest for this study was administrative women in higher education. I observed that there was considerable mentoring literature specific to women and to the value of the mentoring relationship in their career development and success (Chandler, 1996; Scanlon, 1997; Ragins, Townsend, & Matis, 1998; Gibson, 2004). However, most of the literature focused on women in corporate environments with relatively little attention to women working in post-secondary education (Cullen & Luna, 1993; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). The studies that addressed mentoring of women in higher education focused on women in academic positions rather than women

in administrative positions (Gibson, 2006; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). My interest was to contribute to mentoring research by focusing a population that has been understudied.

Assumptions

I made the following assumptions in this study:

1. That there continued to be a need to provide definitional and conceptual clarity to the concept of mentoring;
2. That the methodology and study design would result in new insights into mentoring; and
3. That the nature of participants' knowledge of mentoring relationships would be constructed as they tried to explain or make sense of the mentoring experience. Schawndt (1998, as cited in Corbin & Strauss, 2008) stated, "constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it" (p. 10).

Delimitations

I placed the following delimitations on this study:

1. Sample: I delimited the sample to women employed within Human Resources and/or who held the title of Director or Associate Vice-President. This information was found in the public domain;
2. Location: The University of Saskatchewan was selected as the organization in which to investigate the research questions;
3. Time: The time allowed for data collection was delimited to one month; and,
4. Focus on relationships that worked: While I appreciated that not all mentoring relationships are positive I attempted to delimit the study to examining positive mentoring relationships, which was consistent with an Appreciative Inquiry approach.

However, I found keeping participants focused on positive mentoring relationships was difficult to control.

Limitations

I acknowledged the following limitations in this study:

1. The study was qualitatively and positively oriented;
2. The study employed one set of process methodologies;
3. As a novice researcher, my ability to apply strategies adapted from grounded theory methodology in the analysis of the data was constrained; and
4. The unique population and the single site limit transferability to other populations and organizations.

Definitions

The terms and phrases used in this study and my definitions are articulated below. I have acknowledged the definitional challenges associated with mentoring; however, I decided to include a definition of mentoring that reflected definitions or characterizations typically found in the literature. For the purpose of inductive study of the concept of mentoring, I bracketed this definition and did not make reference to mentoring in my interactions with participants.

Administrative women. Those women in universities who had a role that was predominantly administrative in nature, i.e., their focus is about either supporting the work of academic staff, dealing with students on non-academic matters, or working in an administrative function (Szekeres, 2004, pp. 7–8).

Grounded theory. Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction

shaped by the views of a large number of participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 63).

Appreciative inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8).

Focus group. Focus group is a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1997, p. 6).

Mentoring. A relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé's career (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 5).

Developmental Relationship. Relationships that support career development and enable an individual to address the challenges encountered moving through adulthood and through an organizational career (Kram, 1988, p. 1).

Chapter Summary and Outline of Thesis

The first chapter was dedicated to the research question. In this chapter I described the importance of this study to the field of mentoring. The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of mentoring amongst administrative women in higher education from an appreciative perspective, and the research questions that guided the study were based on my simple desire to learn more about mentoring. The significance of the study was outlined, and I described the assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and definitions of the study.

In chapter two, I review literature relevant to this study. The research design is outlined in chapter three. Findings from the focus groups are reported and analyzed in

chapter four. In chapter five, I discuss responses to research questions, findings, and implications for future research.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review literature related to workplace mentoring. In this review, I include an exploration of the history of mentoring; some definitional challenges; the components, phases, types, and models of mentoring; the benefits of mentoring relationships; mentoring and women; and ongoing development of the concept of mentoring.

History of Mentoring

Virtually all scholars of mentoring, at some point, make reference to the mythical figure, Mentor, in Homer's *Odyssey* (Kram, 1988; Eby, Rhodes & Allen, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007). When Odysseus sailed against Troy, Mentor was the wise and faithful advisor entrusted to protect his son Telemachus.

However, there are two important features of Mentor that have not been widely acknowledged in the mentoring literature. The first point is that Mentor was actually a woman. Mentor was Athena. Perhaps the myth may be interpreted to suggest that features of both male and female are necessary in order to provide the full range of support required by protégés. The second point is that Mentor was only one of the disguises Athena wore. Wiltshire (1998) stated, “[i]n the *Odyssey*, the goddess Athena assumes many roles as helpful companion for the hero Odysseus, his wife Penelope, and the son Telemachus. She is their advisor and guide at critical moments in their various journeys. She always fills this role, however, in disguise” (p. iv). The point that Athena wore many disguises may be interpreted to suggest that it takes more than one person to provide the full range of support that an individual requires over the course of their career.

These two features of the myth around Mentor have influenced my thinking and contributed to my interest in mentoring. It is my view that there is currently a disjoint between the myth and reality that should be rectified. Perhaps encompassing the fullness of the myth will lead to a fuller understanding of the reality.

Until the mid-1980s, there was little published research related to mentoring. Speizer (1981) acknowledged that the concepts of role model, mentor, and sponsor were new to the literature and questioned the validity of the claim that these relationships were necessary for a successful career. Speizer (1981) concluded that “despite their almost universal acceptance, there is very little supportive evidence for their validity” (p. 712) and “systematic studies that explore the definition of a mentor and examine what function such a person might perform have yet to be undertaken” (p. 711). Kram’s (1985) study of mentoring in the workplace addressed these concerns and “created a flurry of research on mentoring in the fields of education, psychology, and management” (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007, p. 8).

Kram (1988) is one of the most widely cited references in literature related to mentoring. Dougherty, Turban, and Haggard (2007) stated that Kram’s book “is probably the most widely cited piece by a mentoring scholar with over 275 citations to date” (p. 142). My own search on the term “mentoring” in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* returned 159 articles, published between 1984 and 2009, related to mentoring; a delimited search of the 159 articles revealed that Kram (1988) was cited in 83 of those articles (52%). This is noteworthy given the range of disciplines that have engaged in mentoring research, and that Kram’s own research was most directly related to workplace mentoring. Kram’s research program involved “an in-depth interview study of

relationships between younger and older managers in a corporate setting” (p. 4). Kram’s research resulted in a body of knowledge that helped scholars begin to conceptualize mentoring and encouraged a proliferation of research in what was then an emerging topic for academic inquiry.

Definitional Challenges

Speizer (1981) suggested that scholars interested in the concepts of role model, mentor, or sponsor should establish clear and accepted definitions for each concept. While scholars have attempted to define mentoring, it has proven to be a daunting task. To date there is still no clear and accepted definition. It is interesting that twenty years after Kram (1988) first advanced a definition of mentoring, Chandler and Kram (2005) reported, “[t]o date, multiple definitions of a mentor have been advanced, but researchers in the field have not unconditionally accepted any specific one” (p. 5).

Through my own research, I discovered that the mentor relationship has been defined in several ways. The mentor relationship has been defined as a one-to-one relationship like the relationship between Mentor and Telemachus in the *Odyssey*; one of a number of developmental relationships that might also include peers (Kram, 1988), sponsors, allies, and friends (Higgins, 2007); or, as a network of virtual relationships between individuals anywhere in the world as e-mentors (Ensher, Heun, & Blancard, 2003). As opposed to moving towards clarity through research, I suggest that the concept of mentoring has become more even ambiguous. Indeed, at one point, I exclaimed to my supervisor that mentoring was either so specific it was virtually non-existent or so vague that it existed in every relationship. The essential nature of the concept has been difficult to articulate and how people characterize it depends, to some extent, on the context.

In her review of mentoring literature in the fields of education, management, and psychology, Jacobi (1991) identified 15 different definitions. The definitions from each of these fields seemed to capture a slightly different essence. For example, a definition from management was more likely to stress the age and power differential of the mentor-protégé relationship than was a definition from higher education. Some of the definitions focused on defining mentor, the person, while others focused on defining mentoring, the act. Perhaps this duality has contributed to the lack of consensus on a definition because different scholars focused their definitions on different aspects of the phenomenon.

The definitions of mentoring, the act, also seemed to capture a different essence even within a field of literature. For example, mentoring in higher education was described as “a process” (Blackwell, 1989 as cited in Jacobi, 1991); “a function” (Lester & Johnson, 1981 as cited in Jacobi, 1991); or, “a form of professional socialization” (Moore & Amey, 1988 as cited in Jacobi, 1991). Given the breadth of descriptors, it should not be all that surprising that there is little consensus on a definition even within a single field.

Lack of definitional and conceptual clarity of mentoring has resulted in both academic and practical challenges. From an academic standpoint, lack of definitional and conceptual clarity has hampered research efforts and made research that has been done vulnerable to criticism (Jacobi, 1991; Allen & Eby, 2007; Gibb, 1994 as cited in Friday, Friday, S., and Green, 2004). From a practical standpoint, the lack of clarity has made it difficult, if not impossible to duplicate the benefits attributed to mentoring (Burke, 1984; Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997) in formal programs because the source of the benefit is not clear.

While a definition of mentoring has been elusive, there is agreement among mentoring scholars about the attributes or characteristics of mentoring. In a review of research that has shaped how scholars view mentoring, Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2007) identified several attributes of mentoring that they claimed provided a common frame of reference and that differentiated mentoring from other types of relationships. The five attributes they identified from the literature were: (a) mentoring is a unique relationship defined and shaped by the individuals in the relationship; (b) mentoring is a learning relationship and involves gaining new knowledge or developing new skills; (c) mentoring is a process defined by the support provided; (d) mentoring relationships are reciprocal, but benefits to mentor and protégé do not necessarily accrue equally; (e) mentoring relationships change over time (p. 10).

What I found interesting is the similarity between the list of attributes identified by Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2007) and the list of attributes identified sixteen years earlier by Jacobi (1991). Jacobi (1991) identified the following attributes as ones associated with the act of mentoring, on which there seemed to be some consensus: (a) mentoring relationships are typically helping relationships usually focused on achievement of the protégé via the assistance and support of the mentor; (b) mentoring includes functions in any or all of three broad categories: psychosocial support; career development; and role modeling; (c) mentoring relationships are reciprocal and benefits accrue to both mentor and protégé; (d) mentoring relationships require direct interaction between the mentor and protégé; (e) mentors have more experience, influence, and achievement with the organization relative to protégés (p. 513). What puzzled me was that agreement about

attributes that differentiated mentoring from other types of relationships had not translated into definitional and conceptual clarity of the construct.

Components of Mentoring

While a definition of mentoring has been elusive, there does appear to be some consensus with regard to mentoring components or functions as well as the activities associated with those functions.

Kram (1988) identified mentoring functions as “those aspects of a developmental relationship that enhance both the individual’s growth and advancement” (p. 22). Two distinct sets of functions emerged out of her research. The first set of functions Kram identified were career functions that “are those aspects of the relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in an organization” (p. 22). The activities associated with career functions share three characteristics. The activities are possible by virtue of the senior person’s experience, rank, and influence in the organization. The activities help the junior person understand how the organization works, gain exposure, and obtain promotions. The activities also help the senior person build respect from colleagues, as well as garner future support from those he has mentored (p. 25).

The second set of functions Kram (1988) identified were psychosocial functions that “are those aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional role” (p. 22). The activities associated with psychosocial functions rely on the quality of the interpersonal relationship. These activities affect both the junior and the senior person on a much more personal level and the benefits typically extend beyond the organization (p. 32).

Kram (1988) concluded that a hierarchical relationship that has provided both career and psychosocial functions best approximated a true mentor relationship. However, she also acknowledged that the relationship that provided a full range of career and psychosocial functions was rare.

In her research, Kram (1988) identified nine activities associated with career and psychosocial functions. Activities considered career functions included sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. Activities considered psychosocial functions included role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship (p. 23).

In her review of mentoring literature, Jacobi (1991) identified 15 functions associated with mentoring. In addition to those activities identified by Kram (1988), Jacobi identified access to resources, value and goal clarification, information, social status, socialization, acquisition of knowledge, and training (p. 509). Noting that different researchers might define the activities differently, Jacobi suggested that regardless of the specific definition, each activity would fit into one of three categories: psychosocial, career, and role modeling. Although Kram originally identified role modeling as one of the activities possible within the broad category of psychosocial functions, other research identified role-modeling as a function in and of itself (Burke, 1984; Sosik & Lee, 2002).

A number of scales have been developed in an effort to assess the extent to which these activities are present in a mentoring relationship, and to determine the extent to which the activities are associated with career outcomes. Using the work of Kram (1988) and other early mentoring scholars, Noe (1988) developed a 32-item scale “to assess the extent to which the protégés believed the mentors provided career and psychosocial

functions” (p. 466). Scandura (1992) developed an 18-item scale to investigate the link among vocational functions, role modeling, social support, and career outcomes. Ragins and Kram (2007) suggested that focusing on instrumental outcomes is a rather narrow lens for assessing the effectiveness of mentoring relationships, and that a broader approach is required in order to expand understanding beyond what the mentoring relationship can do for protégés, mentors, and organizations (p. 8).

Phases of Mentoring

Based on her studies, Kram (1988) identified four phases through which mentoring relationships proceeded, which were: (a) initiation, which signaled the beginning of the relationship; (b) cultivation, when the activities associated with mentoring were at a maximum; (c) separation, when the relationship was physically or emotionally altered; and, (d) redefinition, wherein the relationship either evolved or ended (p. 48).

Kram (1988) also associated an optimal time period for each phase, which suggested that if a mentoring relationship ended prematurely or went on too long it could potentially do more harm than good (pp. 48–50). The optimal time period for each phase varied considerably in duration and was based on the developmental tasks and concerns of the individuals rather than temporal time. Kram stated that only when the developmental tasks and concerns of the two individuals are complementary will a relationship thrive (p. 69), which suggested that when developmental tasks and concerns are not complementary, the relationship would suffer.

I would suggest there are few individuals who can clearly articulate their developmental tasks and concerns, but many individuals intuitively know what they need

in order to feel complete or to control anxiety at any given point in time. I concur with the suggestion that individuals are drawn to those relationships they sense can meet their needs. If it is true that individuals are drawn to those relationships they sense can meet their needs, it provides one explanation why informal mentoring relationships are reported to accrue more benefits than formal mentoring relationships (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). In formal mentoring relationships, where mentors and protégés are matched, the match may be based on criteria quite different from developmental tasks and concerns. In fact, in a study regarding the matching process in formal mentoring schemes Cox (2005) proposed training as the “solution to matching dilemmas, since if the alliance is learning driven, this would appear to override the need for a totally compatible match” (p. 413).

Types of Mentoring Relationships

Two types of mentoring relationships have been identified in the literature: formal and informal. Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) suggested that formal mentorship is distinguished from informal mentorship based on how the relationship is established or initiated. Chao et al. stated that “[i]nformal mentorships are not managed, structured, nor formally recognized by the organization” (p. 620). Chao et al. contrasted informal mentorships with formal mentorship programs that “are managed and sanctioned by the organization” (p. 620). Ragins and Cotton (1999) identified duration of the relationship as another distinguishing feature between formal and informal mentorship. Baugh and Fagenson-Eland (2007) reported “formal relationships develop within a limited time frame. . . rarely longer than 1 year. Informal relationships will continue as long as the parties remain involved” (p. 251).

Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) conducted a field study of 212 protégés involved in informal mentorships, 53 protégés involved in formal mentor relationships, and 284 individuals who did not have mentors. The researchers found that protégés in informally developed mentoring relationships perceived significantly more career-related support from their mentors and slightly higher levels of organizational socialization, intrinsic job satisfaction, and salaries. The mentored groups did not differ in their report of perceived psychosocial support. What was interesting was that the hypothesized differences between protégés in formal mentoring relationships and individuals who did not have mentors did not materialize as expected.

Ragins and Cotton (1999) examined the type of mentoring relationship on mentoring functions and career outcomes reported by 614 protégés. They found that protégés with informal mentors reported more career development functions, more psychosocial functions involving friendship, social support, role modeling and acceptance, reported greater satisfaction with their mentors, and had significantly greater compensation. Consistent with the findings that Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) reported, no significant differences were found between non-mentored and formally mentored individuals.

Mentoring Models

The nature of the mentoring relationship is of interest to members of organizations and scholars alike. Organizations are interested in establishing mentorship programs in order to accrue the benefits associated with mentoring. Scholars are interested in conducting research that will help organizations establish effective

mentoring programs. As a result of this mutual interest, scholars have advanced mentoring models for organizations to consider.

Haring (1997) described two models of mentoring: (a) a grooming model that is characterized by hierarchical, dyadic relationships in which benefits flow from mentor to protégé; and, (b) a networking model that is characterized by a group of people working together with a facilitator. The facilitator is not a mentor, but rather a support person assigned by the organization, who can help make connections with human and other resources.

In an overview of formal mentoring models, Wasburn and Crispo (2006) included the grooming model as described by Haring (1997), a slightly different networking model, and a blended model. Wasburn and Crispo's overview can be summarized as follows: (a) grooming mentoring is the traditional one-to-one model where more experienced people are matched with people new to the organization; (b) networking mentoring involves more than two people; and, while mentors are still likely to be more experienced people from within the organization, they are not individually matched, but rather lead a group of protégés; (c) grooming-and-networking mentoring involves blending the two models in an effort to capitalize on the strengths of each model and minimize the weaknesses. The blended model utilizes the matching function of the grooming model with the group philosophy of the networking model; thus, a group of protégés is matched with one or two experienced people from within the organization (pp. 19–20).

There are pros and cons associated with all three models, but the grooming model garners the most criticism, mainly because of the power dynamic inherent in the one-to-

one relationship. Haring (1997) challenged a number of the underlying assumptions of the grooming model: (a) if a dyadic relationship is or becomes toxic or flawed in some way, it can inhibit protégé development and success; (b) no ideal variables have been found for matching mentors and protégés, so the process is hit and miss, much like a “blind date”; (c) there is no acknowledgement of what protégés might contribute to the relationship that would benefit the mentor, which further contributes to the power imbalance in the relationship (p. 66).

Wasburn and Crispo (2006) echoed many of the same concerns with the grooming model and stated that “mentoring relationships do not always produce positive results” (p. 19). Wasburn and Crispo noted a number of negative outcomes that could be attributed to the grooming model. The first was the potential for older employees to embed norms and values that may be obsolete in the organization. Second, mis-matches of mentors and protégés could result in various types of clashes or conflict (e.g., personality conflict, different values). Finally, unclear goals and outcomes of the mentor/protégé relationship might result in one or the other feeling either marginalized or overextended. Other more serious criticisms of the grooming model included mentors overtly or subtly sabotaging protégés’ work or character, sexual harassment, and the expectation that protégés would be submissive to mentors (Wasburn & Crispo, p. 19).

Both the networking model and blended models responded to these criticisms by moving away from the dyadic relationship. Despite these shortcomings, Haring (1997) and Wasburn and Crispo (2006) observed that the grooming model was the most common model in organizations that had formal mentoring programs.

Benefits of Mentoring

Kram (1988) suggested that significant benefits accrue to the mentor, the protégé, and the organization. Kram stated that “the potential to enhance individual development at every career stage is impressive” (p. 159) and “[f]rom an organization’s perspective, mentoring has significant benefits” (p. 159).

Kram (1988) reported that mentoring serves the career-related needs of the protégé by helping them “learn the ropes of the organization, gain exposure, and obtain promotions” (p. 25). For the mentor, mentoring serves career-related needs by “helping him or her build respect by developing younger talent and develop support among people in his or her area of responsibility and who are likely to be in positions to reciprocate support” (Kram, p. 25). Mentoring can satisfy psychosocial needs of both protégés and mentors by increasing their “sense of competence, effectiveness, and self-worth” (Kram, p. 32). In terms of benefits to the organization, Kram suggested that mentoring could be used to pass on values and practices of the organization, reduce turnover of new staff, turn mid-career plateaus into growth opportunities, and counteract disadvantages of not being a member of the dominant group (pp. 159–160).

Burke (1984) also reported that mentors were seen as influential in both the personal development and the career development of protégés; he further suggested that mentoring can perpetuate existing standards of excellence, regenerate an organization, and be used to develop future leaders (p. 369). Burke outlined several impacts mentoring could have on an organization: both mentors and protégés may be more successful in their careers and have a desire to make individual and organizational contributions; there may be reduced turnover, particularly of new staff; it may ensure individuals are groomed

for more senior jobs and help in succession planning; and, he cited Zaleznik (1977) who suggested mentoring would facilitate leadership development (pp. 354–355).

Further research has confirmed and advanced the work of Kram (1988) and Burke (1984). Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, and Lima (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of research that focused on the career benefits of mentoring for protégés. The literature revealed two broad categories of outcomes: objective career outcomes that were tangible signs of career success and subjective career outcomes that were intangible signs of career success. Allen et al. identified objective career outcomes as those outcomes that could be measured by compensation and promotions. They identified subjective career outcomes as career satisfaction, expectations for advancement, career commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to stay. The result of their analysis supported their hypotheses that, with the exception of intention to stay, individuals who have been mentored have greater career outcomes, and that both career-related and psychosocial mentoring are positively related to career outcomes.

The literature related to benefits accrued to mentors is sparse; however, one study by Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs (1997) is frequently cited. Allen et al. interviewed mentors regarding their mentoring experience. One area of inquiry was outcomes associated with mentoring for the mentor. Mentors identified four specific categories of benefits that included building support networks (developed close relationships); self-satisfaction (satisfaction in seeing others grow); job-related rewards that focused on self (increased mentor's own learning); and, job-related rewards that focused on others (built a competent workforce). One theme that emerged was, "they [the mentors] believed they often learned as much from the protégé as the protégé learned from them" (p. 87).

Allen, Lentz, and Day (2006) studied the relationship between mentoring others and salary, promotions, subjective career success, and job satisfaction. They found that individuals with mentoring experience reported greater compensation, received a greater number of promotions, and perceived greater career success. However, mentors did not report greater job satisfaction than non-mentors reported.

Women and Mentoring

In his work, *Seasons of a Man's Life*, Levinson (1978) suggested that a mentor relationship is the most important relationship of young adulthood. He acknowledged that the reality of the day was that mentors of the young men in his study were almost exclusively male. He also acknowledged that women received less mentoring than men, in part, because female mentors were in limited supply. In his subsequent work, *Seasons of a Woman's Life* (1996) there were several sections on mentoring, but I did not find the strong claim that was presented in his study of men. That is, there was no suggestion that a mentor relationship was the most important relationship of young female adulthood.

Scanlon (1997) stated that her review of 20 years of mentoring literature related to women revealed that having a mentor or mentors can be extremely valuable to women's career development and increased knowledge and self-reliance. Ragins, Townsend, and Mattis (1998) identified career strategies used by successful women executives and CEOs and they found that 91% of their sample reported having a mentor at some time in their careers, and that 81% saw their mentor as critical or fairly important in their career advancement. In a phenomenological investigation, Gibson (2004) identified a number of themes expressed by women as they reflected on being mentored. These themes included: having someone who cares and is willing to act in one's best interest; feeling connected

to someone and not being alone; being affirmed of one's worth as an individual; and, helping understand the politics of the organization.

The literature suggested that mentoring is valuable to women, but that there are barriers to mentoring for women that simply do not exist for men, particularly with respect to cross-gender relationships. Kram (1988) suggested that neither men nor women were "sufficiently prepared for collaborative and effective working relationships with individuals of the other sex" (p. 106). Kram identified five categories of cross-gender relationship complexities. Three of the complexities related to the relationship that develops between two individuals (internal) and two complexities related to the boundary between the two individuals and the organization (external).

The first internal complexity related to reducing anxiety by assuming stereotypical roles. Stereotypical roles are what people know, and therefore what they will tend to perpetuate in the culture of the organization. According to Schein (2004) and Bergquist and Pawluk (2008), the underlying purpose served by the formation and maintenance of culture is to contain anxiety. Typically, males have had a large influence on the beliefs and values to which organizations subscribe, and the culture created and maintained in most organizations reflects the male experience. If upsetting the status quo will create anxiety, and individuals "seek cognitive and emotional stability" (Bergquist & Pawalak, p. 11) then it makes sense that stereotypes are difficult to break or change because they help people to be less anxious. Furthermore, Kram (1988) found that resorting to stereotypical roles in mentoring relationships only served to limit behavior and reduced individual competence and effectiveness.

The second complexity was that the role-modeling function was often unsatisfactory in cross-gender dyads. Kram (1988) recognized identification and interaction as important components of role-modeling. Identification occurs when a protégé discovers someone who represents an ideal to which they might aspire and the mentor sees a younger version of themselves in the protégé. Gender differences can make identification more difficult, because women typically do not aspire to become like men, and men have difficulty seeing a younger version of themselves in women. Interaction is concerned with getting together to resolve issues of common interest. When the dilemmas faced by the protégé and the mentor are different, “interaction concerning how to manage these is of limited value because empathy and joint problem solving are difficult to achieve” (Kram, p. 114). Simply stated, men and women do not often share the same concerns; thus, the interaction may be more difficult and the potential conversation can be limited.

The third internal complexity concerned intimacy and sexuality. Whether or not the desire for intimacy is mutual, the risk is present. Given the inherent power dynamics in the traditional mentoring relationship, any advances by a mentor could result in the protégé feeling angry and unsure of their own competencies (Kram, 1988). Traditional mentoring relationships are built on trust and a sense of closeness. The intimacy characteristic of the mentoring relationship was seldom an issue in dyads of the same gender; however, in cross-gender dyads, developing an intimate relationship was not desirable because of the potential for it to lead to sexual tension. This complexity could result in a relationship that never developed a level of intimacy sufficient for the provision of career and psychosocial functions.

The fourth and fifth complexities focus on how the dyad related to the organization: public scrutiny and peer resentment (Kram, 1988). Related to intimacy and sexuality, cross-gender relationships may be viewed with resentment if people in the organization believe that the mentoring relationship is based on favoritism. Mentors, in particular, will avoid cross-gender relationships if they perceive that the relationship may have an adverse effect on their reputation or undermine their credibility. Given that mentors are traditionally more senior members of an organization, they have more to lose through any public scrutiny that might result in negative perceptions. The desire to avoid public scrutiny may result in resistance to cross-gender mentoring relationships.

Peer resentment was more common in highly competitive organizations where peer groups are predominantly male. In such an environment, females who are singled out for special attention, such as a mentoring relationship, can experience considerable stress and ultimately be forced to choose between two valuable relationships, the relationships with her peers and the relationship with her mentor. Females are often forced to choose among these two developmental relationships as opposed to receiving the benefit of both.

Ongoing Development of Mentoring

Kram (1988) acknowledged that traditional one-to-one mentoring relationships, which provide the complete array of career and psychosocial outcomes are rare. Kram stated, “mentor relationships are relatively unavailable to most individuals in organizations” (p. 133). Interestingly, many individuals advance their careers, gain a sense of competence, clarify their identity, and become increasingly effective in their profession despite the relative unavailability of mentors. One reason posited for this

success is the existence and importance of other relationships that can provide career and psychosocial support. Kram introduced the notion of relationship constellation to represent the variety of developmental relationships in which one might be engaged. The constellation included traditional mentors as well as potential developmental relationships with peers, subordinates, supervisors, friends outside of work, and family members.

Higgins and Kram (2001) extended the original idea of constellations (Kram, 1988) to reconceptualize mentoring as something more than a single relationship; a new approach they referred to as a developmental network perspective. This reconceptualization was stimulated by research on alternative forms of mentoring (Eby, 1997) as well as recognition that the career context has changed such that a traditional mentoring relationship may no longer be particularly useful (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996 as cited in Higgins & Kram, 2001; Hall, 1996 as cited in Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Eby (1997) suggested 14 different mentor-protégé relationships based on whether the relationship was hierarchical or lateral and whether the skills developed through the relationship were job-related or career-related. Higgins and Kram (2001), summarizing the core work of career researchers Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Hall (1996), identified four categories of change in the career context that have direct implications for the nature of developmental relationships. These four categories included: (a) the nature of the psychological contract such that organizations are no longer the strong anchor to an individual's identity that they once were; (b) technological advances that have increased value on ability to learn as opposed to seniority; (c) flat organizational structures and globalization, which have changed how and where individuals will look for

developmental relationships; and, (d) increased diversity in the workforce in terms of both ethnicity and gender have changed the nature of development relationships protégés want (pp. 266 – 267). Higgins and Kram stated that, “mentoring – that is, the provision of career and psychosocial support – is still of primary interest, but *who* provides such support and how such support is provided are now more in question” (p. 267).

Higgins and Kram (2001) defined an individual’s developmental network as “the set of people a protégé names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the protégé’s career by providing developmental assistance” (p. 268). The concept of developmental networks differs in several ways from the original concept of mentoring as originally outlined by Kram (1988). First, a developmental network acknowledges the possibility of a number of concurrent relationships; second, it contemplates developmental relationships outside of the organization; and third, it does not specify that developmental relationships must be hierarchical. As well, Higgins and Kram suggested a new term for people in the protégé’s developmental network that further distinguishes the concept from mentoring; they refer to individuals in a network as developers. The concept of developmental networks is consistent with the original concept of mentoring in that it defines developmental assistance as the provision of career and psychosocial support originally identified by Kram (1988).

Higgins and Kram (2001) suggested four categories of developmental networks, based on the diversity found in the network, that is, the range of different social systems the relationships represent and the extent to which the developers are connected, and the strength of the relationships in the network (Higgins & Kram, p. 269). The four categories of developmental networks were: (1) entrepreneurial which is high diversity

and high strength; (2) opportunistic which is high diversity and low strength; (3) traditional which is low diversity and high strength; and, (4) receptive which is low diversity and low strength (Higgins & Kram, p. 270).

Higgins and Thomas (2001) explored the effects of the primary developmental relationship and relationship constellations in a longitudinal study of careers of lawyers. By juxtaposing the effects of the primary developmental relationship with those of the individuals' relationship constellations, they were able to provide insight into "if and when these two perspectives on mentoring yield different results regarding the effects of mentoring on protégé career outcomes" (Higgins & Thomas, p. 223). The results of the study showed that the quality of the primary developmental relationship affects short-term career outcomes; however, the composition of the entire constellation accounts for longer term career outcomes. Higgins and Thomas also found that the constellation perspective explained at least as much of the variance with respect to protégé career outcomes as the traditional perspective (pp. 240–241). This study answered, in part, the question of who can provide career support to individuals and in doing so broadened the traditional notion of mentor.

Contemplation of the question of how support can be provided to individuals has resulted in new models of mentoring. One model of particular interest is e-mentoring, which Ensher and Murphy (2007) defined as "a mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and a protégé, which provides new learning as well as career and emotional support, primarily through e-mail and other electronic means" (p. 300).

E-mentoring differs from the traditional mentoring model described by Kram (1988) in a number of ways. The first and most obvious difference is that e-mentoring

relationships include computer-mediated communication (CMC). The extent of CMC as the method of interacting has resulted in a typology that includes CMC-only, CMC-primary and CMC-supplement (Ensher, Heun, & Blanchard, 2003). Second, e-mentoring contemplates relationships outside of the organization, outside of geographical areas, and outside of time zones. Relationships can be forged between individuals virtually anywhere in the world because the relationship is virtual. Finally, e-mentoring does not assume dyadic relationships and, in fact, is seen as a way to develop networks. It is relatively easy to bring people into e-relationships through inclusion in an e-mail or on a listserv such that opportunities to connect with developers can expand exponentially. E-mentoring is consistent with the traditional mentoring model in that e-mentoring provides both career and emotional or psychosocial support functions. As well, e-mentoring relationships may be formal or informal.

Mentoring literature focused on traditional models of mentoring has identified a number of issues that Ensher, Heun, and Blanchard (2003) believe present opportunities for e-mentoring. Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs (1997) indicated that serving as a mentor usually requires an investment of time that is above and beyond that required for the mentor's regular job. This investment of time may serve to limit the number of individuals willing to mentor if the relationship is perceived to extend the workday. Burke, McKeen, and McKenna (1993) found that mentors reported more mentoring to protégés whom they believed were similar to them. The demographics of most organizations may result in certain groups having less access to developmental relationships that are already hard to come by. For instance, women and minorities may find access to a mentor even more limited because most of the men in top management

positions in organizations continue to be white males. Finally, the changing career context may also limit the access individuals have to potential mentors as organizations become flatter and more global.

Ensher, Heun, and Blanchard (2003) proposed that e-mentoring has the potential to address these issues by providing greater access to mentors and by diminishing the effect of status and demographic characteristics. Greater access to mentors is possible because e-mentoring provides another way for mentors and protégés to interact, which mentors may perceive as more convenient. If the time investment through computer-mediated communication is perceived to be less onerous than face-to-face communication, more individuals may be willing to engage as mentors.

Status and demographic characteristics are diminished because individuals do not actually see one another when they participate in computer-mediated communication. This “masking” may minimize differences in status, age, race, and gender. Ensher et al. suggested that “status equalization of communication partners can be beneficial to protégés who may perceive themselves to be of lower status if it allows them greater ease in contacting and communicating with higher status mentors” (p. 281). They also stated that “the Internet can also make it easier for potential protégés to seek out mentors based on complementary or similar skills and interests rather than superficial characteristics” (p. 282). Two other benefits that Ensher et al. imputed to e-mentoring were reduced costs in terms of expenditures required to establish and maintain formal mentoring programs and increased accountability and clarity through a written record of interactions between mentor and protégé.

Ensher, Heun, and Blanchard (2003) also identified five key challenges of e-mentoring. First, CMC relies on written communication, but an environment where verbal and non-verbal cues are absent can increase the likelihood of miscommunication. Second, there is no suggestion that relationship development in e-mentoring is different than in face-to-face (FtF) mentoring, but there is a suggestion that it may take longer for the trust and rapport needed for mentoring relationships to develop. It simply takes longer to get to know someone on-line. Third, because e-mentoring uses written communication in a technical environment, individuals who are not proficient writers and/or who do not feel comfortable with technology will find e-mentoring difficult. Fourth, technology can fail and e-mentoring relationships that are interrupted for extended periods of time due to technological limitations may be compromised. And finally, it may also be detrimental if communication thought to be private and confidential is exposed.

Only in the last 10 years has the traditional notion of mentoring been challenged. Mentoring has been, and in many ways seems to be, stuck in the 1980s. I believe that the challenge for a new generation of researchers will be to extend the original work of Kram (1988) and others and to continue to challenge the mythical notion of mentor.

Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter I provided a review of literature related to workplace mentoring. In my initial review of the literature, I employed what I have heard referred to as a “snowball” approach. Using this approach, I began with a few key books and articles and used the references from those books and articles to further my search for other relevant literature. While this was an effective technique for finding seminal literature and provided excellent background information, it did not result in a broad-based literature

review and my initial thinking about mentoring reflected this somewhat narrow knowledge base. I knew a great deal about the history and roots of mentoring, the challenges associated with mentoring, and how scholars were beginning to reframe mentoring, but if I was to expand my thinking about mentoring, I needed to expand my literature review. To expand my literature review, I took a much more structured approach and searched a number of databases using key phrases, such as mentoring relationship, female or woman, and higher education. The benefit of expanding my search was two-fold. First, a number of the sources I had discovered in my initial approach to the literature reappeared. This provided a signal that perhaps my “snowball” approach had yielded a more fulsome literature review than I had thought. Second, the structured search yielded new resources that helped me think about mentoring relationships through different lenses. While not all of the new sources were incorporated into the literature review, they contributed to a broader knowledge base that informed my thinking about mentoring.

As I have read the literature and reflected on the work of Kram (1988) and the mentorship scholars that followed, I wondered if it was time for a paradigm shift in mentoring. Covey (2003) referred to paradigm shifts as “significant breakthroughs [that] often represent internal breaks with traditional ways of thinking” (pp. 17–18). Alternatively, I wondered if the original work of Kram (1988) might simply be updated to reflect the world as it is in 2010.

Wheatley (2006) suggested “we need to the courage to let go of the old world, to relinquish most of what we have cherished, to abandon our interpretations of what does and doesn’t work. We must learn to see the world anew” (p. 7). As I listened to the voices

of the participants in this study and reflected on the old way in which mentorship has been defined or construed I believed that I was hearing something different. I wondered if there was another way to capture the nature of the relationships described from a different perspective.

I draw this chapter to a close with two figures. Figure 2.1 shows the relationship between mentoring as it was originally conceived by Kram (1988), to developmental networks articulated by Higgins and Kram (2001), to the relationship with that I suggested (2009). The dyadic relationship reflects the historical and mythical roots of mentoring, whereby an older and wiser advisor is entrusted to guide, teach and protect one who is younger. Developmental networks broaden the concept of mentoring to include several different kinds of relationship in which one could engage at a particular point in time. The integrative relationship contemplates an even broader concept of mentoring that includes a reflective relationship with oneself.

Figure 2.1. The Evolution of Mentoring

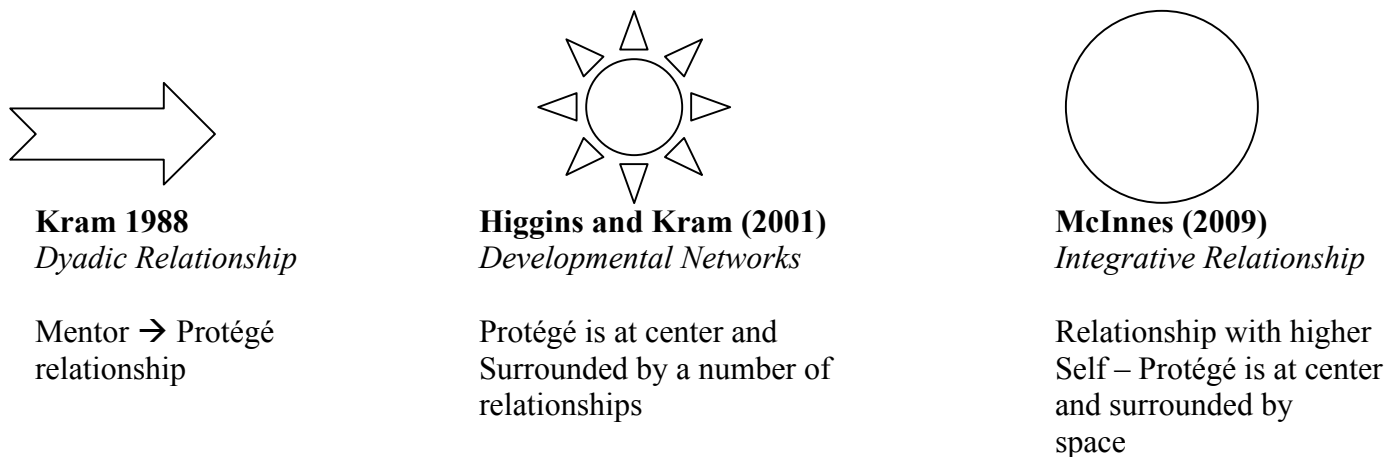
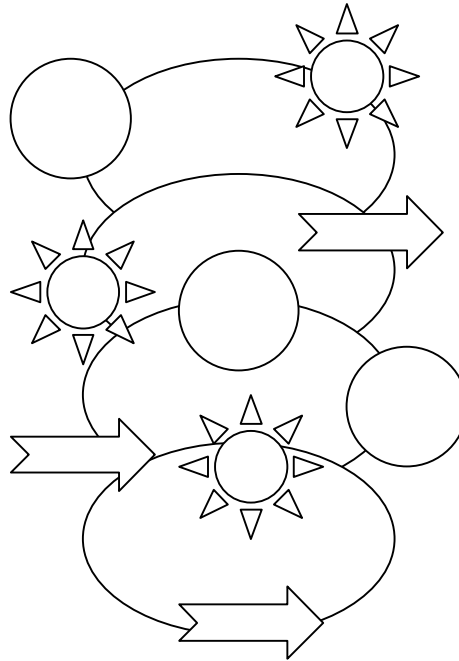


Figure 2.2 shows a mentorship loop which is my attempt to illustrate how I have come to understand mentoring based on my knowledge of the literature and my own life

experience. In this model, there is a place for all kinds of relationships. I have placed the three relationships that I have deduced from the literature (as depicted in Figure 2.1) on the loop simply to illustrate the model.

Figure 2.2. The Mentorship Loop



As I contemplated the mentorship loop and my own career development and growth, I could identify each of the three relationships at multiple points on the loop. Beginning at the bottom of the loop, as I entered the world of work, dyadic relationships were helpful in learning the work and how to be a professional. At the same time, I was starting to build networks with peers and colleagues that, unbeknownst to me at the time, would have profound impacts on my career well into the future. As I settled into my career, I became more reflective about the work in which I was most interested and had been told I had some talent. I also began to think more consciously about my career path and what that might look like. During the time that I was reflecting, I was also taking on new roles at work in which dyadic relationships became important again and my

networks continued to expand. As my own experience illustrated, the relationship loops repeat themselves.

I temporarily parenthesized these figures from the study in order to develop an inductive sense of the perceptions of my participants. For me, Figures 2.1 and 2.2 represent the deductions I have made from the literature and my life experience. In this study, I turned my attention to an inductive research approach; one designed to learn from the experiences described by administrative women in higher education. In the end I will revisit these figures and determine how I might enrich these initial musings or how the voices of my research partners (administrative women in higher education) might take me in a different direction.

Chapter Three – The Research Design

In this chapter I describe the design used to explore the concept of mentoring amongst administrative women in higher education from an appreciative inquiry perspective. In this chapter, I present a description of the sample population and why it was of interest to me, the methodological orientation and study design, and a description of how I analyzed the data. I describe the validation strategies I employed and I describe ethical concerns addressed in this study throughout the chapter.

Sample Population

The population of interest for this study was administrative women in higher education. This population was of interest to me academically, personally, and practically. I drew the sample from women employed within Human Resources and/or who held the title of Director or Associate Vice-President at the University of Saskatchewan. The total population included approximately 65 individuals employed either in administrative units or in administrative positions within academic units.

The final sample was 21 administrative women who were employed within Human Resources and/or held the title of Director or Associate Vice-President. The women represented seven different administrative units within the organization. The final sample also represented a wide range of tenure in the workforce and the current organization. The length of time in the workforce ranged from under five years to close to 40 years. The length of time in the current organization ranged from under one year to just over 20 years.

With respect to my academic interest, I observed that there was a great deal of mentoring literature that was specific to women and the value of the mentoring relationship to their career development and success (Chandler, 1996; Scanlon, 1997; Ragins, Townsend, & Matis, 1998; Gibson, 2004). However, most of the literature focused on women in corporate environments with relatively little attention to women working in post-secondary education (Cullen & Luna, 1993; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). The studies that addressed mentoring of women in higher education focused on women in academic positions rather than women in administrative positions (Gibson, 2006; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). My academic interest was in contributing to mentoring research by focusing on a population that has been understudied.

I have been a female administrator in higher education for 17 years and the population of female administrators held personal interest for me. During my career, I observed a shift in the demographic characteristics of people who held senior positions in the academy. When I began my career in the early 1990s, academics held many of the senior administrative positions, such as Registrar, Associate Vice-President Student Affairs, and Associate Vice-President Human Resources. Individuals were typically appointed for five-year terms and at the end of their term would return to faculty positions.

I began to notice a change in the early 2000s, as the academics, who traditionally held these positions, began to retire. Post-secondary institutions began to look for professional staff, with knowledge specific to the profession, rather than academics to fill these positions. I further observed a gender shift, with more women being hired as Registrars and Associate Vice-Presidents of administrative units. While there was a

paucity of literature that spoke to the shifts I observed, I was interested in the career paths of administrative women, like me, in higher education. Specifically, I was interested in the relationships these women identify as having contributed to their career development and growth and how they perceived these relationships have contributed.

Finally, from a practical perspective, focusing on women alone provided a homogeneous gender sample with which to work. Delimiting the study to women was appropriate given that differences in how men and women might describe mentoring relationships were beyond the scope of this study.

My academic, personal, and practical interest in administrative women in higher education made this an interesting and worthy population to study.

Methodological Orientation and Study Design

I conducted this study within a qualitative paradigm using adapted elements and features from the grounded theory work of Corbin and Strauss (2008). The focus group questions used to collect the data were designed according to the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. The following section outlines the qualitative paradigm, grounded theory, and appreciative inquiry.

Qualitative Paradigm

I conducted this study within a qualitative paradigm that “assumes that social reality is constructed by the participants in it” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 32). Both the research question and the assumptions of the researcher are important factors in determining an appropriate paradigm for a study. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that “the research question should dictate the methodological approach” (p. 12). Gall et al. stated that “different researchers make different epistemological assumptions about the

nature of scientific knowledge and how to acquire it” (p. 31). Although it was possible that my research questions could have been contemplated from a quantitative paradigm, my assumptions about knowledge ultimately determined the paradigm in which I conducted this study.

My worldview is probably the most closely aligned with constructivism. Schawndt (1998, as cited in Corbin & Strauss, 2008) described constructivism as a belief that “human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it” (p. 10). Creswell (2007) stated the intent of researchers with a constructivist worldview is “to make sense (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (p. 21). The paradigm in which I conducted this study reflected my acceptance of both of these statements.

Grounded Theory

The methodology I used in this study adapted elements and features from the grounded theory work of Corbin and Strauss (2008). Corbin and Strauss used the term grounded theory in a general sense to “denote theoretical constructs derived from qualitative analysis of data” (p. 1). While grounded theory was originally conceived as an approach to theory development, Corbin and Strauss acknowledged that grounded theory was also appropriate for “researchers who are interested in thick and rich description, concept analysis, or simply pulling out themes” (p. xi).

I was interested in concept analysis and Corbin and Strauss (2008) indicated that the generation of concepts was useful for increasing understanding and providing a language that can be used for discussion. They stated that “[t]he understandings can then be used to build a professional body of knowledge and enhance practice” (Corbin &

Strauss, p. ix). The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of mentoring amongst administrative women in higher education from an appreciative inquiry perspective, and one of the questions that guided the study was what findings might contribute to understanding of mentoring. As such, an adaptation of elements of grounded theory was an appropriate theoretical perspective for this study.

I adapted the grounded theory work of Corbin and Strauss (2008) in two significant ways. Corbin and Strauss outlined their version of analysis as “taking data apart, conceptualizing it, and developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions in order to determine what they tell us about the whole” (p. 64). My analysis focused on taking the data apart and conceptualizing it. Developing concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions was beyond the scope of this study. As such, my coding was less rigorous and reflected open coding and not axial or selective coding.

The basis of sampling was the other way in which I diverged from the grounded theory approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008). Corbin and Strauss recommended theoretical sampling that they defined as “the process of letting the research guide the data collection. The basis for sampling is concepts, not persons” (p. 157). I chose persons as the basis for sampling and deliberately decided upon a purposefully-selected sample for this study.

Despite these adaptations, I agreed with the key idea of grounded theory that descriptions or theory are “generated or ‘grounded’ in data from participants who have experienced the process” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). I attempted to be consistent to underlying intentions, principles, and gross method of the grounded theory of Corbin and Strauss (2008); however, I did not strictly adhere to all aspects of their procedures.

Two approaches to grounded theory have evolved over time. The original approach was developed in 1967 by sociology researchers Glaser and Strauss (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). The second approach has been advanced more recently by Charmaz (2006). Charmaz (2006) offered the following distinction between the two approaches:

In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories... (p. 10)

In an updated edition of the text, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Corbin acknowledged her agreement with “the constructivist viewpoint that concepts and theories are *constructed* by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008 p. 10). Thus, while it may be that earlier versions of grounded theory rested on positivist underpinnings (Creswell, 2007, p. 63), more recent iterations have shifted to reflect a constructivist worldview.

There were two aspects of the grounded theory approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008) that appealed to me and seemed adaptable to use in this study. The first aspect was the acknowledged alignment with a constructivist worldview. The second aspect was the more structured approach of Corbin and Strauss. Creswell (2007) suggested that “their systematic approach is helpful to individuals learning about and applying grounded theory research” (p. 66). I believed that adapting the theory of Corbin and Strauss gave me the best of both worlds, so to speak. The theoretical perspective was consistent with my worldview and yet it provided the structure useful to a novice researcher.

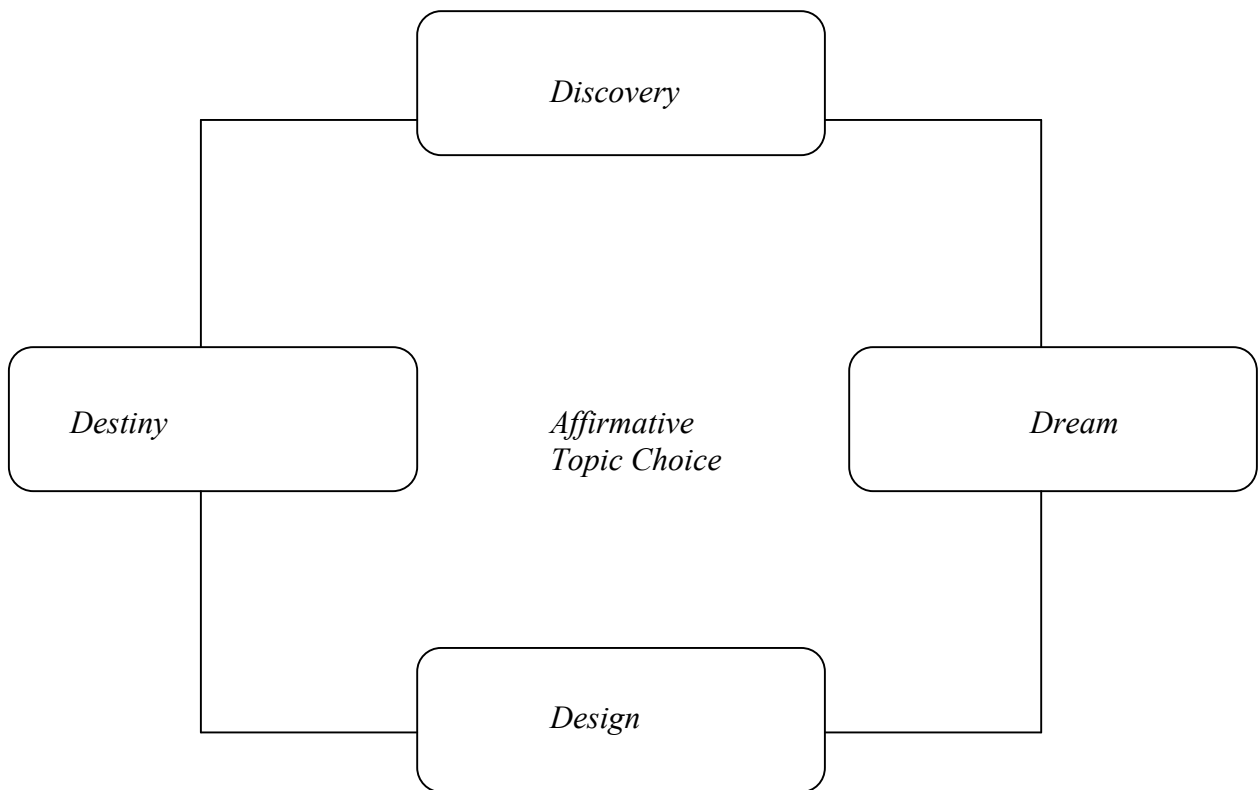
Appreciative Inquiry

I designed the focus group questions used to collect the data for this study according to the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. I chose Appreciative Inquiry as the basis for the focus group questions for two reasons. First, AI was aligned with my worldview, the choices I have made about the paradigm in which this study was conducted, and the underlying theoretical perspective. As well, AI reflected the natural way in which I approach my work and my life. This rationale was reflected in two principles of Appreciative Inquiry, the constructionist principle and the positive principle.

The constructionist principle is that, “[w]e are constantly involved in understanding and making sense of the people and world around us” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 49). This principle reflected the constructivist worldview to which I subscribe. The positivist principle of Appreciative Inquiry is captured in the way that Ncube and Wasburn (2006) described Appreciative Inquiry as “the collaborative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (p. 78). This principle reflected my natural disposition that takes a “cup half full” view of people and organizations. I am generally very trusting and enter into relationships with the view that people are good; I hold this view until it is proven otherwise. I also prefer to take a problem-solving approach to issues that arise in organizations. I am not interested in blaming or complaining about what might have been, but am interested in working together to resolve problems. These two principles, which aligned with my worldview and personality, made AI an appropriate philosophy on which to base the focus group questions used to collect the data.

In addition to supporting the underlying principles, the second important component of Appreciative Inquiry was the process. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) referred to the processes as generic because, “[n]o two Appreciative Inquiry processes are alike” (p. 25). They further acknowledged that “[t]he four D’s of AI – discovery, dream, design, and destiny – can take many forms of expression” (p. 25). One representation of the process is shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle.



Note. From *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

The questions of the focus group protocol aligned with the Discovery, Dream, and Design phases of AI. The data analysis in Chapter Four is presented using the Discovery,

Dream, and Design phases. The Destiny phase is contemplated in implications of the research outlined in Chapter Five.

The purpose of the Discovery phase was to search for and acknowledge the stories that represented the best of the topic choice. Watkins and Mohr (2001) stated, “[t]he core task of the *discover* phase in this model is to appreciate the best of ‘what is’” (p. 43). The tool used in the discover phase to uncover the stories is dialogue. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) stated, “[a]t the heart of discovery is the *appreciative interview*” (p. 25). The literature on AI suggested that the appreciative interview is typically an individual interview, but I did not come across any suggestion that precluded the appreciative interview from being a group interview or focus group. The first two questions of the focus group protocol aligned with the Discovery phase. These questions asked participants to describe relationships that had contributed in a positive and meaningful way to their career development and growth.

The purpose of the Dream phase was to image the future based on the best of what was identified in the Discovery phase. Watkins and Mohr (2001) suggested the Dream phase is both *practical*, in that it is grounded in experience, and *generative*, in that it expands the possibility of potential for the future (p. 44). Question three of the focus group protocol aligned with the Dream phase. This question asked participants to image their workplace, five years from now, full of the relationships they described in the Discovery phase. Participants were encouraged to imagine the interactions that would be occurring, the behaviors that would be exhibited, and the kind of environment that would be created.

The Design phase moved to challenging what currently exists and re-creating something different. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) reflected that “[w]hen inspired by a great dream, we have yet to find an organization that did not feel compelled to design something new and necessary” (p. 29). I suggest that this statement could be applied to individuals as well as to organizations. I believe in the potential to be inspired by stories and imaginings of the participants in the study and to be compelled to think about mentoring in a new way. Question four of the focus group protocol aligned with the Design phase. This question asked participants to think about the initiative they or others might take to create the environment where the relationships they described would flourish.

I viewed the Destiny phase as letting the positive power of Appreciative Inquiry loose on the future. William James (1902, as cited in Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) acknowledged, “[m]an alone is the architect of his destiny” (p. 34) and suggested that humans decide how their future will play out. In terms of mentoring, perhaps it really is whatever individuals want and need it to be for their future to play out. I will return to contemplation of the Destiny phase in Chapter Five.

In this study, I used the Discovery, Dream, and Design phases as the basis for the focus group questions used in the data collection. The focus group questions encouraged participants to appreciate what is, to imagine what could be, and what it would take to create something different. I return to the Discovery, Dream, and Design phases in the data analysis in Chapter Four. I return to the Destiny phase in implications of the research in Chapter Five.

Data Collection Method

Corbin and Strauss (2008) defined methods as “techniques and procedures for gathering and analyzing the data” (p. 1). I have described the data collection method used in this study under the headings of site selection, participants, and focus groups.

Site Selection

I chose the University of Saskatchewan as the site from which to recruit participants because it provided a context and culture with which I was familiar. Because mentoring always occurs in a particular context I chose a site with which I was acquainted in the event that it would be useful in the data analysis phase of the study. I also chose the University of Saskatchewan because it was geographically accessible to me.

Ethics approval was required and I submitted my *Application for Approval of Research Proposal* to the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on January 15, 2010. I received feedback on February 12, 2010 and I submitted revisions on February 16, 2010. I received final approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board on March 2, 2010. I received approval from my thesis committee on March 1, 2010.

Participants

The participants for this study were women employed within Human Resources and/or who held the title of Director or Associate Vice-President at the University of Saskatchewan. The total population included approximately 65 individuals.

The units in which employees worked and the titles of employees in the organization were publicly accessible via the institutional website and the institutional

phone directory. I derived the sample and obtained e-mail addresses through the institutional phone directory and the institutional website. I identified women in these positions in two ways. First, e-mail addresses included first and last names, so I identified many of the potential participants by first name. Second, most if not all of the women in this sample were known to me, so in the event that the first name was gender neutral or ambiguous it was likely that I knew the gender of the person in question. If there had been any question about the gender of a potential participant, I would have excluded them. Fortunately, I was able to identify all the women in the population by their first name and no one was excluded due to ambiguity of gender.

To recruit participants for the focus groups I sent an e-mail invitation (see Appendix A) to the entire sample identified above. The e-mail invitation included a description of the study, the nature of the questions that would be asked, the duration of the focus group, six focus group options, and how to express interest in participating. I had intended to send the e-mail invitation a second time, one week later, if more volunteers were required. However, since the population was about two-thirds of what I had originally anticipated, I decided to call all potential participants that had not responded by the date indicated in the e-mail. I made all of the calls on a Sunday afternoon and left voice-mail messages that referred potential participants back to the e-mail invitation. I asked for an indication of their willingness to participate via either a reply to my e-mail or a phone call to my home.

I knew all of the individuals who volunteered to participate in the focus groups; however, I excluded those individuals with whom I had reporting relationships from the population. Participants were advised of the possibility that they would know and/or be

known to one another in the e-mail invitation. I expected that professional relationships would be maintained following this study and this has held true.

Focus Groups

I collected the primary data for this study by audio recording focus group discussions. I also invited participants who wished to share information with me apart from the focus group to do so (see Appendix D) through a one-on-one interview with me or in a written communication to me. No participants availed themselves of either opportunity to share information with me apart from the focus groups.

In consultation with my supervisor, I set a goal of recruiting 30 participants for this study and anticipated that up to eight focus groups, consisting of between four and eight participants, would be conducted in order to reach this minimum. The minimum of 30 was set, in part, based on an initial estimate that the total population included approximately 100 individuals. I had hoped that one third of the population would participate in this study. Once I discovered the population was in fact 65, as opposed to 100, I adjusted my goal accordingly to 20 participants. The final sample included 21 participants.

In the following section I describe why focus groups were chosen as the data collection technique, how I prepared for the focus groups, and the focus group implementation.

Rationale for Focus Groups

I originally contemplated individual interviews as the primary data collection method for this study; however, I eventually determined focus groups would be the appropriate data collection method. This decision was based on: (a) my desire to use a

data collection method not typically used in mentoring research; (b) my experience with both individual interviews and focus groups; and, (c) by contemplating “if there are any barriers to active and easy interaction” (Morgan, 1997, p. 17).

Qualitative research related to mentoring has typically relied on individual interviews as the data collection method (Kram, 1985; Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997). I was interested in finding out if a different data collection method might offer new insights.

As I reflected on my experience with focus groups and individual interviews, I anticipated that focus groups would be the more efficient method for collecting the data. In fact, focus groups have garnered a reputation for their “relative efficiency in comparison to individual interviews” (Morgan, 1997, p. 13). I limited the amount of time that I would spend on data collection, so efficiency was an important consideration for me. Morgan (1997) also suggested focus groups as “being a good way to produce concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest” (p. 13). Gathering concentrated amounts of data related specifically to my topic was also a desirable goal given the time limitations I imposed. While the time limitation was an important consideration, I was not willing to compromise the validity of study by employing an inappropriate data collection method and I thus turned to the question posed by Morgan (1997). Morgan stated that “[t]he simplest test of whether focus groups are appropriate for a research project is to ask how actively and easily the participants would discuss the topic of interest” (p. 17).

I asked myself Morgan’s question and tried to contemplate it from the perspective of others. I did not identify any barriers that might affect my own response to the topic of

interest nor did I identify any barriers that would affect the participants' discussion of the topic of interest. I then returned to the literature review, but did not come across anything that would lead me to believe that a positive exploration of topic of interest would be controversial. I would ask participants to speak about their own experiences and I did not expect the presence of others to alter participants' contributions. To the contrary, I anticipated the discussion of the topic would be richer as a result of the group interaction. Morgan (1997) stated that "this process of sharing and comparing provides the rare opportunity to collect direct evidence on how the participants themselves understand their similarities and difference" (pp. 20 – 21). This process is one of the most valuable aspects of focus group discussions. Comments from participants suggested that they did indeed benefit from the group interaction. For example, over the course of the discussion, participants continued to add people to their original lists and to recognize more relationships as contributing to their career development and growth than they had originally identified.

One of the disadvantages of focus groups, generally associated with qualitative research is the influence of the researcher on the group's interactions and thus the data that are collected. Peshkin (1988, as cited in Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007) "urged researchers to seek out their subjectivity systematically while their research is in progress, so that they can better determine how it might be shaping their inquiry and research outcomes" (p. 462). I was aware of my influence on the focus groups interactions and I forced myself to sit quietly and let participants freely explore the relationships they identified. I found that being conscious of sitting quietly was an effective technique that allowed me to avoid unhelpful influence in the group process.

While group interaction is one of the most valuable aspects of focus group discussions, I was aware of the influence of the participants on one another. I took care to ensure that all participants had equal opportunity to engage in the conversation, but beyond that, I sat quietly. The need for me to direct the conversation was minimal and the discussion flowed freely. I did not pick up on any underlying tension or any desire to interfere with the purpose of the study that I articulated at the beginning of each focus group.

Preparing for the Focus Groups

The focus group protocol was formulated and I determined the questions in consultation with my supervisor (see Appendix C). In order to ensure that the questions were appropriate and generated a rich discussion I did one informal pilot testing prior to the study.

I am fortunate to have a wide range of acquaintances and I hand-picked four women that I trusted to provide honest feedback on the focus group process. None of the individuals were part of the sample population. All of the women had experience as female administrators in a higher education context. I held the pilot session in my home on a Sunday afternoon and provided snacks for participants. There were two pieces of information that I wished to get from this informal pilot testing. First, I wanted to ensure the focus group protocol made sense to participants and I asked them to provide direct feedback on the protocol. Second, I wanted to ensure the questions produced data on the topic of interest and that participants discussed the topic of interest actively and easily (Morgan, 1997). I was primarily the judge of the effectiveness of the questions, but also sought feedback from participants in this regard.

I received excellent feedback from the women in the pilot group. Their feedback resulted in a slight change to one of the questions, a slight change to the protocol, and reconsideration of the number of participants in each focus group.

In my focus group pilot, I had phrased the first question differently, asking participants to focus on one relationship. One of the participants indicated “This is really hard for women.” Following the focus group pilot I realized that I had unintentionally delimited the study by asking the question in the way I had. As a result, I rephrased the question to allow women to identify and speak to more than one relationship.

I also received helpful feedback from participants on the process. For example, I was advised to be more specific in my instructions to participants. This feedback was incorporated into the final focus group protocol and I drafted speaking notes to help ensure my instructions were both clear and consistent across the focus groups.

The informal pilot testing also ended up informing the size of the focus groups, which I had originally anticipated to number between four and eight participants per group. The pilot group consisted of four participants and the focus group lasted 60 minutes. I quickly realized that a focus group of eight would be difficult to accommodate in 90 minutes and made a decision to adjust the upper limit of number of participants per focus group from eight to six.

Focus Group Implementation

The focus groups were all held on-site. I conducted four focus groups. Two of the focus groups had six participants, one had five participants, and one had four participants. One focus group was held on a Saturday afternoon and the other three were held

immediately after work during the week. Snacks, appropriate to the time of day, were provided. Each focus group session ran between 60 and 90 minutes.

To recruit participants for the focus groups an e-mail invitation (see Appendix A) was sent to the entire population. The distribution list was not revealed to the group as I used the “blind carbon copy” function rather than the “to” function. The e-mail invitation included a description of the study, the nature of the questions that would be asked, the duration of the focus group, six focus group options (dates and times), how to express interest in participating, and a deadline for expression of interest.

I followed up with all participants who had not responded by the deadline date indicated in the e-mail. My original intent was to follow up with another e-mail, but I decided to use a more personal approach in the hope that it would increase the rate of participation. I made all of the phone calls on a Sunday afternoon and left voice-mail messages that referred potential participants back to the e-mail invitation and asked for an indication of their willingness to participate via either a reply to my e-mail or a phone call to my home by a specified date.

I decided to include the dates and times for the six focus groups in the e-mail invitation rather than sending a second e-mail with this information to those who accepted the initial invitation. I made this decision for two reasons. The first reason was logistical. The focus groups had to fit into my schedule and a quick look at my calendar made me realize that my own availability was somewhat limited. The second reason was efficiency. I realized that inclusion of this information up front would expedite the process as participants would accept the invitation only if they knew they were available at one of the times provided.

Participants were asked to indicate up to three preferences for particular dates or times. I was able to accommodate all but one request for particular dates or times. Beyond this accommodation, I assigned participants to the groups randomly with one other consideration. To the extent that I was aware of direct reporting relationships, I ensured that there were no direct reporting relationships among participants.

Once participants were assigned to a focus group, another e-mail confirming the date, time and location of the focus group to which they had been assigned was sent to each participant. The Consent Form for Participation in Research (see Appendix B) was sent as an attachment with the confirmation e-mail. An e-mail reminder was sent to participants the evening before each focus group.

I reviewed the Consent Form for Participation in Research at the beginning of each focus group and asked participants to sign the form and return it to me. Participants were provided with a copy of the signed Consent Form for their records.

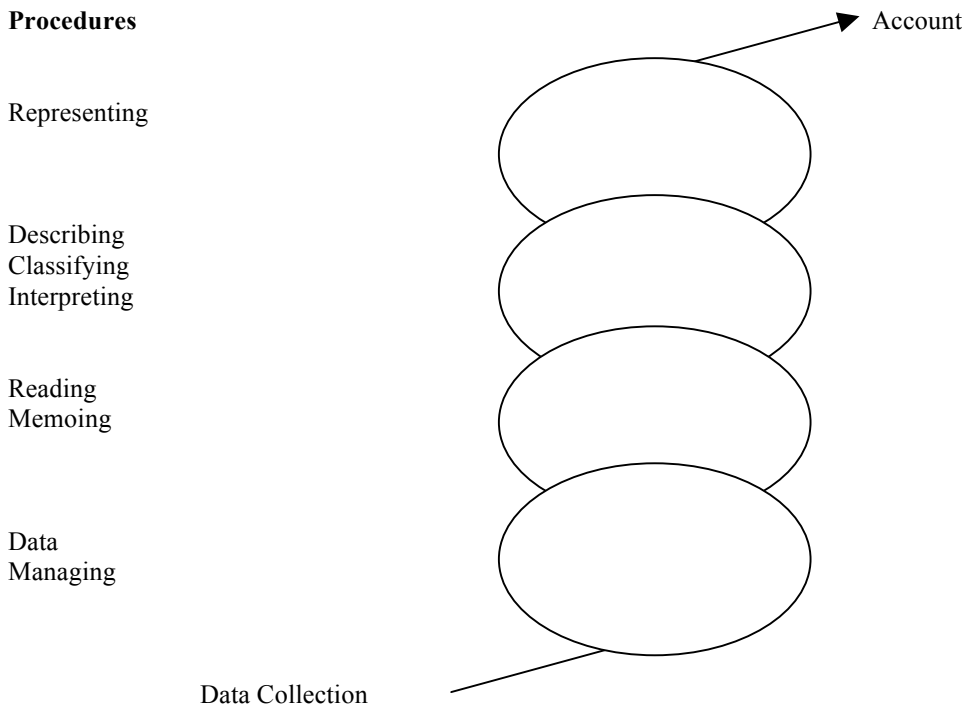
An e-mail was sent to participants within 24 hours of the focus group (see Appendix D). This e-mail served two purposes. The first was to thank the participants for participating in the focus group and the second was to invite them to provide information beyond the focus group. None of the participants availed themselves of the invitation to provide information beyond the focus groups.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) stated, “data analysis in a qualitative paradigm is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 37). This section begins with an overview of the data analysis process as I imagined it. How the data analysis actually proceeded is described throughout this section.

Creswell used a data analysis spiral to depict how data is analyzed in a qualitative study. I have reproduced an adaptation of this spiral in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2. The Data Analysis Spiral



Note: From *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.) by Creswell, J.W., 2007, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.

With the data analysis spiral as a general guide, actual analysis of the data proceeded using several strategies adapted from grounded theory methodology outline by Corbin and Strauss (2008).

The process began with data management or organization of the data. The data from this study was transcribed text of the focus group discussions. The transcribed data from each focus group was saved in a separate document and assigned an alpha character based on the order in which they occurred. Thus, the data from the first focus group became Focus Group A and so on. In order to ensure the accuracy of the data, I listened

to each digital audio recording twice. The first time I listened to the recordings, I transcribed the data as completely as possible. The second time I listened to the recordings, I corrected any errors and added nuances, through punctuation, that I thought would help in the describing, classifying, interpreting phase of analysis.

The next step was immersion in the data. Agar (1980, as cited in Creswell, 2007) suggested that researchers "...read the transcripts in their entirety several times. Immerse yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts" (p. 150). In the data analysis spiral, reading is complemented by memoing. Memos can take a number of forms but the distinguishing feature is that they are a "written records of analysis" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 117). Creswell suggested that writing memos is helpful in the initial exploration of the data. Consistent with the data analysis spiral process, Corbin and Strauss indicated, "[w]riting memos should begin with the first analytic session and continue throughout the analytic process" (p. 118).

I immersed myself in the data in two ways. The first was by listening to the digital audio recordings of each focus group a third time. However, instead of listening to the recordings of each focus group in its entirety as I had done in the data managing stage, I listened to the recordings by question. Thus, I listened to all responses to question one, then all responses to question two, and so on. This helped provide me with a sense of the responses to the questions as a whole. As I listened to the data in this way, I jotted down words or phrases that seemed meaningful. At this phase, I defined meaningful as an idea that was repeated or evoked an obvious emotional response in the person speaking.

The second way in which I immersed myself in the data was through reading the transcripts. I read them from start to finish by focus group; I then read them again by

question; and, finally, I posted all of the transcripts on the walls of my office by question. As I read the transcripts I would highlight words or phrases that seemed meaningful. This information was correlated with the information I jotted down as I had listened to the recordings and provided a starting point for the next phase of the process: describing, classifying, and analyzing.

In addition to jotting down and highlighting words and phrases that seemed meaningful, I also kept track of my initial musings of the data. I have also kept all text and diagrams that reflect my thoughts related to the data analysis. My memos are not as formal as those described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), but I believe these documents met the test of memoing as they provided a “written record of analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, p. 117).

The process of reading and memoing leads naturally into the next loop of describing, classifying, and interpreting the data. In this loop, “researchers describe in detail, develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or view of perspectives in the literature” (Creswell, 2007, p. 151). Corbin and Strauss (2008) might reframe the describing, classifying, and interpreting loop as the coding loop. Corbin and Strauss defined coding generally as “deriving and developing concepts from data” (p. 65). While the words to describe the activities of this loop may be conceptualized differently by different researchers I viewed the underlying processes as the same. Returning to the purpose of this study and drawing on Creswell and Corbin and Strauss I visualized this loop as follows:

- Describing the data in detail will be done through coding (I identified concepts and themes through coding the data)
- Classifying the data into themes will be done through relating the concepts identified in the coding (I suggested what these concepts and themes reveal about mentoring relationships)
- Interpreting is synonymous with understanding (I have sought to understand the concept of mentoring through interpretation of the women's voices)

I have portrayed my visualization of the loop as linear; however, I believe it is circular or iterative, as depicted in the data analysis spiral.

The describing, classifying, interpreting loop was the one I found most challenging. I contemplated using a computer program to assist with describing and classifying the data because I suspected it might be more efficient, but in the end, decided against this approach. My decision against using a computer program was based on my desire to make meaning myself through physically handling the data, and my lack of experience with coding software. I have some experience with focus groups and very simple analysis. My past experience suggested that I was effective with manual coding processes, and I had some sense of how I would approach the describing and classifying steps. I also know that I am a multi-modal learner so being able to see all of the data at once, being able to physically move the data segments around, and being able to move around myself while I thought about the data all contributed to my understanding. As well, as I had no experience with coding software, trying to learn a new computer application when I was already experiencing a huge learning curve as a novice researcher was simply overwhelming.

I initially coded the data by going through the transcripts with highlighters of various colors. Each color represented a different concept. For example, I used blue to highlight ideas that described the relationship, such as encouraging and challenging. I also circled words or phrases that were repeated, such as trust and reflection. Once I had been through the data in this way, I went back and recorded each segment I coded on a sticky note. The sticky notes went on another wall in my office and I spent time reflecting and sorting, or classifying the sticky notes into various categories or themes. It was very helpful to have the data represented in this way as it allowed me to think about it in a variety of ways simply by moving the sticky notes around. As I continued to move and sort the sticky notes, themes began to emerge.

Creswell (2007) indicated that code formation “represents the heart of qualitative data analysis” (p. 151), which suggested to me it is important to carefully consider how to proceed with coding the data. There are basically two ways in which coding may be approached. One way is to begin with a list of codes derived from the literature, while the other way is to let codes emerge from the data. I contemplated both possibilities and decided to let codes emerge from the data. This decision is consistent with the purpose of the study, which is to explore the concept of mentoring. I believed that to begin my data analysis with a list of codes could potentially limit the exploration of the concept and may even pre-determine the findings. Having said this, I also appreciated the possibility that the codes that emerged might be reflected in the mentoring literature. Either way, I believe I gained greater insight into the concept of mentoring through letting the codes emerge from the data. Analysis continued until I was satisfied that it “feels right” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 64). I used my own insights of how I experience authenticity to guide

what “felt right” to me. I experience strong physical sensations when something “feels right” or when something does not “feel right”. The direction provided by Corbin and Strauss led me to believe it was appropriate to use subjective experiences, such as physical sensations, within a constructionist approach.

In the final spiral, “researchers present the data, a packaging of what was found in text, tabular, or figure form” (Creswell, 2007, p. 154). The findings of this study are represented in text form as a thesis.

The findings of this study identified concepts and themes generated through the focus group discussions, suggested what these concepts and themes revealed about how mentoring relationships are experienced, and proposed practical implications for workplace mentoring. The presentation of the findings is consistent with the purpose of this study, which was to explore the concept of mentoring amongst administrative women in higher education from an appreciative perspective.

Validation

Creswell (2007) acknowledged “[m]any perspectives exist regarding the importance of validation in qualitative research” (p. 202). Schwandt (1997, as cited in Creswell & Miller, 2000) defined validity as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (pp. 124 – 125). There are a number of strategies that researchers engaged in qualitative study can use to “document the ‘accuracy’ of their studies” (Creswell, p. 207). To document the accuracy of this study, I adapted two strategies outlined by Creswell and Miller, member checking and thick, rich description.

Member checking involves the participants in the determining the accuracy of the study. Member checking “consists of taking the data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Creswell (2007) and Creswell and Miller identified a number of ways researchers may employ member checking. I chose to e-mail transcripts back to focus group participants for review. I sent the transcripts, in their entirety, to members of each focus group and invited them to provide clarity to any of the comments they made, and to provide additional comments on anything that came to mind as a result of revisiting the discussion. I did not receive any requests to clarify information captured in the transcripts nor did I receive any additional comments. This suggested to me that I had accurately captured the focus group discussions.

Thick, rich description requires the researcher to “describe the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). The purpose of providing detailed descriptions is to allow readers to feel that they have or could experience the events being described and to determine whether findings could transfer to other settings or contexts (Creswell & Miller). I attempted to provide as much detail as possible for the readers and have two indications that I was successful in this regard. The first indication was my own response to this work after having been away from it for a month or more. As I read chapters three and four, in particular, the words elicited a strong emotional response and I felt transported back to the focus group discussions. The second indication was the response of my thesis committee members to this study. I received several positive comments from my

committee members related to my style of writing which suggested to me that the descriptions I provided were thick and rich.

Summary of Chapter Three

In this chapter I have outlined the research design. I conducted this study from within a qualitative paradigm using a grounded theory approach adapted from Corbin and Strauss (2008). Focus groups were the primary method of data collection. Participants were afforded the opportunity to share information beyond the focus groups; however, none availed themselves of this opportunity. I generated transcripts from digital audio recordings of the focus group sessions. I analyzed the transcripts following the systematic approach outlined in the data spiral (Creswell, 2007). Analysis continued until I was satisfied that it “feels right” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 64). I used my own insights of how I experience authenticity to guide what “feels right” to me. I represented the findings of the study in text form as a thesis.

Chapter Four – Data Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze the data generated from the focus groups. The first two questions invited participants to concentrate on describing their relationship with a person or persons who had provided advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to their career development and growth. The third question invited participants to imagine what would be happening in a workplace that had more of the relationships they had described in the first two questions. The fourth question asked participants to contemplate what would need to happen in order for the relationships they had described in the first two questions to flourish.

The focus group questions aligned with the Appreciative Inquiry approach outlined by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005). The key phases of the Appreciative Inquiry Approach are Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, p. 16). The first two questions of the focus group protocol aligned with the Discovery phase, the third question aligned with the Dream phase, and the fourth question aligned with the Design phase. The Destiny phase is contemplated in implications of the research outlined in Chapter Five.

In this chapter I provide a brief introduction to the women who participated in this study and the nature of the relationships described by them. I then analyze the data from the focus groups, following the systematic approach outlined in the data spiral (Creswell, 2007), and using strategies adapted from the grounded theory of Corbin and Strauss (2008). This data analysis is presented using the Appreciative Inquiry phases of Discovery, Dream, and Design. I have provided an overview of the data analysis in Table 4.1. The table includes the AI phases, the focus group questions associated with the each

AI phase, and the themes identified in the data analysis. Quotations from the data that reflected the themes are referenced by focus group (A, B, C, or D) and transcript page. Thus the reference (A, 6) would be used to indicate the quote was taken from page 6 of the transcript of Focus Group A.

Table 4.1. Overview of the Data Analysis

Phase	Focus Group Question(s)	Themes
Discovery	Q1: Describe the relationship(s). Why do you think they came to mind? Q2: In the form of a story tell me about this relationship	1. Acquisition of self-knowledge 2. Acquisition of career knowledge 3. Conditions necessary for acquisition of knowledge 4. Persons from whom knowledge was acquired 5. Outcomes of acquisition of knowledge
Dream	Q3: Imagine your workplace full of the very best of these relationships.	1. What I would be getting from the workplace 2. What I would be giving to the workplace 3. What would be happening in the workplace
Design	Q4: What would need to happen in order for these very best relationships to flourish?	1. What I can do to encourage relationships to flourish 2. The degree of trust within the organization

The chapter closes with a summary of the findings from the focus groups using the Discovery, Dream, and Design phases of Appreciative Inquiry and then a summary of the chapter as a whole.

Introduction to Study Participants

Twenty-one administrative women participated in the focus groups. Participants represented seven different administrative units within the organization. The length of time in the workforce ranged from under five years to just under 40 years. The length of time in the current organization ranged from under one year to just over 20 years.

Each of the participants initially identified three or four people who had provided advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to their career development and growth. All of the women described the nature of the relationships that had provided advice, support, and encouragement related to their career development and growth as nurturing, encouraging, supportive, and understanding. Several women also acknowledged the respect they had for the people with whom they had these relationships. Comments from women throughout the focus group discussions suggested that they held the individuals they identified in high esteem. All of the women seemed to enjoy the experience of talking about and reflecting upon these relationships. One woman commented that thinking about these relationships made her feel good. Another woman acknowledged how energized she felt as a result of the focus group conversation.

There were a few notable exceptions where women identified negative relationships; but each of them expressed their recognition that the outcomes of those relationships had contributed in a positive way to their career development and growth.

One woman indicated that she recognized she had learned a lot about business from one of the individuals she identified, even though she described the relationship as very negative. This individual also acknowledged that the positive relationships that she had in her life at the same time helped her stay in the negative relationship for a period of time and ultimately benefit from the learning.

Another woman recalled an interaction with a supervisor where her values were challenged. While the relationship ultimately ended because of the values clash, the individual noted that it was the first time her values had been challenged and this situation had reinforced for her how important those values were to her.

The relationships identified by participants that provided advice, support, and encouragement related to their career development and growth were inclusive. I observed from the descriptions of the relationships that they included: family members, peers, colleagues, and supervisors; men and women; and, people who were older and people who were younger. The relationships presented early in life and continued to present throughout the individual's life. As indicated, some of the relationships were positive and a few were negative; and some of the relationships were ongoing while some had ended.

As the women described their relationships, I observed an interesting progression. The women appeared to identify the relationships in the order in which they occurred in their life. Several of the women noted that the first person who came to mind was their mother, their father, their grandmother, or other significant family member. I interpreted this progression to suggest that career development does not necessarily begin upon entry into the workplace, but may actually begin much earlier. The familial relationships

provided important role models for the participants. For example, one woman spoke of a drive that her mother had to improve herself, and how that drive had influenced her.

The next group of people identified by the women ranged from undergraduate professors, to peers, to supervisors. Who was identified in this group seemed dependent, to some extent, on time of entry into the workforce. For example, one woman recalled the economic downturn in the 1980s just as she was finishing her undergraduate degree. Offers that were on the table were withdrawn and she went from having several options to consider to no offers at all. This woman was absolutely convinced that one of her professors had contacted an organization on her behalf in order to help her secure employment during that time. Women newer to the workforce tended to identify peer relationships as those that provided advice, support, and encouragement related to their career development and growth. One woman recalled what she termed a “crucial conversation” with a friend that helped her break down barriers she did not even know existed. This woman was of the opinion that she began to be open to different opportunities as a result of that crucial conversation.

Finally, all of the women identified a current colleague, supervisor, or boss as one of the people who provided advice, support, and encouragement related to their career development and growth. For the most part, colleagues, supervisors, and bosses were described as encouraging and challenging. I was struck by the interesting relationship between “encouraging” and “challenging” expressed in the conversations. When combined with encouragement, being challenged or pushed was viewed in a positive way.

While the relationships identified by the participants were diverse some common themes emerged. I focus on these themes in the remainder of this chapter.

Discovery Phase Questions

The first two questions of the focus group protocol aligned with the Discovery phase. Discovery engaged participants in “[i]dentifying ‘The best of what has been and what is’” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16). The focus group questions were as follows: (a) I would like you to describe this relationship or these relationships, but please do so without attribution, that is please do not identify the person or person(s) with whom you have had this relationship. Why do you think these particular relationships came to mind? (b) You have identified a relationship that has contributed in a positive and meaningful way to your career development. In the form of a story, an instance, or some other concrete example, tell me about this relationship. Think about how it made you feel and what made it meaningful.

There were five themes reflected in the descriptions of the relationships and the stories shared in response to these questions. All of the themes related to the acquisition of knowledge where knowledge was defined as “all the information, truths, and principles learned throughout time” (*Encarta World English Dictionary*). The five themes were: (a) acquisition of self-knowledge; (b) acquisition of career-knowledge; (c) conditions necessary for acquisition of knowledge; (d) persons from whom knowledge was acquired; and, (e) outcomes of the acquisition of knowledge.

Acquisition of Self-Knowledge

Acquisition of self-knowledge was reflected in an increased awareness of “who I am” as an individual. The voices of the women suggested an increased emphasis on the

intrapersonal perspective might apply to mentorship. Participants highlighted the importance of relationships that led to increased knowledge of themselves; the relationships they identified contributed to first “knowing thyself.”

Acquisition of self-knowledge included concepts of reflection, challenge, and tolerance. It was through reflection, being challenged, and acceptance of others that the participants voiced coming to know something new or different about themselves. Acquisition of self-knowledge, as described by the participants, may be best characterized as the provision of either confirming or disconfirming information that resulted in new knowledge of self.

Reflection was voiced, most often, as the ability of another person to see something in the individual that they themselves did not see. The talent or the ability was either unrecognized or unacknowledged by the individual.

She saw things in me that I didn't see in me and that was very helpful. Like for instance she once remarked that she thought I was really good at making connections between people and things and ideas, being able to network and put somebody in touch with somebody. (A, 1)

[He] recognized that I had this business mind and it wasn't something that others could see. (A, 3)

She often sees what I can't in terms of what my abilities are. (A, 3)

The women in this study acknowledged relationships with individuals who were able to recognize and/or acknowledge talents or abilities that the women were either unaware of or that they were aware of, but took for granted. What appeared to be important to the women was having someone else recognize or acknowledge talents and abilities in them. I observed a shift in how the women viewed themselves as a result of the recognition and/or acknowledgement. The first individual cited above stated that she

had not valued the talent of making connections until she realized that much of the success she had experienced in her career was due to this talent. The unspoken assumption seemed to be that there was no value in talents and abilities until they were recognized or acknowledged by someone else.

Once the acknowledgement or recognition was made, however, two things seemed to result: first, the acknowledgement or recognition increased the self-confidence of the women; and second, it allowed the women to be more comfortable with that aspect of themselves. The woman who spoke of her business mind being recognized also spoke of becoming more comfortable her competitive nature as a result of this recognition.

The recognition and acknowledgement of talents and abilities by others also informed career choices. The women spoke of making particular career decisions related to the environments in which they chose to work and whether or not they stayed in a particular career as a result of learning something about their talents and abilities. The woman who commented on the person who could see what she could not in terms of her abilities was reconsidering a recent career decision. This conversation was an important reflection back to her because it confirmed that she did have the abilities required to succeed and that her struggle was related not to her abilities but to gaining experience in the new role.

Recognition and/or acknowledgement of talents and abilities appeared to spark more personal reflection on the part of some of the women.

The values that person had mirrored mine so it seemed like I could trust that person and then value how they viewed me and take their feedback and examine myself to see if that's exactly what I would agree that my strengths are, and then think to myself if I could see areas of growth and then move that way. (C, 2)

There is a lot of reflection of myself that they used, a lot of guidance as to what do I want to be doing, where do I want to go, always help on how to get there and if they didn't know, then they were able to provide contacts to help me get there. (C, 2)

The metaphor of the mirror was used in a couple of instances. Sometimes the mirror represented a likeness. Other times the mirror was a metaphor for reflecting something back to the individual. Either way, it provided an opportunity for reflection.

The women seemed to be most appreciative of the conversation they had with the other person about themselves. In these instances, it seemed to be less about the outcomes that resulted from the conversation and more about having another person take an interest in them. Underlying the conversation appeared to be a much stronger message that “you are important enough to me to warrant my time and attention.” Thus, the women left these conversations feeling valued.

And finally, reflection reinforced that which was good and positive in the individual.

You know, you're very aware of your flaws but you need someone else that is reflecting your good qualities. (A, 6)

The person who can really see what's positive about you and see that beyond anything else with you, then you feel you want to live up to that. (A, 6)

Participants spoke about being hard on themselves and how they held themselves to very high standards. Positive reflection from another person provided positive reinforcement and in some cases became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The women appeared to acknowledge a disjoint between how they viewed themselves and how they were viewed by others. When this disjoint became apparent to them, they attempted to align the conflicting views by accepting the view of the other. In these instances, the view of

the other was always the more positive view. A more positive view of self seemed to translate into an increased desire to contribute to their work.

One of the women described the feeling she associated with positive reflection of herself. The positive reflection translated into freedom to be creative and to take risks. Once she experienced this freedom, she spoke of how much happier and engaged she was in her career, which eventually translated into career success.

The women acknowledged the value in being pushed or challenged in coming to know themselves and of what they were capable. While most participants spoke of being challenged in a positive way, at least one woman acknowledged that being challenged in a negative way also contributed positively to who she is today.

In each case, the relationship was a challenge and I don't mean that in a negative way, but because of the challenges put to me I was able to grow and learn. (C, 2)

These people all pushed me to be who I am now . . . whether it was good or bad pushing, they still pushed me to my limits. (D, 2)

This person has pushed me a lot to work outside my comfort zone, to try things that I haven't done before and to be much more reflective about myself and the work that I do. (A, 2)

I observed that when complemented with encouragement and support, being challenged or pushed was viewed as stimulating and that it resulted in a positive outcome. In the case of the “bad pushing,” this individual indicated that the encouragement and support she received from others allowed her to reframe the “bad pushing” in a positive light.

In an environment of encouragement, support, and understanding challenge was viewed not just as positive, but as necessary for development and growth. The women recognized that it was not enough to surround themselves only with people who

appreciated and accepted them, but that it was also important to engage with others who would push them to become more of who they could be.

Women expressed appreciation for the acceptance of others as they had explored different aspects of self. This appreciation manifested in comments that identified encouragement to explore opportunities, freedom to decide on their own what was right for them, and support for taking risks.

They were supportive and not necessarily pushing in one way or another – its whichever way you wanted – it was more supporting me in whatever decision I wanted to make. (D, 2)

He taught me about exploring opportunities that might be really far off from where I am right now and to really expand my world. (D, 4 – 5)

[He] was understanding of my need to explore my own pathway. (A, 3)

[She] gives me the space to make my decisions and make my mistakes, but is supportive when I make those mistakes because that is how you best learn. (A, 3)

What I found was how supportive they were in allowing me to take risks, allowing me to go and maybe try something that they weren't totally sure was going to be a success or not and allowing me to learn and to experiment. (D, 8)

Some of the women acknowledged that occasionally they were looking for easy answers and wished that another person would make decisions for them. While they acknowledged this desire they also appreciated the importance of finding their own way. The women valued relationships with others that challenged and pushed them to explore and find their own way.

One woman stated that she would often present the other person with alternatives and ask him to decide, for her, which alternative to choose. At the time, she recalled feeling frustrated because she never received a straight answer. However, in hindsight,

she realized that she learned a great deal more by not being provided with a straight answer.

The comments made by the women seemed to suggest the importance of retaining control over their career and the choices they made in that regard. The other people, of whom they spoke, were not interested in power and/or control over the individual, but were interested in what was right for that person, at that time. The other with whom the women had the relationships seemed to intuitively understand the importance of helping them learn how to explore options and make decisions on their own. The other people identified by the women provided the space and tolerance for them to learn more about themselves through exploring options and making decisions. This is not to say that the outcome was always positive, but the value appeared to be in the learning that accompanied the situation. Thus, even a negative outcome represented an opportunity for learning.

The women appreciated the risk associated with relinquishing power and control. Particularly in the workplace, encouraging others to explore options and make decisions can be risky for the person who is doing the encouraging. The women spoke about the potential to fail, to make an incorrect assessment or a wrong decision. The women translated the willingness of someone to relinquish power and control to them as an acknowledgement of the trust the other person must have had in them. Relinquishing power and control to the individual or ensuring that power and control stay with the individual appeared to be a powerful exhibition of trust in that person.

Acquisition of Career Knowledge

Acquisition of career knowledge was reflected in the women coming to know and understand “what I do.” The significance of these relationships was in what and how the relationships contributed to the individual’s career knowledge. Acquisition of career knowledge included concepts of deciding on a career path and developing career-specific skills. The voices of the women reflected the shift to a protean career or one that was shaped by the individual rather than by the organization. Acquisition of career knowledge, as expressed by participants, was through the influence of others who were interested in them as individuals and not an overarching interest in the organization.

This person helped me choose career paths, I’ve had a couple of different careers, but each time they provided me with different articles and personal tests to find which direction to go into. (B, 3)

The professional relationship I think was significant in me deciding on a second career and going down that path. Had it not been for that influence, I don’t think I would have. (B, 3)

He paid attention to my career and where I was going. He offered me to work or be trained to work wherever I wanted in that company and it was an opportunity not many people are given. (A, 10)

As the women described the relationships that provided career knowledge, it was evident that the individuals themselves were thinking about a new career, a second career, or some kind of career progression. The relationship with the other person appeared to be the catalyst the individual required in order to take the next step, whatever the next step might be.

During the discussion, the women recognized their desire to advance or change careers, but acknowledged that, for a variety of reasons, they were being held back. Two reasons indicating why these relationships were important to these women came to light

during the discussion. One woman identified the fear associated with pursuing the education that she knew would advance her career. Another woman alluded to the fact that she was not a risk-taker and therefore could convince herself to continue with a career in which she was unhappy.

For the women who spoke of these relationships, they truly believed that had it not been for the relationship, they might not have taken the actions that they took. One woman commented that these relationships help you get to places that you should be, but cannot get to on your own. The value in these relationships was that through their actions, the others instilled confidence and courage in the women to do the very thing that they wanted to do.

Developing career-specific skills or information was also mentioned in the discussion. Even in a negative relationship, one of the participants was able to recognize that she was gaining valuable information and therefore stayed in the relationship until it deteriorated to the point where learning was no longer possible.

Coming into the U from private industry and being mind-boggled by the level of complexity in the organization and really going through the ropes, how you have to do the consultation process, how you have to approach getting something done. So how do you write up a specific document to make a proposal... and the level of consultation through committees that had to be done and mentoring me through that role of how you do the consultation across the organization, how you prepare submissions was also invaluable. (B, 2)

She really helped me hone a lot of skills in terms of presentations, working with clients, building business plans, all those things. (A, 4)

The relationship was very negative, but this individual was very prominent in her field of work, very intelligent, taught me a lot in regards to business, but very negative relationship. (D, 1)

The voices of participants suggested it was important to have relationships with others that could impart practical career knowledge. This relationship appeared to be particularly important early in an individual's career or in the event of a career change.

While practical career knowledge was articulated as important there also seemed to be an acknowledgement that understanding the culture of the organization was also important. This was expressed by one of the women as a sense of being overwhelmed when she moved from the private sector to the university sector. While her profession had not changed, the way things worked in the university was dramatically different. She noted the consultation process required for getting things done as an example of this difference. For this woman, being able to navigate the consultation process was important to her work and, ultimately, to her success in the organization.

Often the culture is not obvious, which may be, in part, why relationships that can impart practical knowledge are identified as important. Each organization has its own culture and part of understanding the culture of an organization is understanding what is valued within that organization. Another woman spoke of honing her technical skills, which were critical to her success in the organization she worked in at the time. It appeared that the real value in improving these skills was that it increased her value and ultimately her success within the organization.

The value in the relationships identified by women that helped them develop career-specific skills was two-fold: first, they provided practical career knowledge; and second, they provided information about the underlying culture of the organization. Both of these career-specific skills contributed to the individual's success in the organization.

Conditions Necessary for Acquisition of Knowledge

Two conditions were identified as necessary for the acquisition of knowledge to occur, the first being the presence of trust. I defined trust as, “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). The second condition was the individual’s own readiness to engage in the learning.

Comments related to the presence of trust and readiness were typically made in response to the question of why these particular relationships came to mind.

I believe the trust you have in the other person who influenced your career – its not built up in one day, its over time and you start to feel that trust and that trust really starts to influence you, not only by the words, but also by modeling it. I think that’s very important. (B, 4)

Trust is a big one. These are all long-term relationships where we have built mutual trust. (C, 3)

My two key aspects would be were the people who challenged me, so you know, its out of respect and trust and its helping me to grow and understand things that I don’t. (A, 6)

In this context, the trust to which the participants referred was individual trust. They needed to trust the person with whom they had the relationships in order to reap the benefits. According to the women in this study, trust was built up over time. One woman recognized that the relationships that had contributed to her career development and growth were all long-term relationships where trust had developed over time. This woman also commented that the trust was mutual, suggesting that whether or not the other trusts is important as well.

The women identified what trust looked like for them and how they would know if and when trust was present in the relationship. Essentially, trust is evident when words

and actions are aligned: in other words, that what one sees is what one gets and that there will be no surprises. The definition of trust in this section referenced the intention to accept vulnerability. The women in this study seemed to express that in order to make oneself vulnerable required confidence that there would be no surprises if this vulnerability was exposed.

While a number of the women spoke explicitly of trust, there were other references that I suggest could be construed as trust, or that trust would have to be present for the individual to feel a particular way. For example, other expressions I heard included lack of fear, freeing, and feeling safe.

The women in this study identified openness and readiness to engage in learning as being important as the presence of trust. They also recognized a serendipitous nature to the relationships.

The planets lined up – lots of things were happening at a period of time in my life where I think I was open, I was open to change and to growth and to learning. (C, 2)

I think there are people that come into your life in a given period of time and its like that's there gift to you. And then, that part, that allows you to get to where you need to be for the next part of the journey. (A, 7)

The others just happened to be in the right place at the right time for when I needed them. (C, 3)

The women voiced an acknowledgement that the relationships met a particular need at a particular time. There was also a sense that these relationships should not necessarily be expected to last. Two of the women reflected that these relationships were not the same as friendships. One woman indicated that they were mentors, not friends. Another woman described one of the relationships she identified as like her best friend, but that her best friend does not give her career advice. Alternatively, some of the women

indicated that what began as a relationship focused on career development and growth, over time, did morph into a friendship.

A number of the relationships that the women identified had ended. Some spoke of that ending in the focus group discussions, while others simply acknowledged that the relationship had ended. Some of the women found it somewhat contradictory to identify a person with whom they no longer had a relationship as significant to their career development and growth. Regardless, the women reflected that although the relationships had ended, they were able to recall them with gratitude and appreciation for what they received from the others during the time in which the relationship was active.

Persons From Whom Knowledge was Acquired

I asked participants if they could think of a person or person(s) who had provided advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to their career development and growth. In response, women identified a wide range of people including: mothers, fathers, other family members, colleagues, supervisors/bosses, friends, book clubs, professors, and coaches. One participant identified a particular leadership development program as contributing to her career development and growth.

The first one is my mother and well that's an obvious relationship. I think hers was indirect, hers was a modeling as I was growing up she was always in the workforce and progressively advancing in her career. (A, 1)

My first one was my grandma. She was someone who was always positive, always on my side and really good conversations and we would always talk at length about whatever was happening – you know she had a lot of wisdom. (A, 2)

The first is a family member and the nature of the relationship, I looked up to this person and their career and the lifestyle she has from her career is something that drew me towards. (B, 2)

The other person I put down was a university professor in my undergraduate degree who I ended up becoming good friends with after university. But this particular woman I think took a real keen interest in me. (A, 2)

I also have my current boss is somebody who has been very influential in my development. (A, 3)

Another person that was extremely influential on both the positive and slightly negative, but self-discovery perspective, was a woman who was my boss. (A, 3 – 4)

I think the one that had the biggest impact is a colleague in higher education. (C, 1)

The diversity of the relationships identified by participants in relation to their career development and growth struck me because a number of the relationships were well beyond the workplace and were pre-career in nature. I interpreted this diversity as reflective of a more holistic view of career development and growth; it does not only happen through workplace relationships or relationships where the focus is career development and growth.

I observed two orientations that appeared to capture the relationships that contributed to the acquisition of knowledge. The first orientation was “future-oriented.” Future-oriented relationships included familial relationships or relationships with others outside of the workplace. The women seemed to resonate with familial relationships and friendships that were able to provide a glimpse into the future and the possibilities available. These relationships represented possibilities for the women as they contemplated their own futures. It was through these relationships, in particular, that women explored and envisioned possibilities for themselves and contemplated what their futures might look like.

The second orientation was “present-oriented.” Present-oriented relationships included workplace relationships with colleagues and bosses. I interpreted this orientation as reinforcement of the importance of relationships in the workplace to career development and growth. It appeared that as the possibilities began to play out and as individuals moved from exploring and envisioning to doing or acting, the relationships shifted as well.

As the conversations progressed, the list of people that participants identified as having provided advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to their career development and growth increased. The following quote captures the nature of this increased awareness.

This is such a good question that I haven't really thought enough about, but one aspect that occurred to me was that I've had a book club that a friend across the street and I, when we were home with new babies, started. That book club, that may sound strange, but that whole book club provides, all throughout my life since then, provides advice, support and encouragement in a way that is really pretty deep. (A, 4)

As the women reflected upon the people that they originally identified and then added to their lists, I observed an increasing awareness among them about the nature of developmental relationships. There seemed to be an “aha moment” that spread through the room as the women recognized the breadth and depth of relationships that had contributed to their career development and growth.

Outcomes of the Acquisition of Knowledge

The outcome of the acquisition of knowledge described by participants was a change in their thinking. Concepts such as “life-changing” and “turning point” were heard over and over again. Thus, the way in which the relationships identified by participants contributed in a positive and meaningful way to their career development and

growth was by facilitating a change in how individuals thought, which seemed to allow for development and growth to proceed.

I think it also contributed to increasing my confidence and my ability to take on new things and the faith that they demonstrated in me I think that was – for each of them I think I would say were life-changing in some way, each of those relationships, and that’s probably why I think of them or why they come to mind. (A, 6)

She was one of the very few female models that I had early on in my career so she really did suggest that that might be something I would want to do and that was really neat because that was definitely a life-transforming year and it gave me confidence I didn’t have and it enabled me to then go on to a lot of different steps in my career. (A, 12)

And she said my mom decided to retire because she wanted to keep the two young people in the job. And that story really shocked me, really shocked me. I never thought anybody would do that, at least my background and my culture wouldn’t teach me to do something like that. So I was very shocked and then I started to think, you know, maybe I should think something different. And I think of that story as a starting point and I started to pay attention to lots of this kind of thing – you know, to recognize others success and let other people shine and put myself in a supporting role. (B, 7 – 8)

[He] encouraged me to apply for a major scholarship and I was able to turn my life around at a low point because of him. (A, 5)

I was working very hard, but I noticed I damaged some relationships and I didn’t even know why and then I think what really triggered me to think differently was the Covey training. The Covey training opened my eyes and really changed my perspective, especially to working as a team and paying attention to the people working around you. And also, giving the opportunities to others to be successful. (B, 2)

The comments of the women reflected the power of thinking in new ways regarding their career growth and development. In the first two quotes cited above, the relationship resulted in their thinking in new ways about themselves. For the woman who applied and received a major scholarship, the thinking in new ways expanded possibilities for her; she did not think a scholarship was something available to her prior

to being encouraged to think that it was. For the woman who spoke about the Covey training, the result was thinking in new ways about relationships with others; she recognized that prior to the training she had been thinking about individual accomplishment, whereas after the training her thinking shifted to working with and through teams.

I was moved by the story of a particular woman who grew up outside of Canada in a culture that placed high value on individual achievement and success. For this woman, the outcome of the acquisition of knowledge was a paradigm shift. She already had a great deal of confidence in herself, but she recognized that her growth and development would come from putting herself in a supporting role. Through this story I realized that the most profound outcome of learning was not necessarily increased confidence or new abilities, but that it was actually new thinking that ultimately resulted in increased confidence or new abilities.

Dream Phase Question

Question three of the focus group protocol aligned with the Dream phase of AI. The Dream phase of AI encouraged participants to create “a clear results-oriented vision in relation to discovered potential” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16). Participants were invited to imagine or dream beyond what was to what might be. The focus group question was: As you continue to reflect on these relationships, imagine your workplace five years from now – you are in the same workplace and you have the very best of these relationships that you have described only you have more of them. Concentrate on what is going on in your workplace. What are some of the aspects of these relationships you wish you could experience more?

The women appeared almost melancholy as they thought about a workplace that could be full of the very best of the relationships that they described. It was almost as though they did not believe that a workplace full of these relationships could ever come to pass. In fact, one woman said as much, that she just could not imagine it. Academically, she appreciated the exercise, but emotionally, she struggled to actually imagine that kind of workplace. The melancholy was reflected in a comment that made reference to slowing down and allowing people's humanity to come through.

A few of the women exhibited a slight bitterness or edge in their voices as they spoke. For these women, I suspected that they may have been thinking about the relationships they had not had in the workplace. A comment made by one of the participants reflected this edge. It was about being able to go anywhere if there were more of these relationships in our lives.

However, as participants responded to the third question that invited them to imagine or dream about the workplace of the future, three themes emerged: (a) what I would be getting from the workplace; (b) what I would be giving to the workplace; and, (c) what would be happening in the workplace.

What I Would Be Getting from the Workplace

The first theme related to self or "what I get." As participants continued to reflect on the relationships that were meaningful to them, they incorporated these reflections into their imaginings. Comments in this regard reflected learning, being nurtured, and receiving encouragement, understanding, and support. This was one of the questions where the responses of the women specifically referenced mentoring relationships.

Knowing how powerful those relationships have been for me in the past, I wanted to make sure those opportunities were here and that I would have

the potential to continue with another very important mentoring relationship. (A, 15)

What has just been freeing for me is a mentor who does accept on a really genuine level that people are going to screw up, you're going to screw up, and they're still going to be able to move ahead with you. (A, 16)

For me it's about being somewhere people will push the boundaries and encourage you to push the boundaries. (A, 16)

It allows you to fall too, but knowing that if you do fail, or you make a mistake, that everyone's there to support you to allow you to point out what you've learned or maybe where the mistake was and what to do next time. (C, 9)

As women responded to the imagine question of the Dream phase, they began by reiterating the importance of mentoring relationships. The conversation seemed to naturally drift back to the relationships they had described earlier in the discussion; but at this point the women appeared more aware of what it was about these relationships that was important to them. The women reminded themselves of their own desire to continue to be engaged in relationships that nurtured them and provided encouragement, support, and understanding.

There was a noticeable absence of comments related to acquisition of career knowledge in the participants' imaginings. I suggest two interpretations of the absence of comments related to career knowledge. First, it may be that acquisition of career knowledge is inherent in these relationships. That is, the acquisition of career knowledge is a given in a relationship that provides advice, support, and encouragement to career development and growth. The second interpretation may be that the acquisition of career knowledge is not as important as the acquisition of knowledge of self. However, given what I understand about these relationships, I would suggest the first interpretation is closer to the truth.

What I Would Be Giving to the Workplace

The second theme related to others or “what I give.” Participants quickly moved beyond imagining what they would get out of the workplace of the future to considering what they could offer to this workplace. Comments continued to reflect the importance of mentoring, but there was a shift from being mentored to being a mentor or role model. The focus shifted from themselves to others.

Learning from mistakes so that you can grow and improve is a critical element. It's not about me as a person, but what really happened that we can learn from so that number one, I'm not going to do this again, but how do we take the learning and help others grow as well. (A, 16)

I do see myself in the future playing a major role in supporting other young people to be successful. (B, 10)

If there was more of those people in our lives [mentors] you could go anywhere – places that you should be, but wouldn't wind up there on your own. (B, 10)

For a play to work, every single actor has to go out on the stage committed to making the person beside them be the best actor that anyone's ever seen and if that everyone's out there making the person next to them be the best actor anyone's ever seen you have a phenomenal production. I always thought if you could get a workplace to think that way – that you are making your colleagues as phenomenal in other people's eyes as phenomenal as anything – I thought what a workplace that would be. (D, 15)

I just think if I could just slow people down it would be just amazing, the people's humanity could come through. (D, 15)

You see the potential when people are nurtured how different they are. I can't believe how some people have blossomed. (A, 19)

I observed a parallel between what women wanted from the workplace of the future and what they believed they could contribute. It appeared as though what they wanted and what they could contribute were one and the same. Women were prepared to

offer nurturing, encouragement, understanding, and support to others. I attributed this to knowing how powerful these relationships could be to career development and growth.

The comment that related to making one's colleagues phenomenal in other people's eyes seemed to capture the essence of what a workplace full of the very best of these relationships would be. This comment led to some conversation about what would not be present in such a workplace: competition, fear, misunderstanding, mistrust, blame, and so on. These descriptions were the antithesis of nurturing, understanding, encouragement, and support. Women seemed to need to acknowledge both what a workplace in the future would be as well as what it would not be. I interpreted this acknowledgement of what it would be and what it would not be as a desire for clarity.

What Would Be Happening in the Workplace

The third theme that emerged from the imaging conversation was related to the organization. The women articulated what would be happening in an organization that was full of relationships that provided advice, support, and encouragement, and that contributed in a positive and meaningful way to people's career development and growth.

You wouldn't have to always feel the stress or the need to perform or be ambitious because that would just be the given and then from there you just kind of celebrate what everybody's talent or what they bring to the conversation. (D, 13)

There would be a lot less talking and a lot more listening from everybody. (D, 13)

I think we'd see some walls come down. (D, 13)

There would be less hands up staying stop, stop, stop. Right now you always get policies, contracts, let's tighten those up and get those in place. (D, 13)

Everybody would be supporting each other in what they're trying to accomplish. (D, 11)

It would be a workplace with such trust and commitment that there's no risk that anything you do would be misunderstood or misinterpreted – it would be safe. (C, 9)

The women seemed to articulate with ease what would be happening in a workplace that was full of the very best of these relationships. This ease of description may have been due to the fact that behaviours and physical space are observable, even in the mind's eye, and it was easier for women to identify specifically what would be happening in a workplace that was full of the very best of the relationships that they described.

The comments made by the women reflected an openness in the workplace and they referenced all kinds of barriers coming down. The barriers included physical barriers (walls), emotional barriers (misunderstanding), and procedural barriers (policies). I interpreted the references to barriers coming down as a desire to be in an environment that was more freeing. “Freeing” was the language used by some of the women, and I found it useful in capturing the essence of what a workplace full of the very best of the relationships they described would be.

As women described what would be happening in the workplace and used their imaginations, energy seemed to permeate the room and everything became a possibility. For example, one woman began to describe a new environment that would have flexible workspace and flexible work arrangements (e.g., alternative hours, working from home, and working from a distance). She began to describe an environment where serendipitous meetings were not only possible, but encouraged; an environment where one could find quiet space if one was having a bad day; an environment full of plants (life) and color. Another woman described an environment where everybody was allowed to bring their

“genius” to bear on issues, regardless of whether or not it was their “area of expertise.” She described a situation in which she had recently been involved where there was such trust in one another and such commitment to a good outcome that there was simply no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

The openness the women described was physical and emotional. Phrases such as “wouldn’t have to always feel the stress or the need to perform,” “less hands up saying stop, stop, stop,” and “walls come down” were all reflective of the physical and emotional openness they imagined.

Design Phase Question

Question four of the focus group protocol aligned with the Design phase of AI. In the Design phase participants are asked to create “possibility propositions of the ideal organization” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16). The focus group question was: What would need to happen in order for you to get more of these experiences? What would need to change in order for these kind of relationships to flourish?

Two themes emerged from the fourth question that asked participants to contemplate what would need to change in order for these kinds of relationships to flourish: (a) what I can do to encourage relationships, and (b) building trust within the organization.

What I Can Do to Encourage Relationships

The first theme was related to personal responsibility or “what I can do.” The concepts, evident in this theme, included: self-reflection, focusing on the positive, and being a mentor or good role model for others.

It’s a lot about personal resiliency. You might falter now and again in heading down the path, but if you can always bring yourself back to the

type of place that you imagine and the type of person you want to be, then go, OK, I've got to correct my path here and head that way. (C, 14)

You see what you are looking for. There needs to be a focus on the good things that people are doing. (B, 12)

You start mentoring how you want people to be responding and working, either through your actions or sitting down to have the conversation. (D, 14)

Being a good role model for others. Know what type of environment you want and building that – being the environment. (C, 14)

The women initially commented that it was necessary to be aligned with the leadership and strategic directions of the organization and have support “from above” in order to create the workplace they imagined. In some instances, the women quickly assumed the support would be put in place and moved, on their own, to what initiative they could take. Other times, however, I felt that women were getting stuck on what was required from the leadership of the organization and I had to ask what initiative they could take in order to create an environment where the best of the relationships they described could flourish. By the end of the discussion, the women acknowledged that one had to be the change one wanted to see. Thus, it seemed to come back to self. The women spoke of personal accountability for creating the workplace that they were finally able to imagine.

Personal accountability ranged from staying true to one’s own course, to focusing on the good in the organization, to being a mentor and role model for others. All of these actions were within the individual’s control and were completely independent of whether or not there was support from the top of the organization.

Other comments indicated an awareness of a ripple effect; if one is a good role model or mentor then others will want to be good role models and mentors.

Well I think it's exponential – if you're nice to one person and they're nice to two people, its so on and so on. (B, 10)

There was an expression of “paying it forward” that was used by some of the women. I interpreted this expression to mean using goodwill one creates today to build even more goodwill tomorrow. In response to what can I do, perhaps the best one can do is “pay it forward.”

Building Trust within the Organization

The second theme identified was “trust in the organization.” Trust was identified by the participants as one of the conditions of the relationship necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. Here trust was identified as a condition of the environment that would help create the imagined workplace. Trust within an organization was required in order for relationships that provide advice, support, and encouragement to flourish.

A lot of this boils down to trust and whether you have a trusting environment. (D, 15)

I think its about if you have a strong trust in an organization and a committed purpose, I think you can challenge openly, you can succeed together, you can fail together and that's the kind of environment I want to work in. (D, 15)

New things are being created just from people coming together and having trust in each other. (C, 11)

The first two comments cited above made specific reference to trust within the organization. Because organizations are made up of individuals, the underlying element of a trusting organization is interpersonal trust. The third quote cited above seemed to capture this nuance. Trust in an organization is built through building trust in relationships with one another.

Although the earlier discussion referred to trust in relationships and this conversation referred to trust in the environment, the fact that participants identified trust as important in both areas strikes me as significant. Trust in an organization is built individual by individual. Thus, even at an organizational level, the focus on interpersonal relationships with one another is important.

Summary of Chapter Four

I began this chapter with an introduction to the women who participated in the study and the nature of the relationships described by them. This introduction was followed by the analysis of the focus group questions. The focus group questions aligned with the Appreciative Inquiry approach outlined by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) and I used the AI phases of Discovery, Dream, and Design to organize the data analysis.

One of the outcomes of an Appreciative Inquiry process is “to make the positive core the common and explicit property of all” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 9). The final focus group question asked participants to brainstorm about the word or words, metaphors, or phrases that captured the relationships the group had been talking about. The way in which the women responded to this question provided a summary of the best of what had been and what was, which was a summary of the Discovery phase. The following words captured the positive core of the relationships that provided advice, support and guidance related to their career development and growth: integrity, learning, promise, trust, self-discovery, open, honesty, power, courage, free, life-changing, and necessary.

The Dream phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process contemplates the positive core in the imagining exercise. The Dream was manifested in “a vision of a better world,

a powerful purpose, or a compelling statement of strategic intent” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 28). The participants articulated a vision of a better world. As I reflected on the data, I thought of a new conceptualization of organizations described by Wheatley (2006). I observed some similarities in Wheatley’s descriptions and the descriptions of the participants. For example, both Wheatley and the participants acknowledged the power of positive, nurturing, and encouraging relationships. Wheatley stated that “[i]f power is the capacity generated by our relationships, then we need to be attending to the quality of those relationships. We would do well to ponder the realization that love is the most potent source of power” (p. 40). Both Wheatley and the participants acknowledged an environment that was freeing. Wheatley stated that “order and form are created not by complex controls, but by the presence of a few guiding formulas or principles repeating back on themselves through the exercise of individual freedom” (p. 13).

Once the Dream has been envisioned, the Design phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process articulated the principles that would draw upon the positive core. As I reflected on the data from question four of the focus group, I felt that there was one idea reflected in the voices of the participants that would draw upon the positive core. That idea was simply to be the change you want to see. The two themes I noted in the Design phase were both related to self.

In Chapter Five I will contemplate the Destiny phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process. I will also provide my summary, discussion of finding, the implications of the study, and my conclusion.

Chapter Five – Summary, Discussion, and Conclusion

Mentoring has suffered from a lack of definitional and conceptual clarity. This lack of clarity has hampered research efforts and rendered research on mentoring vulnerable to criticism. Lack of clarity has also made implementation of mentoring programs a challenge, because it is difficult to know who or what exactly is providing the benefit. In this chapter I review the purpose of the study, the research questions that guided it, the methodological orientation, and the study design. I then provide my response to the research questions, a discussion of findings, and practical and academic implications. I close the chapter with my conclusion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of mentoring amongst women in higher education administration from an appreciative perspective. To do so, I sought to understand the nature of mentoring relationships described to me by a purposefully-selected group of women. Through analysis of their descriptions, I identified themes and concepts; suggested what these themes and concepts revealed about how mentoring relationships are experienced; and, proposed practical implications for workplace mentoring.

The Research Questions

I was guided in this study by a simple desire to learn more about mentoring from the perspective of administrative women in higher education who have experienced mentoring relationships. Consistent with the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the nature of the experience of the mentoring relationship that is described by administrative women in higher education?
2. What do the women's descriptions of their mentoring experiences reveal about mentoring?
3. What might findings contribute to the understanding of mentoring including practical implications for future mentoring initiatives?

Methodological Orientation and Study Design

I conducted the study within a qualitative paradigm that “assumes that social reality is constructed by the participants in it” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 32). The methodology used in this study adapted elements and features from the grounded theory work of Corbin and Stauss (2008). While grounded theory was originally conceived as an approach to theory development, Corbin and Strauss have acknowledged that grounded theory is also appropriate for “researchers who are interested in thick and rich description, concept analysis, or simply pulling out themes” (p. xi). For the purpose of this study, I was interested in concept analysis. Corbin and Strauss indicated the generation of concepts is useful for increasing understanding and providing a language that can be used for discussion. They stated, “[t]he understandings can then be used to build a professional body of knowledge and enhance practice” (Corbin & Strauss, p. ix).

Data for this study was collected through focus group discussions. The focus group questions used to generate the data were designed according to the Appreciative Inquiry approach. I choose Appreciative Inquiry as the basis for the focus group questions for two reasons. First, Appreciative Inquiry aligned with my worldview, the choices I made about the paradigm in which this study was conducted, and the underlying

theoretical perspective. Second, Appreciative Inquiry reflected the natural way in which I approach my work and my life.

I audio recorded the focus group discussions and transcribed the recordings at the conclusion of the data collection phase of the study. The text generated from the transcriptions provided the data for the analysis phase of the study.

I was guided in the analysis of the data by the data analysis spiral depicted by Creswell (2007). The data analysis spiral illustrated the data analysis process in a qualitative study and the strategies I adapted from grounded methodology outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) fit well within this model. The data analysis phase was an iterative process that included: (a) data managing; (b) reading and memoing; (c) describing, classifying, and interpreting; and, (d) representing the data (Creswell).

Response to the Questions

This study was guided by three research questions. I summarize what I have learned over the course of this study in response to each of the three questions.

1. What is the nature of the experience of the mentoring relationship that is described by administrative women in higher education?

All of the women in this study described the nature of the relationships that had provided advice, support, and encouragement related to their career development and growth as nurturing, encouraging, supportive, and understanding. Several women acknowledged the respect they had for the people with whom they had the relationship. Comments from women throughout the focus group discussions also suggested that they held the individuals they identified in high esteem. I observed that the women appeared to enjoy the experience of talking about and reflecting upon these relationships.

Comments from the women suggested that they did in fact enjoy this experience. One woman commented that thinking about these relationships made her feel good. Another woman acknowledged how energized she felt after the focus group conversation. In a very few instances, women identified negative relationships, but did so with the recognition that the long-term outcomes of those relationships contributed in a positive way to their career development and growth.

One of the principles of Appreciate Inquiry is the positivist principle, which was described by Ncube and Wasburn (2006) as “the collaborative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (p. 78). I was asked if this approach might result in only half of a conversation or story being revealed. I have reflected on this question and believe that Appreciative Inquiry actually allows a more fulsome story to emerge. I suggest that taking a positive approach to the discussion created an environment of openness and safety, which ultimately allowed both positive and negative stories to be revealed. As well, I think that beginning with positive inquiry of mentoring relationships allowed stories of negative relationships to be reframed in a positive way. The data supports these reflections; not all the relationships identified by participants were positive, but the women were able to acknowledge the long-term outcomes of these relationships were positive.

Essentially, these relationships contributed to the women’s self-confidence. The relationships instilled confidence that translated into a belief in the women’s capacity to take risks. The women also indicated the relationships provided them with the courage to take risks. The women acknowledged risk-taking could lead to success or failure. Thus,

several women commented that the relationships that supported learning from failure were also important.

When the women were asked how they would describe the relationships we had been discussing to someone else, a few of the women described the relationships in the terms of a picture. One woman described the transformation of an ugly duckling into a swan. Another woman described the relationships as bungee cords.

These metaphors provided a summation of the nature of the relationships described by the women. In the first instance, the metaphor was obvious: the relationships helped the individuals grow and ultimately become more mature and perhaps even better than they were before. The image of the change from an ugly duckling to a swan is notable in that the change would be very noticeable. In the fable, the change also resulted in positive outcomes for the duckling. The women described similar experiences. The changes in the women were noticeable, at least to them, which was perhaps why the relationships were described as transformative or life-changing. The changes also appeared to result in positive outcomes for the women as life after the transformation was typically described as better. The second metaphor was also obvious: the bungee cord is what keeps individuals safe as they free fall from tall structures. The relationships were the bungee cords; knowing that they were safe allowed the individuals to take risks that they might not otherwise have taken. While a bungee cord provides physical safety, the women experienced emotional safety. In both instances, feeling safe was what allowed the individual to take the risk.

2. What do the women's descriptions of their mentoring experiences reveal about mentoring?

I had made a conscious decision not to use the phrase “mentoring relationship” with participants. Although I did not make any reference to the terms mentor, mentoring, mentorship or mentoring relationships, participants spoke of mentors and mentoring relationships in response to two questions. The first instance was at the very beginning of the discussion when they described relationships that had provided advice, support, and encouragement to their career development and growth. My first observation was that women who spoke specifically of mentoring relationships intuitively defined them in the traditional sense: a dyadic relationship with an individual within the organization who was older and wiser. However, as the analysis of the data proceeded, I noticed an intuitive understanding of peers as mentors, and recognition of informal relationships as mentoring relationships.

Most of the women described mentoring relationships that were dyadic. The mentoring relationships described were with an individual who was older and perceived as wiser or more skilled. As well, the person of whom they spoke was within the same organization. Thus, the mentoring relationships described by most women, who spoke specifically of mentoring relationships, appeared to meet the more traditional definition. However, only one woman in this study made reference to a formal mentoring relationship, and it had been through a program that was available to her as an undergraduate student in a school of business.

One individual explicitly stated that she had never experienced formal mentoring, but acknowledged that there had been a considerable mentoring along the way. I interpreted this comment as reflective of an intuitive understanding of informal mentoring relationships. There were two comments by women that I believe

demonstrated an intuitive understanding of peer mentoring. In one instance, a woman described a relationship with a colleague as a mutual mentoring relationship. In the second instance, a woman made reference to mentorship from colleagues in a professional association.

I found it interesting that not all of the relationships described by the women were construed as mentoring relationships. For example, not once did any of the women identify the familial relationships as mentoring. In fact, several women lamented the lack of a mentor and speculated on how things might have been different for them had they had a mentor. What I found interesting was all the relationships identified were in the same context, which was relationships that provided advice, support, and encouragement to their career development and growth. And yet, only a subset of all the relationships described in this context were referred to as mentoring.

What was obvious from the women's descriptions of their mentoring experiences was the belief that a mentoring relationship was important to career development and growth. Women who identified a mentoring relationship described it as transformational or life-changing. Alternatively, women who could not or did not identify a mentoring relationship believed things might have been quite different for them had they had this particular relationship. Of course, it is impossible to know whether or not things would have actually turned out differently if a mentor had been present, but the perception is that it would have. This is consistent with an observation made by Kram (1988) that "[t]he popular press has done a disservice by implying that the key to career success is finding a mentor. This is an oversimplification of a complex web of work relationships that could be made available to individuals in organizational settings." (p. 4). Twenty-

five years later, there is still a sense that a mentor relationship is an important relationship.

3. What might findings contribute to the understanding of mentoring including practical implications for future mentoring initiatives?

I indicated in Chapter Two that I would revisit the deductions that I made from the literature and from my life experience. The voices of my research partners (administrative women in higher education) have clarified and simplified my understanding of mentoring. What I have come to understand about mentoring relationships is that while mentors may be perceived as virtually non-existent, the reality is that mentoring relationships may be all around us. This was certainly the case for the women who participated in this study. In *The Odyssey*, Mentor was only one of the disguises Athena wore in order to provide advice and guidance to Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus. The myth may be interpreted to suggest that it takes more than one kind of person or relationship to provide the full range of support that an individual requires over the course of their career. In reality, the women identified numerous relationships that provided advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to their career development and growth. Thus, reality is more closely aligned with the myth than has been portrayed in the mentoring literature.

Understanding mentoring relationships as any number of relationships that provide advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to career development and growth has practical implications for future mentoring initiatives. The first implication is a programmatic response and the second is an academic response.

In terms of programming, I envision conversation and education that would shift the focus of mentoring away from a single, formal, dyadic relationship. Mentoring would be reconceptualized to include all relationships that provide advice, support and encouragement related to career development and growth. The wonderful thing about reconceptualizing mentoring relationships is that it can be done through conversations and education; it is practically possible to do reconceptualize mentoring relationships.

I envision programming to include education that would enable individuals to identify gaps and needs in the relationships that provide career development and growth. The program would also help individuals develop strategies for recognizing potential mentoring relationships that might fill identified gaps and needs. Finally, individuals could be encouraged to identify mentoring relationships based on attributes of the relationships as opposed to the structure. In my view, this is all about education and programming could be implemented in a variety of ways for a variety of audiences.

Individuals need to reconceptualize mentoring relationships as any number of relationships that contribute to their career development and growth. Furthermore, mentoring relationships need to be focused on the attributes of the relationship on which there is agreement in the mentoring literature. Individuals would be encouraged to identify and contemplate relationships that have provided advice, support, and encouragement to their career development and growth, and to identify what needs these relationships are meeting. Gaps would be identified and plans for recognizing potential mentoring relationships would be developed. As the most successful mentoring relationships are informal, the plan would focus on recognizing and taking advantage of potential mentoring relationships or possibly, repurposing existing relationships.

The academic response to future mentoring initiatives needs to begin with the women who participated in this study. I think it would be interesting to bring the women who participated in the focus group discussions together to debrief the research project and, together, decide what the group can do to facilitate a mentoring environment at the University of Saskatchewan. The women who participated in this study were engaged in the discussion and committed to “being the change” within the organization. In a way, this is letting the positive power of Appreciative Inquiry loose on the future.

Discussion of Findings

As I listened to the voices of the women, I reflected on the original work Kram published in 1985. In this section, I discuss my findings through comparing and contrasting them with the findings of Kram (1988). I use the AI phases and I discuss findings from the Discovery phase, the Dream phase, and the Design phase.

Discussion of Discovery Phase Findings

The voices of the women reflected the psychosocial functions and career functions described by Kram (1988). Kram identified mentoring functions as “those aspects of a developmental relationship that enhance both the individual’s growth and advancement” (p. 22). Agreement amongst scholars with the mentoring functions identified by Kram is evident in the mentoring literature, therefore it is interesting that the voices of the women reflected these functions. I suggest that acquisition of self-knowledge and acquisition of career knowledge enhanced the individual’s growth and development; however, it was not necessarily accomplished in the same ways Kram identified in her study.

Psychosocial Functions and Acquisition of Self-Knowledge

Kram (1988) defined psychosocial functions as “those aspects of the relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identify, and effectiveness in a professional role” (Kram, p. 22). Activities considered psychosocial functions included role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, p. 23).

The women in this study made numerous references to role models; however, most of the persons to whom role modeling was attributed were family. Kram (1988) stated that “[r]ole modeling succeeds because of the emotional attachment that is formed” (p. 34). The existence of an emotional attachment might help explain why the comments that related to role models were attributed to mothers or other female family members. While Kram identified role modeling as an activity within the broad category of psychosocial functions, other research identified role modeling as a separate function (Burke, 1984; Sosik & Lee, 2002). The fact that most of the persons to whom role modeling was attributed were family members lends support to the notion that role modeling is a separate function and, in fact, is one that may be more readily available outside of the workplace.

The women also made references to friends, or colleagues who became friends. I observed an interesting dichotomy with respect to friends or friendship. Some of the women voiced a desire to maintain some distinction between friendly relationships with colleagues at work and friendships with people outside of work. One woman observed that although it was not necessary to have one’s best friend at work, it was necessary to have a best friend at work. The activity of friendship described by Kram (1988) as “social interaction that results in mutual liking and understanding and enjoyable informal

exchanges about work and outside work experiences” (p. 38) is consistent with the notion of having a best friend at work.

The fact that the women spoke of friendships within and outside of the workplace and made a distinction between these two kinds of relationships would suggest that there is a difference between the two and that both are important. Listening to the women talk about best friends outside of the workplace, I believe there is an emotional attachment formed in these relationships that may be similar to the emotional attachment that is formed in successful role modeling relationships. Friendly relationships with colleagues did not appear to elicit the same emotional response that I observed when women spoke of best friends outside of the workplace.

Kram (1988) indicated through acceptance-and-confirmation, “both individuals derive a sense of self from the positive regard conveyed by the other” (Kram, p. 35). The counseling function “enables an individual to explore personal concerns that may interfere with a positive sense of self in the organization” (Kram, p. 36).

Comments by the women suggested that through recognition or acknowledgment of talents and abilities that they themselves did not recognize or acknowledge, they experienced acceptance-and-confirmation. Several women described relationships with a person who either provided recognition or acknowledgement of a skill or talent, or helped them to recognize or acknowledge it for themselves. The talent or ability that was recognized or acknowledged was typically something positive that the individual felt good about, so not only did they receive positive regard, but learning something new about themselves helped them derive a positive sense of self. I have been told that peoples’ most unique talents or abilities are so much a part of them that they are often

blind to them. I have also come to know that people often take their own talents and abilities for granted and do not value them. Women acknowledged that having others recognize and acknowledge their talents and abilities contributed to their self-worth, increased their confidence, and sparked personal reflection.

One aspect of acceptance-and-confirmation that Kram (1988) observed was reciprocity; that is that both individuals derived a sense of self. I did not get a sense of this reciprocity in my own study, but I attributed this to the fact that Kram interviewed both people in the mentoring relationship, whereas my study focused on only one side of the mentoring relationship.

The importance of being able to explore personal concerns that may interfere with self was evident in the appreciation women expressed for others who engaged in this exploration with them. In particular, the women spoke of being encouraged to explore opportunities, to decide for themselves what was right for them, and to take some risks. The discussion amongst the women suggested the importance of retaining control over their career, and over the decisions that they made in that regard. As well, the fact that the other person in the relationship was willing to relinquish control, so that they could explore and learn together, appeared to the women to be a powerful exhibition of trust in them.

One area that Kram (1988) did not identify within the broad range of psychosocial activities was being challenged or pushed. While Kram did acknowledge being given challenging assignment as a career function, what I heard described by women in this study was different. Kram stated that challenging assignments, “characterizes effective boss-subordinate relationships. It relates to the immediate work of the department” (p.

31). The comments women made about being challenged or pushed did not relate to success on a particular project or developing a specific skill. Rather, the women identified being challenged or pushed to grow, learn, and work outside their comfort zone as an important component of them becoming who they were as individuals. Thus, being challenged contributed to their career development and growth because it enhanced their knowledge of self.

I have observed an increased emphasis on the intrapersonal perspective in the recent leadership literature. For example, Hatala and Hatala (2005) stated that “[t]he first commandment of life and leadership is to ‘know thyself’”(p. 67). Women highlighted the importance of relationships that led to increased knowledge of themselves through reflection, being challenged, and acceptance of their choices. In my opinion, this emphasis on the intrapersonal is the fundamental difference between the study by Kram (1988) and this study. The psychosocial functions Kram identified were all about the individual in a professional role in the workplace. Acquisition of self-knowledge shifted to activities that were more focused on the individual in the world and not just the workplace. Career development and growth were facilitated through knowledge of self as a whole individual.

Career Functions and Acquisition of Career-Knowledge

Kram (1988) defined career functions as “those aspects of the relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in the organization” (Kram, p. 22). Activities considered career functions included sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments (Kram, p. 23).

Several women in this study described relationships with an individual who had helped them learn the ropes of their profession. The experiences described by the women aligned most closely with the activity of coaching that “enhances the junior person’s knowledge and understanding of how to navigate effectively in the corporate world” (Kram, 1988, p. 28). Women who had made the move from the private sector or from another public sector organization to the university identified relationships with people that helped them understand the importance of and the intricacies of collegial processes, as well as the delicate balance of cooperation and competition that existed amongst provincial post-secondary institutions. Because of the positive nature of the focus group questions, the women described success as a result of having these relationships as opposed to failures that resulted from a lack of them. The voices of the women reinforced the importance of these relationships for individuals who were new to the workforce or the organization.

Women in this study also acknowledged opportunities being made available specifically to them. These experiences were most closely aligned with sponsorship that “involves actively nominating an individual for desirable lateral moves and promotions” (Kram, 1988, p. 25). One woman mentioned a particular person who had provided a number of opportunities for her to move up within the organization. She recalled that he did not have to provide these opportunities for her and that he did not necessarily provide them to others. Another woman recalled the offers she received from a senior executive to work or be trained to work anywhere in the organization. She also recognized that these were opportunities not many people were given. As the women spoke of the opportunities that had been provided to them, there was almost a sense of wonder that

might be summed up as “why me?” Both women recognized that not everyone received these kinds of opportunities and I observed that they almost felt bad that they had been singled out for that kind of attention. If people believed that these kinds of relationships were all around them and could be developed, there would be no need for those individuals who receive the benefit of these relationships to feel bad.

The women also described relationships that seemed to align with the assignment of challenging work. Kram (1988) stated that “the assignment of challenging work, supported with technical training and ongoing performance feedback, enables the junior manager to develop specific competencies and to experience a sense of accomplishment in a professional role” (p. 31). One woman recalled a conversation with an individual about a recent promotion that was not going so well. The conversation reinforced that she had been given the opportunity because the other person believed she had the potential to develop the skills and the relationships. Another woman described a relationship that provided plenty of opportunities to develop and in which there was ongoing feedback. Through these relationships, the women recognized that it takes time to become proficient in a professional role, and that while they were not fully proficient they had the potential to be. In a way, the conversations with others gave them permission to acknowledge their shortcomings. Once acknowledged, the conversation could then focus on the support required to address the shortcomings and to become proficient.

Kram (1988) reported that sponsorship was the most frequently observed career function and that without it individuals would likely be overlooked for promotions (Kram, p. 25). I believe that this finding reflected the career context that existed at that time in which career attainment was important (Hall & Associates, 1996, p. 4). In

contrast, the relationships women in this study described as most powerful and most important in terms of acquisition of career knowledge were ones that acted as a catalyst for a change in their career path. This finding is consistent with the new career context described by Hall and Associates as protean. The protean career is “shaped more by the individual . . . and may be redirected from time to time to meet the needs of the person (Hall, 1976 as cited in Hall & Associates, p. 20). Although Hall identified this new career context in the late 1970s, due mainly to the economic bust in the 1980s, it was not until 1996 that there was a noticeable shift from the organizational career to the protean career (Hall & Associates, p. xi).

What was absent from the comments of the women was any reference to being protected from damaging contact with key people or being assigned responsibilities that would allow relationships with key figures in the organization to develop. Again, the absence of comments in this regard could be interpreted to reflect the shift in the career context where people are less interested in advancement, therefore less concerned about relationships with senior administrators, and more interested in careers that have meaning and produce value (Hall & Associates, p. 5).

The voices of the women reflected alignment with the psychosocial functions and career functions that Kram (1988) attributed to mentoring relationships, particularly in the acquisition of self-knowledge and the acquisition of career-knowledge. This alignment reinforces the observation by Higgins and Kram (2001) that “who provides such support and how such support is provided are now more in question” (p. 267).

The number of people identified by participants as having contributed to their career development and growth suggested to me that mentoring relationships are all

around us; they are plentiful. The question is why not all of these relationships are thought of as mentoring relationships. I think there are two reasons. The first reason is that individuals have bought into the myth of Mentor. Individuals continue to connect mentoring to Mentor, the wise and trusted advisor that Odysseus left to care for Telemachus. The act of providing advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to career development and growth became synonymous with the figure, Mentor; Mentor defined mentoring. Without a clear definition or conceptualization of mentoring, individuals may continue to define it in terms of the myth. The second reason is that mentoring scholars have not offered a viable alternative to the mythical relationship for individuals to consider.

I offer the following alternative: that mentoring relationships are not unique relationships, but that they are relationships defined by the attributes acknowledged in the mentoring literature and voiced by the women in this study. The question is not whether or not individuals have had a mentor, but rather, with whom they have had or could have a mentoring relationship.

In a review of research that has shaped how scholars view mentoring Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2007) identified five attributes from the literature that they claimed provided a common frame of reference and differentiated mentoring from other types of relationships. The five attributes Eby et al. identified in the literature were: (a) mentoring is a unique relationship defined and shaped by the individuals in the relationships; (b) mentoring is a learning relationship and involves gaining new knowledge or developing new skills; (c) mentoring is a process defined by the support provided; (d) mentoring

relationships are reciprocal, but benefits to mentor and protégé do not necessarily accrue equally; and, (e) mentoring relationships change over time (p. 10).

The voices of the women in this study provided confirmation for all of the attributes identified by Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2007). Thus, much of what we know about how mentoring is provided remains relevant, but the question of who provides mentoring is reconceptualized to include all of the people who have provided advice, support and encouragement related specifically to an individual's career development. The reconceptualization has certainly begun, but I believe as long as we continue to talk about mentors rather than mentoring relationships, individuals will continue the search for that one elusive relationship.

Discussion of Dream and Design Phase Findings

The findings of the Dream phase resulted in features that would create conditions that supported mentoring relationships in the workplace. The findings of the Design phase addressed what would need to happen in order to make the dream a reality. In order to present a fulsome discussion, I have combined the discussion of the findings of the Dream and Design phases.

Kram (1988) acknowledged that “[f]eatures of an organization can either create or interfere with conditions that support mentoring” (p. 160). I have summarized the five features acknowledged by Kram as follows: (a) what the reward system of the organization emphasizes; (b) whether work is accomplished through individuals in relative isolation or through various kinds of functional and cross-functional teams; (c) the existence of systems and tools that would facilitate performance feedback and career

development; (d) the culture of the organization; and, (e) lack of awareness of the value of mentoring relationships.

The findings identified in the Dream phase articulated the value of mentoring relationships. The women expressed a new appreciation for the importance of mentoring relationships to them and voiced their desire to continue to be engaged in relationships that nurtured them, and that provided encouragement, support, and understanding for them. However, the women quickly turned to considering other relationships in which they would be engaged in this particular workplace of the future. I observed, with interest, the parallel between “what I would get” and “what I would give.” Women voiced their desire to be engaged in relationships where they could nurture others, and provide encouragement, support, and understanding to others. Thus, there seemed to be recognition that “what you give is what you get.”

The voices of the women also described a particular culture that would be found in a workplace that was full of the relationships they described. Culture in this context is simply defined as “the way we do things around here.” The language used by the women to describe the workplace reflected openness in the physical space, in the personal interactions, and in the policies and procedures that guided the work. Wheatley (2006) stated, “order and form are not created by complex controls, but by the presence of a few guiding formulas or principles repeating back on themselves through the exercise of individual freedom” (p. 13). I suggest that a workplace that is governed by principles as opposed to policies and procedures is a workplace that would be described as freeing, which is a word that I heard often during the focus group discussions.

The findings of the Design phase reflected how to create a culture that would support mentoring relationships. There are many dimensions related to culture that will determine whether or not individuals will engage in mentoring relationships. Kram (1988) stated that one important dimension is the extent to which an organization values open, transparent communication and where trust for one another and those in authority is high (p. 164). The voices of the women reflected this dimension and they recognized that for relationships that provide advice, support, and encouragement to flourish required trust within the organization. The women also recognized that they had a role in creating the workplace they imaged through their own actions and attitudes. They had the power to choose how to be in the workplace: they could look for the good or the bad in the behaviour of others; they could engage in a mentoring relationship with someone or not; they could be a positive role model or a negative role model; and, they could facilitate building trust in the organization or not. The action and attitude of each individual could facilitate or inhibit the creation of an environment that supports mentoring relationships.

While the women recognized that they could create the workplace that they imagined through their own actions, there were also comments that acknowledged the importance of the leadership in the organization. One woman commented that if the leaders created environments where individual success was rewarded, it was likely to create a competitive environment where mentoring would not flourish. This comment is consistent with the findings of Kram (1988).

There was also acknowledgement that the university is a highly unionized environment and that there would be challenges in creating the kind of workplace they imagined within such an environment. Kram (1988) did not explicitly indicate whether

the setting for her study was a unionized environment. The setting was identified as a large public utility company; thus it is impossible to speculate one way or the other. The features that Kram identified could be affected by the presence or absence of a union or unions, and unions could inhibit or encourage mentoring relationships. The impact of a unionized environment could be a question for future research.

While there was a great deal of alignment with the work of Kram (1988), what I observed as new or different was the explicit acknowledgement that each individual contributes to creating the kind of organization in which they work. Without doubt, leadership of an organization is important, but there appeared to be a new-found sense of empowerment as the women recognized that they too could impact the culture of the organization.

Destiny Phase

The outcome of the data analysis and interpretation was captured in the Destiny phase. Destiny contemplates the whole system, “enabling it to build hope and sustain momentum for ongoing positive change and high performance” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16). In this section, I outline the implications that I believe will allow individuals and the organization to achieve the future imagined by the women in this study.

Academic Implications: Mentoring Initiatives

There are both practical and academic implications that affect future mentoring initiatives. The practical implications were discussed in response to the third research question. In this section, I focus on the academic implications for future mentoring initiatives.

If one accepts the premise that mentoring relationships permeate the workplace, and are not restricted to the dyadic relationships between a younger and an older more experienced adult, then this study must focus on helping individuals understand the attributes of mentoring relationships and on recognizing those attributes in existing relationships. I envision this understanding and recognition being accomplished through education. This thesis could easily be turned into a presentation on mentoring relationships that could be incorporated into various development programs. For example, I am currently involved in a project to create a development program for new Deans and Executive Directors. It might be possible to design a workshop that would recreate, to some extent, the conditions of the focus group discussions. The learning seems much more powerful when individuals are encouraged to challenge their thinking rather than simply being told what the new thinking might be.

To realize the destiny envisioned by the women in this study also requires “a convergence zone for people to empower one another – to connect, cooperate, and co-create” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 35). The women who participated in this study have provided the seed for that convergence zone. The women indicated, in the design phase, that to create a workplace full of positive and meaningful relationships that support career development and growth, must begin with each of them. I envision unleashing the potential of these women to initiate the change they want to see. The women in this study are poised to engage in mentoring relationships with others. I have promised to send them the outcomes of my research and see an opportunity to further engage them in how they might go about being that change. It is possible to develop a workshop, with these women that they could then present to a group of their colleagues.

The women recognized the power of the ripple effect and bringing them back together would be one way to start the ripple.

Academic Implications: Future Research

One of the ways I believed this study would contribute to mentoring research was by employing a methodological orientation and design not typically used in mentoring research. Thus, I chose focus groups as the data collection method and used Appreciative Inquiry as the basis of the focus group questions. I compared my methodological orientation and study design with the research methodology employed by Kram (1988). I noted a number of similarities in our approaches, but also noticed a difference that I believe went beyond the focus group versus individual interview choice and resulting question design. The fundamental difference was how the sample for the study was determined.

Kram (1988) stated that “[m]y program of research began with a study of relationships between junior and senior managers in one corporate setting” (p. 209). As I learned more about how Kram identified the pairs for her research, I began to wonder if she had delimited her study from the very beginning by employing a narrow definition of mentoring relationships. While the definitions employed by Kram were not explicit, the descriptions of the interview sequence with junior managers suggested this was likely the case. During the first interview, Kram indicated, “junior managers focused on relationships with senior colleagues who were currently supporting their development” (p. 217). Junior managers were then asked to identify “anyone among those you have mentioned today that you feel has taken a personal interest in you or your development”

(p. 217). Thus, the sample Kram built reflected dyadic, within-organization relationships, between a less experienced person and a more experienced person.

In my research methodology I also asked people to identify individuals, but the question was more general. I asked the individuals in the population of interest if they could think of a person or person(s) who had provided advice, support, and encouragement related specifically to their career development and growth. If they were able to, they were invited to participate in the study. While my question still focused on identifying relationships in a career context, the relationships that people were encouraged to think about were not restricted to senior colleagues within an organization. This broad question resulted in a greater range of people being identified.

Kram (1988) acknowledged in her first study that “[a]fter five interviews, it became clear that in some instances more than one senior manager was equally important to the individual’s development; this was the first indication that mentoring was not always embodied in one individual” (p. 217). Even within a narrow context, the myth of Mentor began to be called into question.

The limitations and delimitations I placed on this study also provide opportunities for future research. The delimitations related to sample, location, and relationships could all be explored with different groups, in different locations, from different perspectives. However, given the alignment of the findings from this study with the original findings of Kram (1988), I would now expect to find similar alignment with different groups, in different locations, and from different perspectives. The limitations related to orientation and process methodologies could also open the door to different research on this topic. A different orientation and process methodologies might result in quite different outcomes.

For example, I speculated on what this study might have looked like from a positivist worldview. I would suggest that the paradigm, the methodology, and the research questions would all be quite different, and thus the findings would be quite different.

Participants in this study were a purposefully-selected group of administrative women in higher education. This study could be repeated with a different sample, either another purposefully-selected sample (academic women, administrative men), or a random sample. As well, a single site was employed in this study and results might vary if the study was conducted in either another post-secondary institution, or if it was conducted in a private sector organization.

A number of the individuals who responded to my original e-mail invitation declined to participate because they had never had a mentor. Two questions were raised for me as a result of these comments. First, what automatically led them to believe that I was talking about mentoring relationships when that was intentionally not specified? Second, why would they automatically assume that they had not had a mentoring relationship? While this study has provided some insight into the second question, a follow up study with this group could provide more insight into mentoring relationships.

In terms of orientation and process methodologies, it would be interesting to incorporate quantitative methods into the paradigm. There are a number of scales that have been developed to measure mentoring functions. I could envision a study that used mentoring scales to measure mentoring functions of groups who had the benefit of the focus group discussion and groups who did not have the benefit of the focus group discussion. What difference might be observed, if any, based on how mentoring relationships are conceptualized?

Finally, given that trust was revealed as important in both the mentoring relationships themselves and in organizations that are conducive to these relationships, research on how people build that trust would be useful in program development.

Conclusion

My academic interest in mentoring was complemented by my intrigue in the myth that seemed to lie behind mentoring, Homer's *Odyssey*. I was puzzled that two important points about Mentor had gone largely unnoticed. The first point was that Mentor was actually Athena, a woman. The second point was that Mentor was only one of the personas that Athena took on in order to provide advice and guidance to Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachus. I suggested these points could be interpreted to suggest that features of both genders are necessary to mentoring and that it takes more than one kind of person or relationship to provide the full range of support an individual requires.

The myth continues to intrigue me and one of my hopes for this study was some reconciliation of the myth of Mentor with the reality of mentoring. I believe that this hope has been realized. I have reconciled the myth with the reality as follows: Athena was everything to everyone; she embodied many personas and she could do that because she was a goddess. We are human beings and it is a rare human being who could be as Athena was – everything to everyone. We must therefore look to many people to provide the advice, support, and encouragement that contribute to our career development and growth. Thus reality is aligned with the myth; it just needed a more fulsome interpretation. This reconciliation has left me feeling peaceful, excited, optimistic, and hopeful.

In terms of providing conceptual clarity, I believe that this study has actually honoured and extended the original work of Kram (1988) and other mentoring scholars to broaden the conceptualization of mentoring relationships to be more inclusive. I also believe that this conceptualize honours the voices of the women who participated in this study. Several women spoke of a journey. One comment, in particular, captured this notion. This participant remarked, “a career is a journey of learning and self-discovery”. What I now understand is that mentoring relationships are not embodied in a single person or relationship such as Mentor, but encompass all of the persons and relationships, like Athena, who journey with us in learning and self-discovery.

I have reflected on how this plays out for me personally. A year ago and a half ago, I wrote a paper where I lamented my lack of mentors and wondered how I could have been as successful as I had been without a mentor. I recall wondering why I had not been deemed worthy for one of these special relationships. I felt bad. Today, I feel fortunate that I have had the benefit of so many mentoring relationships. As I worked through the questions I asked the women who participated in this study, I reflected on how I might respond. Like the women, I realized that I have been and continue to be surrounded by mentoring relationships. Like the women, I also realized that each of the relationships contributed, in some way, to my career development and growth, and my success. I am worthy of these special relationships; we all are. I feel good.

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Application for Approval of Research Proposal

Submitted to *University of Saskatchewan, Behavioral Research Ethics Board*
January 15, 2010

1. Supervisor: Dr. Keith Walker
Department of Educational Administration & Johnson-Shoyama
Graduate School of Public Policy

1a. Student: Kelly McInnes, B.Sc., B.Ed., M.Ed. Candidate
Department of Educational Administration

1b. Anticipated start date: February 2010

Expected completion date: June 2010

2. Title of Research Project:

Understanding the mentoring relationships of women in higher education administration

3. Abstract:

The purpose of this research project is to understand how a particular population describes and defines mentoring relationships. In an early study of role models, mentors and sponsors Speizer (1981) concluded, “[t]he first step which researchers must take is to establish accepted definitions” (p. 712). Mentoring scholars have long acknowledged that one of the challenges that has plagued research related to mentorship is the lack of a definitive definition of the construct (Jacobi, 1991; Allen & Eby, 2007). The researcher’s review of the literature revealed only one attempt to address this definitional challenge. Friday, Friday, and Green (2004) offered universal definitions for mentor, mentoring and mentorship; however, what they proposed did not differ substantially from the mythical definition and there is no evidence that the definitions suggested by Friday, et al. (2004) have been accepted or taken up by current mentoring scholars.

The researcher is interested in contributing to the resolve of this definitional challenge through increasing understanding of the phenomenon of the mentoring relationship. To increase understanding will require a two-stage study with a purposefully selected sample. The first stage will focus on data collection through the use of focus groups. The second stage will be analysis of the data using strategies adapted from grounded theory methodology. Creswell (2007) stated “the intent of a grounded theory study is to move beyond description to generate or discover a theory” (pp. 62-63). However, Corbin and Strauss (2008) have acknowledged that grounded theory is also appropriate for “researchers who are interested in thick and rich description, concept analysis, or simply pulling out themes” (p. xi). For the purpose of this study, the researcher is interested in

concept analysis. Corbin and Strauss (2008) indicated the generation of concepts is useful for increasing understanding and providing a language that can be used for discussion. They go on to say, “[t]he understandings can then be used to build a professional body of knowledge and enhance practice” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. ix).

Analysis of the data will proceed using several strategies adapted from grounded theory methodology outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). One strategy that will be used in the analysis is the use of memos or “written records of analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 117). Another strategy that will be used is coding which is defined as “deriving and developing concepts from data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 65). Breaking data apart and identifying concepts that stand for the data is referred to as open coding whereas putting data back together through relating the concepts is referred to as axial coding (p. 198). Analysis of the data will continue until the researcher is satisfied that the analysis “feels right” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 64).

4. Funding:

This study is self-funded

5. Expertise:

Not applicable

6. Conflict of Interest:

The group of purposefully selected participants for this study includes four women who report directly to the researcher and one woman to whom the researcher reports. In order to eliminate any risk of coercion, the researcher will exclude these five women from participation in the research project. Given that the total sample includes approximately 100 individuals and the researcher anticipates a minimum of 30 participants, excluding these five women will not compromise the research project. This statement acknowledges assumption that the exclusion of these five women will not alter the results of the research project in any significant way.

It is possible that participants in this study will know and/or be known to one another. The researcher does not anticipate that this will present any problems, but participants will be reminded that they will not be identified in the transcripts and specific details, which might enable a reader to deduce the participants’ identities, will be made more generic. Participants will also be reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any sort.

7. Participants:

The participants for this research project are women who are employed within Human Resources and/or hold the title of Director or Associate Vice-President at one purposefully selected post-secondary institution.

The unit in which employees work and the titles of employees in the organization are accessible to the public via the institutional website and the institutional phone directory. The researcher will build the sample and obtain e-mail addresses through these two

public sources. There are two ways in which the researcher will be able to identify women in these positions. First, e-mail addresses include first and last names so the researcher will be able to identify many of the potential participants by first name. Second, many of the women in this sample will be known to the researcher so in the event that the first name is gender neutral or ambiguous it is expected the researcher will simply know the gender of the person in question. If there is any question about the gender of a potential participant, they will be excluded.

The researcher has chosen to delimit participants in this research project to women for two reasons. First, there is a great deal of mentoring literature that is specific to women and the value of the mentoring relationship to their career development and success (Scanlon, 1997; Ragins, Townsend & Matis, 1998; Gibson, 2004). However, Kram (1988) also identified a number of barriers women face in accessing and engaging in mentoring relationships. One of the issues the researcher is interested in understanding is whether or not the definitional challenge presents a barrier. The second reason for limiting participants to women is more practical in that it provides a homogeneous gender sample with which to work. Differences that may exist in how women and men describe and define mentoring relationships is beyond the scope of this research project.

The researcher has further delimited the group to those women who are employed within Human Resources and/or hold the title of Director or Associate Vice-President because these employees are out-of-scope of any bargaining unit. This is important because it provides a manageable group with which to work in terms of size and yet still encompasses a range of experience from those who are at the beginning of their careers to those who may be approaching the ends of their careers. As well, it reduces the bureaucratic complexity of the research project because the researcher will not have to seek approval from a bargaining unit to contact their members.

No further delimitations will be made on age or other individual characteristics.

To recruit participants for the focus groups an e-mail invitation (see Appendix A) will be sent to the entire sample identified above. The e-mail invitation will include a description of the study, the nature of the questions that will be asked, the duration of the focus group and how to express interest in participating. If there are more volunteers than can be accommodated the participants will be selected randomly from the list of volunteers.

Most, if not all, individuals who volunteer to participate in the focus groups will know and be known to the researcher. As indicated, those with direct reporting relationships will be excluded from the sample. As well, it is possible that the participants will know and/or be known to one another. It is expected professional relationships will be maintained following this research project.

7a. Recruitment material

The recruitment material will include:

E-mail Invitation to Participants (see Appendix A)

Consent Form for Participation in Research (see Appendix B)

Focus Group Protocol (see Appendix C)
E-mail to Participants following Focus Groups (see Appendix D)
Post-Focus Group Interview Consent Form (Appendix E)
Data/Transcript Release Form (see Appendix F)

8. Consent:

Consent forms will be used to seek consent from individuals to participate in the research project (see Appendices B and E). Participants are provided with a copy of the signed consent forms for their records. Consent forms will be kept separate from participant information and from the data collected.

The Consent Form for Participation in Research and Post-Focus Group Interview Consent Form each contain the following information as per the *Consent Form Guidelines and Template*:

- An outline of the purpose and procedures, potential benefits and risks of participating in this study, and where the data collected from the study will be stored and for how long
- Information related to the confidentiality, the volunteer nature of participation, and the right to withdraw
- An invitation to ask questions at any point in the study, a statement attesting to the researcher's willingness and readiness to address any concerns, and confirmation that the research project has received approval on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board
- A space for signatures of participants and the researcher

After data collection is complete, the Consent Forms will be kept in a secure place at the University of Saskatchewan, by Dr. Keith Walker, thesis supervisor, for five years and then appropriately destroyed.

The master list of participants will be destroyed, when no longer needed by researcher.

9. Methods/Procedures:

Primary data will be collected using focus groups. Up to eight focus groups consisting of between four and eight participants will be conducted at one purposefully selected post-secondary institution. Transcripts will be generated from digital audio recordings of the focus group discussions. Participants will not be identified in the transcripts and specific details, which might enable a reader to deduce the participants' identities, will be made more generic. Data will not be disaggregated to the level of the person, but will be kept at the level of the focus group. The transcripts will form the majority of the data for the study. [Data will not be disaggregated to the level of the person, but will be kept at the level of the focus group.]

Focus group questions will be formulated in advance and each focus group session will last approximately 75 minutes. At the beginning of each focus group the researcher will review participants rights as outlined within the Consent Form for Participation in Research (see Appendix B).

The focus group protocol and questions that will guide the focus groups are found in Appendix C (attached). The researcher will do informal pilot testing of the questions to ensure that they are appropriate.

Participants who wish to share information with the researcher apart from the focus groups will be invited to do so. Those who avail themselves of the opportunity to share information beyond the focus group may do so through a one-on-one interview with the researcher or in a written communication to the researcher. There is no protocol for follow-up interviews, as the information shared will be determined by the participants. Any one-on-one interviews will require completion of a separate but similar consent form (see Appendix E) at the time of the interview. Transcripts will be generated from digital audio recordings of one-on-one interviews. Participants will be afforded the right to clarify, add, alter, or remove any or all of the information from the transcript of the interview and will be required to sign Data/Transcript Release Forms (see Appendix F). Any written communication received by the researcher will be included in the final analysis. Participants who participate in a one-on-one interview or provide written comments will not be identified in any way. Any identifying information will be removed and the data will be combined with the focus group data.

Quotes collected from participants through any of the data collection methods outlined above will be used in the data analysis and reporting of results without identifying attribution.

10. Storage of Data:

During the research project, all data collected will be securely stored in the researcher's home. Digital audio recordings of the focus groups and one-on-one interviews will be kept in a locked drawer in the home office of the researcher. The researcher will personally transcribe the focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. Transcripts will be stored on the hard drive of a personal computer in the home of the researcher and backed up on a memory stick which will be kept with the digital audio recordings. During the period of the study, any identifying information, such as the Consent Forms, will be stored separately from the data collected. Identifying information, such as the Consent Forms, will be stored in the researcher's home. These will be stored in a separate file and kept in secure location other than the home office.

The master list of participants will be destroyed, when no longer needed by researcher.

Upon completion of the research project, all data collected will be transferred to Dr. Keith Walker. The data will be kept in a secure place at the University of Saskatchewan for five years and then appropriately destroyed.

11. Dissemination of Results:

Participants will be informed that the data collected and the results of the research project will be used primarily for researcher's masters thesis. They will also be informed that

data from the research project may be published in journal articles or other scholarly works and presented at conferences.

12. Risk, Benefits and Deception:

The research will be carried out in a spirit of mutual trust and respect. There are no foreseeable risks or harm to participants.

Participants will be informed of the purpose of the research and may withdraw at any time without penalty. While many, if not all, participants will know and be known to the researcher and, possibly, to one another, it is expected that professional relationships will be maintained following the research project.

Those individuals with whom the researcher has a reporting relationship will be excluded from the research project.

This research project does not involve participants who are considered vulnerable, captive or dependent.

Risks due to the limits in ability of the researcher to guarantee confidentiality in focus group settings is addressed in Section 13 (Confidentiality).

The researcher does not intend to ask questions that are personal, embarrassing or upsetting to participants. Participants will not embark on any perceived social risks and the research will not infringe on respondent's rights such as restricting access to employment or education.

Participants in this study may receive dinner or snacks in return for their participation in this research project, but will not receive any other remuneration.

Participants may expect to benefit from participating in this research project in three ways: first, they will experience first-hand what it is liked to be engaged in a qualitative research project; second, participants may become more aware and reflective of their own career development and growth; and third, given that the discussion will focus on positive mentoring relationships, participants may become more aware of the benefits of these relationships to their career development and growth and decide to proactively seek out more mentoring relationships.

While participants will be not be deceived in the course of this study, the researcher will not use the phrase "mentoring relationship" with participants. This is consistent with the approach Kram (1988) took in her research. Kram (1988) stated, "it became apparent that the word mentor had a variety of connotations, and that from a research point of view it would be best not to use it. This decision allowed the more general concept of developmental relationships to become the focus of inquiry" (p. 4). The researcher also wishes to make developmental relationships the focus of inquiry and is interested in the language participants use to describe and define these relationships. To this end, the

researcher will provide participants with a more general description of the relationships to be discussed in the focus groups.

13. Confidentiality:

The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Participants will be asked to respect the confidentiality of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group; however, participants will be made aware that others may not respect their confidentiality.

Data from the focus groups will not be disaggregated to the level of the person, but will be kept at the level of the focus group. Participants who participate in a one-on-one interview or provide written comments will not be identified in any way. Any identifying information will be removed and the data will be combined with the focus group data.

Any specific details captured through any of the data collection methods outlined above, which might enable a reader to deduce the participants' identities, will be made more generic.

Quotes collected from participants through any of the data collection methods outlined above will be used in the data analysis and reporting of results without identifying attribution.

14. Data/Transcript Release:

Participants who request a one-on-one interview will be afforded the right to clarify, add, alter, or remove any or all of the information from the transcript of the interview. Participants will receive a copy of the transcript within seven days of the interview. To acknowledge that the transcripts accurately reflect what was said in the interview and to authorize the release of the transcript to the researcher, the participants will sign a Data/Transcript Release Form (see Appendix F). To ensure confidentiality, Data/Transcript Release Forms will be stored separately from the digital audio recordings.

15. Debriefing and Feedback:

Through follow up correspondence that will be sent after each focus group (see Appendix D) participants will be invited to ask questions of the researcher and advised of opportunities to share information with the researcher beyond their participation in the focus group.

Participants will be informed when the thesis is complete and, upon request, the researcher will provide an electronic copy of the thesis to participants and/or procedures for accessing the document from the University of Saskatchewan library.

16. Required Signatures:

This proposal has been reviewed and is recommended for approval.

Dr. Keith Walker, Faculty Advisor

Date

Kelly McInnes, Student

Date

Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart, Department Head

Date

17. Required Contact Information

Dr. Keith Walker
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**UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN**

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Keith D. Walker

DEPARTMENT
Educational Administration

BEH#
10-18

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Kelly McInnes

SPONSOR
UNFUNDED

TITLE
Understanding the Mentoring Relationships of Women in Higher Education Administration

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE 25-Jan-2010	APPROVAL ON 26-Feb-2012	APPROVAL OF: Ethics Application Consent Protocol	EXPIRY DATE 25-Feb-2011
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Full Board Meeting

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review

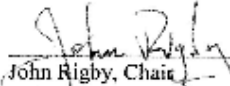
CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/researchethics_review/



John Rigby, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 5008 RPD University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 4A8

Appendix A: E-mail Invitation to Participants

SUBJECT LINE: Invitation from Kelly McInnes to Participate in an Important Research Project

Greetings,

This e-mail is being sent to invite your participation in a research project I am conducting in my graduate student role.

Can you think of a person or person(s) who have provided advice and guidance related specifically to your career development and growth? If so, I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group with others and share the experience of being in a developmental relationship with the person or person(s) who came to mind in response to this question. While I will invite you to speak candidly about your experience, I will ask that you not name nor identify in any way the person or person(s) with whom you have had this developmental relationship. There are many ways people have referred to these types of relationships and the language chosen can mean different things to different people.

The purpose of this research project is to better understand how women in the administration of higher education, who have been in such relationships, describe and define their experience. For the purpose of this research project, I have defined women in the administration of higher education as women who are employed within human resources and/or hold the title of Director or Associate Vice-President. There is a possibility that you will know and/or be known to other participants.

Should you agree to participate, your contribution to the research will be to take part in a focus group lasting approximately 90 minutes. The questions asked in the focus group will encourage you to recall and describe the relationship(s) that have contributed in the most positive and meaningful way to your career development and growth.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact me by e-mail at k.mcinnnes@sasktel.net. I respectfully request an indication of your interest no later than Tuesday, March 16th, together with your three most preferred and ranked times from those offered below:

- A. Thursday, March 18th: 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm
- B. Saturday, March 20th: 10:00 am – 11:30 am
- C. Saturday, March 20th: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm
- D. Monday, March 22nd: 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm
- E. Wednesday, March 24th: 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm
- F. Monday, March 29th: 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm

Light refreshments will be provided.

I will do my best to accommodate first preferences for particular dates and times. Participants will be randomly assigned to the groups based on availability and preference. Upon receiving your expression of interest, I will send a follow up e-mail confirming the focus group to which you have been assigned and providing you with the Consent Form for Participation in Research.

RESEARCH ETHICS

I will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Participants will be asked to respect the confidentiality of the group, but, of course, I cannot guarantee that they will do so. Data from the focus groups will be combined with no reference to individuals or particular focus groups. In other words, quotes collected from participants will be used in the data analysis and report of results without any attribution to or identification of participants.

Please be assured that your accepting or declining of this invitation to participate in this research project will not have any impact on our professional relationship.

This research project was approved by my research committee and by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on March 2nd, 2010. In the event that you have any concerns or you would like additional information, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Keith Walker (email: keith.walker@usask.ca or phone: 306-966-7623) or myself (email: k.mcinnnes@sasktel.net or phone: 306-374-5816).

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Sincerely,
Kelly McInnes

Appendix B: Consent Form for Participation in Research

You are invited to participate in a research project related to developmental relationships that focus on career development and growth. Please read this Consent Form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Supervisor: Dr. Keith Walker, Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan; email: keith.walker@usask.ca; phone: 966-7623

Researcher: Kelly McInnes, Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan; email: k.mcinnnes@sasktel.net; phone: 374-5816

As well, but unrelated to this study, I am also an administrative employee of the University.

Purpose and Procedure:

The purpose of this research project is to understand how women in higher education administration, who have been in a relationship(s) that has supported their career development and growth, describe and define their experience.

I have invited a purposefully-selected sample of women to participate in focus group discussions. For the purpose of this research project, I have defined women in higher education administration as women who are employed within Human Resources and/or hold the title of Director or Associate Vice-President. I will facilitate the focus group discussion and the questions I ask will encourage you to recall and describe the relationship(s) that have contributed in the most positive and meaningful way to your career development and growth. The groups will range in size from four to eight participants and the discussion will take approximately 75 minutes. The focus group discussions will be audio recorded and transcripts will be generated from the digital audio recordings. Participants will not be identified in the transcripts and specific details, which might enable a reader to deduce the participants' identities, will be made more generic. Data will not be disaggregated to the level of the person, but will be kept at the level of the focus group. The transcripts will constitute most of the data for the study.

Should you wish to comment on some aspect of the focus group's discussion or offer information that you felt was of a confidential nature, but may be meaningful to this research project, you can arrange for a one-on-one interview with me or provide written comments to me. Any one-on-one interviews will require completion of a similar, but separate Consent Form at the time of the interview. Transcripts will be generated from digital audio recordings of one-on-one interviews and you would be afforded the right to clarify, add, alter, or remove any or all of the information from the transcript of the interview. Any written communication received by the researcher will be included in the final analysis. Participants who participate in a one-on-one interview or provide written comments will not be identified in any way. Any identifying information will be removed and the data will be combined with the focus group data.

Anonymous quotes collected from participants through any of the data collection methods outlined above will be used in the data analysis and reporting of results without identifying attribution.

Potential Benefits: While benefits are not necessarily guaranteed, participants may expect to benefit from participating in this research project in three ways: first, you will experience first-hand what it is liked to be engaged in a qualitative research project; second, you may become more aware and reflective of your own career development and growth; and third, given that I will focus the discussion on positive developmental relationships, you may become more aware of the benefits of these relationships to your career development and growth and decide to proactively seek out more relationships of this nature.

Potential Risks: The research will be carried out in a spirit of mutual respect and trust. There are no foreseeable risks or harm to participants and there will be no deception. Direct quotations from the focus groups will be reported by without identifying attribution. While most, if not all, of the participants will know and be known to the researcher, relationships will be kept on researcher-participant level and it is expected that any professional relationships will be maintained following the research project.

Storage of Data: Throughout the focus groups, observation, and analysis period, I will keep all digital audio recordings, transcripts and reports in a safe and secure place. At the end of the study period, the data collected from you will be transferred to Dr. Keith Walker. The data will be kept in a secure place at the University of Saskatchewan for five years and then appropriately destroyed.

Confidentiality: I will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality. Any direct quotations used in the data analysis and reporting of results will be done so without identifying attribution. Any specific details captured through any of the data collection methods, which might enable a reader to deduce the participants' identities, will be made more generic.

The data collected and the results of the research project will be used primarily for researcher's masters thesis. As well, the data from the research project may also be published in journal articles or other scholarly works and presented at conferences.

Right to Withdrawal: Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may request that the recording device be turned off or withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researcher and/or the supervisor at the

email and phone numbers provided if questions or concerns arise. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on DATE. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084).

You will be informed when the thesis is complete and, upon request, the researcher will provide an electronic copy of the document and/or procedures for accessing the document from the University of Saskatchewan library.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I consent to participate in the research project describe above, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

Introductory Comments

1. Introduce myself and thank participants for accepting my invitation to participate in the research project.
2. Provide an overview of the purpose of the research.
3. Remind participants of the length of the focus group session and advise at what point snacks and/or dinner will be provided.
4. Assure participants that I will safeguard confidentiality of the discussion and request that they respect the confidentiality of the group by not disclosing the contents of the discussion.
5. Remind participants that they can withdraw at any time without any questions or negative consequences.
6. Go through the Consent Form and get all Forms signed and returned to me.
7. Encourage and answer any questions participants may have prior to beginning the focus group.

Focus group questions

Ice-breaker

Ask participants to introduce themselves and provide two pieces of information about themselves: how long they have been in the workforce and how long they have been employed by the current organization.

Discussion-starter

In the e-mail invitation, you were asked if you could think of a person or person(s) who have provided advice and guidance related specifically to your career development and growth? Take a moment to jot down the initials of one of the people who came to mind. Describe your relationship with this person.

Q2: You have identified a relationship that has contributed in a positive and meaningful way to your career development. In the form of story, an instance or a concrete example, tell me about this relationship. How did you feel? What made it a positive and meaningful developmental relationship? What would you describe as the most meaningful aspects of this relationship?

Q3: As you continue to reflect on this relationship, are there some aspects of the relationship that you wish you could experience more? What would that look like for you?

Q4: What would need to happen in order for you to get more of these experiences? What would need to change in order for these kinds of relationships to flourish?

Q5: We have spent the last hour talking about relationships that have contributed in a positive and meaningful way to your career development. As our final exercise, I would like to brainstorm, individually first and then collectively, about the word or words,

metaphors, or phrases that capture what we have been talking about. How would you describe to someone else the relationships we have been talking about for the last hour?

Closing Comments

1. Thank individuals for participating in the focus group.
2. Encourage and answer any questions participants may have.

Appendix D: E-mail to Participants following the Focus Group

Good afternoon NAME,

Thank you for participating in the focus group on DATE THEY PARTICIPATED. I hope that you found the experience rewarding.

Following the focus group, you may have had recalled information you wish you had shared or perhaps you experienced new insights that you wish to share now. This is to remind you that you may still contribute this information either through requesting a follow up one-on-one interview with me or providing written comments to me. Please feel free to do either.

Any one-on-one interviews will require completion of another Consent Form similar to but separate from the one you completed to participate in the focus group. This second Consent Form will be completed at the time of the interview. Transcripts will be generated from digital audio recordings of one-on-one interviews and you would be afforded the right to clarify, add, alter, or remove any or all of the information from the transcript of the interview. Any written communication received by the researcher will be included in the final analysis. Participants who participate in a one-on-one interview or provide written comments will not be identified in any way. Any identifying information will be removed and the data will be combined with the focus group data.

Quotes collected from participants through any of the data collection methods outlined above will be used in the data analysis and reporting of results without identifying attribution.

My contact information is as follows: e-mail: k.mcinnnes@sasktel.net or phone: 374-5816.

Thank you again for your participation in this research project.

Sincerely,
Kelly McInnes

Appendix E: Post-Focus Group Interview Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in an individual interview with me as a follow up to your participation in a recent focus group. Please read this Consent Form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you have.

Supervisor: Dr. Keith Walker, Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan; email: keith.walker@usask.ca; phone: 966-7623

Researcher: Kelly McInnes, Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan; email: k.mcinnnes@sasktel.net; phone: 374-5816

The purpose of this research project is to understand how women in higher education administration, who have been in a relationship(s) that has supported their career development and growth, describe and define their experience.

This interview is arranged at your request in response to an invitation to focus group participants to share information beyond the focus group through a one-on-one interview. Because this interview is a separate occasion of data collection, you must complete this similar but separate Consent Form.

The interview will be audio taped. You will determine the length of the interview and the specific topic. I will have no predetermined questions although I may have follow-up questions to your comments. Within seven days of our meeting, you will be asked to review the transcript of the interview. You may clarify, add, alter, or remove information from the transcript as you see fit. Any identifying information will be removed and the data from this interview will be combined with the focus group data. Quotes collected from you in the interview will be used in the data analysis and reporting of results without identifying attribution.

The data from this research project will be used primarily for my masters thesis. As well, the data from the research project may also be published in journal articles or other scholarly works and presented at conferences.

While benefits are not necessarily guaranteed, participants may expect to benefit from participating in this research project in three ways: first, you will experience first-hand what it is liked to be engaged in a qualitative research project; second, you may become more aware and reflective of your own career development and growth; and third, given that I will focus the discussion on positive developmental relationships, you may become more aware of the benefits of these relationships to your career development and growth and decide to proactively seek out more relationships of this nature.

The research will be carried out in a spirit of mutual respect and trust. There are no foreseeable risks or harm to participants and there will be no deception. Relationships will be kept on researcher-participant level and it is expected that any professional relationships will be maintained following the research project.

Throughout the data collection and analysis period, I will keep all digital audio recordings, transcripts and reports in a safe and secure place. At the end of the study period, the data collected from you will be transferred to Dr. Keith Walker. The data will be kept in a secure place at the University of Saskatchewan for five years and then appropriately destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort.

If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researcher and/or the supervisor at the email and phone numbers provided if questions or concerns arise. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on DATE. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084).

You will be informed when the thesis is complete and, upon request, the researcher will provide an electronic copy of the document and/or procedures for accessing the document from the University of Saskatchewan library.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I consent to participate in the research project describe above, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

*Understanding the Mentoring Relationships of Women in Higher Education
Administration*

Appendix F: Data/Transcript Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of the one-on-one interview in which I participated, and have been provided with the opportunity to clarify, add, alter, and delete information from the transcript. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in the interview facilitated by Kelly McInnes. I hereby authorize the release of the transcript to Kelly McInnes to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher