An exploration of executive women's experiences of coaching and mentoring: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study

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Abstract

The slow pace of women's advancement to senior levels in organisations is an ongoing topical debate. Resolving this issue through appropriate developmental support interventions is the subject of much discussion. An understanding of the use of coaching and mentoring to address this individual, organisational and societal problem is, however, under-researched in a UK context, and more widely.

In the coaching and mentoring literature there is limited research concerning the voice of the coachee/mentee and even less research relating to executive women. This study sought to address this deficiency and explore the experiences of executive women who have been coached and mentored, in order to gain an understanding of the role of these interventions and how they assisted the women's development. Qualitative research was conducted using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology and involved semi-structured interviews with twelve executive women, all of whom worked at senior levels in UK organisations. The data were subsequently analysed using Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) interpretive framework.

The findings highlight the positive impact of coaching and mentoring on the careers of the executive women in this study. Mentoring provided early career and psychosocial support, while coaching provided later support and challenge that encouraged the development of skills, authenticity and identity; aided coping with and adapting to the work environment; and in some cases assisted with broader life decisions. The participants' subsequent commitment to coach and mentor others was a further outcome of this research. This study contributes not only to understanding the context of a coaching assignment involving executive women, the 'experience' of coaching and mentoring, and the importance of the coaching relationship, but also to the application of such learning to assist others. The implications of this research expand knowledge and provide new insights to add to the limited literature on coaching and mentoring executive women in the UK.

Keywords: coaching, mentoring, executive women

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Chapter 1 **Introduction**

1.1 Research Context

A number of recent reports have highlighted that despite forty years of workplace equality legislation and national policy initiatives, neither the level of gender imbalance within United Kingdom (UK) organisations nor our inability to address this imbalance have been resolved (Davies, 2011):

> At the current rate of change it will take over 70 years to achieve gender-balanced boardrooms in the UK. [FTSE 100 Boards in 2011: 87.5 per cent men, 12.5 per cent women.] We know that organisations invest heavily in identifying and training talented staff but that this investment does not always yield results (Davies, 2011).

The percentage of UK women aged 16–64 in work is currently 67 per cent (compared to 76 per cent of men), while they hold only 35 per cent of manager and other senior positions (ONS, 2013). Studies on the barriers that women face in advancing their careers and attaining the upper ranks of their organisations highlight the low proportion of female representation in these senior positions (Tyson, 2003; CIPD, 2004; BITC, 2005, 2010; IES, 2009; Vinnicombe and Sealy, 2012; McKinsey & Co, 2012). Common explanations for this include a lack of opportunity, barriers to entry and development needs.

To understand the issues behind this lack of advancement, the UK Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) conducted a survey in 2011 of three thousand of its members, which focused on ambition and gender at work. The survey found that most women who aspired to reach senior management positions believed that barriers to career progression still existed. The research also reviewed the career aspirations of men and women and found that only half of women said they expected to reach

managerial level compared to two thirds of men (ILM, 2011). One of the perceived barriers to women's advancement in the workplace is the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon, a metaphor for barriers that women face as they attempt to attain senior levels in organisations. The glass ceiling will be discussed later in this chapter and examined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The argument for the advocation of more women in senior positions is a powerful one. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (2010a) identified six key reasons for promoting diversity at senior levels: good governance, diverse selection pools, innovation, reflection of a firm's customer base, positive corporate image and avoidance of the threat of potential regulation. Within a wider societal context, an ageing population and skills shortages highlight that the failure to attract, retain and develop women is an issue that is growing in importance. There is also an increasing impetus and interest following the 2007–2008 economic crisis to operate differently. A growing focus on corporate governance, social responsibility and diversity necessitates that organisations review their impact on society as well as on employees (BITC, 2010).

The UK has so far resisted the imposition of mandatory quotas of female representation in senior roles from Europe, indicating a preference to focus on development options to achieve this desired increase (CIPD, 2012). How the UK proposes to do this, however, is less clear. Recommendations for addressing issues of development and career progression for women vary according to whether they are focused on governmental, organisational or individual interventions (EHRC, 2011). For example, the government is urged to encourage employers to support and facilitate policy and cultural change within their organisations in order to create

opportunities for developing individual female managers. Such interventions include: tackling the gender pay gap, allowing flexible working, having greater transparency about female representation at different management levels and encouraging a strong 'talent pipeline' (CMI, 2013). Another strategy is to focus directly on increasing the number of women at board level, by advancing women into senior positions through improvements in leadership development (Davies, 2011). The presence of senior female role models could then raise the aspirations of younger women and encourage their entry and progress within the job market.

Although organisations address gender inequality in different ways, some progress is being made. The expansion of higher education opportunities has, for instance, contributed to increasing numbers of female undergraduate students (Leathwood and Read, 2009; Morley, 2011). However, these increased rates of higher education participation by women have yet to be translated into proportional representation in the labour market and into access to leadership and decision-making positions. Growing numbers of women reach middle management positions but proportionally fewer make it to the next level (Billing, 2011). Such progress is mainly found in the public sector, while change in private sector organisations is slow in the making.

It is clear that gender imbalance is symptomatic of society and the organisations in which we work. This raises questions as to what kind of barriers women experience and what needs to be done to enhance opportunities and development for women in organisations. It is therefore important to explore the individual insights of female senior leaders, and to

have a better understanding of the career challenges women face and the development support they receive.

The question of women's representation at senior levels seems to have gained momentum more recently with growing media coverage and the launch of several industry networks, special interest groups and organisations such as Everywoman, Aspire and the 30% Club. These initiatives provide sponsorship and advice networks for women in businesses and highlight the growing activity around gender diversity at board level. In November 2013, Opportunity Now, a gender equality organisation, launched a campaign called Project 28–40. The aim was to ask one hundred thousand women between the ages of 28 and 40 about their views on inequality in the workplace, in order to effect change for future generations. The results, based on twenty-five thousand people completing a questionnaire and ten subsequent focus groups, were published in April 2014. The key findings and headline recommendations focus on the need for organisations and senior leaders to move away from creating diversity initiatives, and to instead establish gender diversity as a core business imperative and prioritise the development of female managers.

While individuals are also being urged by UK policymakers to take responsibility for their own careers and professional advancement (EHRC, 2011), research on the use of development to achieve this aim reveals that men and women reported different types of interventions as being most effective. Men, for example, viewed networks and short courses as being more useful to them than women did (CMI, 2013). The most effective development routes identified by both men and women included

qualifications from business schools and professional bodies. Interestingly, women mentioned coaching by line managers or external practitioners as one of the most effective types of development (CMI, 2013).

The Davies (2011) report recommends the use of coaching and mentoring as being among effective development strategies for increasing the number of women at board level. There is also abundant recent research on leadership and increasingly more on female leaders, but the role that coaching and mentoring plays has not been widely researched in relation to women (Leimon, Moscovici and Goodier, 2011; Broughton and Miller, 2009; Worth, 2012). The organisational and situational context of coaching and mentoring for women is similarly lacking in the research studies available. This highlights questions concerning whether coaching and mentoring interventions are, or could be, supportive for the further career development of senior women, and whether women's experiences of coaching and mentoring are positive and valued by them. Additionally the barriers to promotion to senior positions that women may have experienced, what this means for them and what forms of developmental support the women may have received in their career advancement are also important to understand. These are some of the questions that guide this doctorate research.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of the research is to explore the experiences of executive women who have been coached and mentored, in order to gain insights into the role of coaching and mentoring as developmental and support interventions in their career progression.

In order to complete the study four objectives have been established. Firstly, to critically review the literature on the relevant concepts and theories, including gender, the glass ceiling, leadership development for women, and executive coaching and mentoring. Secondly, to explore the coaching and mentoring experiences of female executives working in a range of sectors within UK organisations. Thirdly, to critically analyse and compare these experiences against relevant theoretical approaches; this will determine which of the generated themes and insights will have a potential impact on executive coaching and mentoring theory and practice. Finally, to use the themes and insights from the research to inform current methods of interventions used by organisations, professionals and individuals to enhance women's career development and progression.

By choosing a qualitative research approach I intend to give voice to the female participants. At the same time this implies that it is the perspective of the coachee that is presented, as this is still a neglected perspective in coaching and mentoring to date (Leimon *et al*., 2011; Skinner, 2012; Worth, 2012).

Although I conceived the research with a focus on executive coaching only, through reflexive thought I considered that the research participants might use both the terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' interchangeably and indeed would have different understandings of the terms than I have. As a coaching practitioner I recognise a distinction between the two methods, reflected by the Oxford Brookes International Centre for Coaching and Leadership's statement: 'The main distinction between the two terms is that coaching does not rely necessarily on the specific experience and

knowledge of the coach being greater than that of the client. We believe that mentoring is enhanced by the use of coaching methods, but that it also allows knowledge and experience to be conveyed to the client' (www.brookes.ac.uk, 2014). As it was initially unclear whether the participants might understand and employ these terms in different ways I begin by using the composite term 'coaching and mentoring' in this thesis. The support interventions are then explored separately in the empirical chapter, and the discussion chapters examine the participants' experiences and meaning.

1.3 Literature and Definitions

When designing the literature review to support this study I selected literature on the relevant theories, concepts and research that informed the experience of executive women being coached and mentored, as well as the contextual dimensions that might shed light on why women experience problems with moving higher up in their careers. I identified and critiqued relevant literature on gender theory, women's leadership development and executive coaching and mentoring for women. The review of gender theory enabled an exploration of related phenomena such as gendered organisations and the glass ceiling. The theme of women's leadership development was selected, as coaching and mentoring are usually introduced at senior levels as part of a leadership development intervention. The executive coaching and mentoring literature was reviewed to assess the latest thinking and research on women's experiences of these interventions.

A review of the gender theory field and the glass ceiling phenomenon

highlights the complexity of the issues involved with women's progression and development (Acker 1990; Chodorow, 1999; Smith, 1987; Butler, 1999; Collins, 1999; Connell, 2006). Glass ceilings, described by Davies-Netzley (1998) as 'invisible barriers' (glass) through which women can see elite positions but cannot reach them (ceiling), are identified with women's lack of advancement to senior levels in organisations. Theoretical explanations of the persistence of these barriers, how women's executive development can overcome them, and how the barriers have evolved over the past thirty years have been widely addressed (Burke, 1997; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000; Ridgeway, 2001; Goodman, Fields and Blum, 2003; Weyer, 2007; Terjeson, Sealy and Singh, 2009; Vinnicombe and Sealy, 2012; Adams and Funk, 2012). There is, however, very little research specifically on how coaching could support the development of executive women and address the glass ceiling barriers (Broughton and Miller, 2009).

Reviewing the literature with a specific focus on female leaders highlights a number of different stances on how to address executive women's development. These include focusing on leadership style or the career challenges women face, or examining various methods of support that can help women progress through the ranks (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2001; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003; Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli and Bilimoria, 2008; Valerio, 2009; Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011). Leadership development is described by Day (2001, p. 586) as 'combining what is considered the traditional individualistic approach to leader development with a more shared and relational approach'. Recommendations on the types of development that support female executives' career advancement

vary from women-only leadership programmes to more generic leadership development interventions, including accredited professional learning and qualifications, projects and assignments and coaching and mentoring. There is, therefore, much debate in this area but limited literature on what the recipients of these development programmes believe is of value to them. The evolution of leadership theory and in particular the emergence of relational leadership theory, where the process of social influence is highlighted to emphasise the importance of coordination and change among leaders (Binney, Wilke and Williams, 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Cunliffe and Erikson, 2011), is discussed further in Chapter 2.

Mentoring as a form of leadership development support, defined as a 'dyadic, face-to-face, long-term relationship between a supervisory adult and a novice student that fosters the mentee's professional, academic, or personal development' (Donaldson, Ensher and Grant-Vallone, 2000, p. 235), appears more established as a recommended intervention to support women's development. A review of women and mentoring research highlights how ideas have significantly progressed beyond questions of access to mentoring and development opportunities for women, which were prevalent in the 1970s, and are now focused on gaining a better understanding of power, cross-gender relationships and career progression (Ehrich, 2008).

A review of the executive coaching literature highlights that there is limited research on the effectiveness and use of executive coaching (Filipczak, 1998; Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck, 1999; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Executive coaching concerns 'an experiential and individual leadership development

process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short and long-term organisational goals' (Stern, 2004, p. 154). There is also relatively little research on coaching women, specifically from a coachee's perspective (Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al*., 2011). Where other research has taken place, this has not been from a UK perspective (Benavides, 2008; Galuk, 2009; Skinner, 2012) or has surveyed UK coaches (Sheppard, 2009). There is therefore limited research on coaching executive women, especially from a UK and female coachee perspective. Where gender is acknowledged within coaching literature it is usually as a separate chapter dealing with diversity and cultural issues for the benefit of the coach's professional development, as opposed to concentrating on the female coachee's perspective with regards to the effectiveness of coaching in supporting her own development (Peltier, 2001; Brunning, 2006; Ting and Sisco, 2006; Passmore, 2009).

Having reviewed these areas of the literature it can be argued that a gap exists in research specific to the experiences of women who have been coached and mentored. The unique contribution this research makes, therefore, is to understand from the women's perspective the specific challenges they face, whether they value coaching and mentoring and what aspects help or hinder their professional development and progression. This research intends to consider issues arising for participants at an individual level, beginning with their personal accounts, but using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore and uncover the essence of their experiences and the meaning these have for each participant's 'life-world' (Smith *et al*., 2009). The relevance of this study to coaching and mentoring literature and practice relates to expanding

knowledge of the female executive's experience and gaining an understanding of the situational and cultural context in which the coaching and mentoring is experienced.

1.4 Personal and Professional Interest

My fascination for this research comes from my professional and personal experience, and is captured by Gadamer when he states 'a question presses itself on us, we can no longer avoid it' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 363). As a human resources (HR) and coaching professional with twenty-five years' experience of diversity issues, leadership development interventions and coaching procurement and practice, I am well aware of the societal, organisational and individual issues concerning women's difficult advancement to the top. There are two key aspects that resonate with my personal experience.

Firstly, the broader social issue sparked my curiosity and interest in learning more about the impact of executive coaching and mentoring on women's career development. Gender is part of our identity, our relationships and our social interaction. It pervades the culture and the systems of the organisations we work in. It's important and it matters. Hence, my research interest relates closely to my personal identity and my professional identity as an HR and coaching consultant. I have also witnessed the expansion of executive coaching as a profession over the last ten years and I have noticed how coaching has moved away from a remedial intervention to a performance-enhancing one. Coaching research on the effectiveness and use of executive coaching, and how to improve its practice is, however, only just emerging. Ongoing research in these fields appears to be more centred on how coaching differs from other practices

such as therapeutic counselling, and on substantiating coaching as a profession in its own right. The focus and research on exploring and understanding coaching as a developmental intervention is growing but I believe that more can be done to inform practice. During my career I have become increasingly interested in people's personal experience of coaching and development. I have also witnessed the potential of coaching to support people through change and transition.

Secondly, as a woman working in a predominantly male environment I have also experienced the personal and developmental support that coaching can give. I have used coaching at different stages in my career and for different reasons, to support transitions, promotions, expanded roles and my fit within an organisational culture. My assumptions of coaching and mentoring, based on prior experiences, are that these interventions would generally be regarded as positive. I recognise that this is my personal assumption and that my experiences varied depending on the coach, my own readiness, and my understanding and expectations of coaching. My more positive experiences of coaching occurred when I was aware of what coaching involved and the type of coach I chose, and I had a clear understanding of what I wanted to achieve from the sessions, with a coach that would challenge and support me in my quest. The research focus, therefore, piques a personal and professional interest and fills a gap in the extant literature for coaching and mentoring research.

1.5 Research Design and Methodology

My philosophical assumptions are interpretivist, where meanings, context and researcher interpretation are key (Fitzgerald and Howcroft, 1998). The research problem is exploratory and focuses on the individual experiences

of the female coachees and their understanding of coaching and mentoring. Therefore, the methodological design of my study is phenomenological and idiographic and the research methodology is IPA (Smith, 1994). IPA enables me, from an epistemological perspective, to understand through interpretation the experiences of the participants. It requires personal reflexivity and aligns with my ontology. The use of IPA also potentially enables a more in-depth experiential exploration of the role of coaching and mentoring in the participants' career progress.

This qualitative research study involves a purposive group of twelve executive women who have been coached and mentored and have reached senior or board level within UK organisations. The use of IPA and the subsequent interpretive analysis is aimed at understanding the women's experience of coaching and mentoring. To assist the interpretive aspect of the methodology, the 'self-reference' of reflexivity (Steier, 1991) was used to inform the research process. Consequently, I have shared my research process decisions, methods, values and assumptions throughout this study.

The exemplary method for data collection within IPA is in-depth, semi-structured interviews, intended to capture the 'detailed stories, thoughts and feelings from the participant' (Smith *et al*., 2009, p. 67). This method facilitates the development of rapport and allows participants to share their experiences via personal interaction. In accordance with IPA guidance the participant group was small and homogeneous, representing a perspective rather than a broader populace (Smith *et al*., 2009). The participants were chosen via a purposive, snowballing approach of referral via executive

coaching contacts. Following the data collection, the subsequent data analysis, in line with IPA, involved a detailed review of the transcripts. From these a set of themes was developed, followed by a framework or table and ultimately a hierarchy of themes presented in a narrative writing style based on substantial verbatim excerpts from the data (Smith *et al*., 2009).

The analysis is focused on illustrating the importance of the participants' input and their experiences of the phenomena, while acknowledging through reflexivity my own interpretation of the research. The data are subsequently analysed and compared with relevant theoretical approaches to determine which of the generated themes and insights have a potential impact on executive coaching and mentoring theory and practice. The research output aims to identify themes that will inform aspiring female executives of the contribution of executive coaching and mentoring, and will hopefully be able to provide coaching and mentoring practitioners and researchers with insights to assist the development of executive coaching and mentoring interventions and theory. The themes and insights from the research will also inform the limited literature on coaching as a development intervention for female executives (Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al*., 2011).

1.6 Thesis Overview

This introductory chapter has established the context and aim of the research and my personal and professional interest in this study. It has also introduced the literature and research methodology. Chapter 2 discusses and offers a critical evaluative review of the literature on gender, leadership development for women, and executive coaching and mentoring. Research specific to these themes is then compared and contrasted to enable a

greater understanding of the issues and potential gaps in knowledge. Chapter 3 examines the methodology and provides an explanation of my research philosophy and ontological and epistemological position. The reasons for my choice of an IPA methodology and the implications of this for my research are discussed in detail. An overview of the research methods is also given to enable an understanding of how the research was conducted.

Chapters 4 to 6 present the data analysis and findings. Chapter 4 begins by illustrating the career challenges of the participants and how they make meaning relative to their situational contexts. This also assists the understanding of later themes and discussions. The chapter moves on to discuss the coping strategies associated with the women's situational context. Chapter 5 explores themes around the women's early career journey and their mentoring and developmental support experiences. Chapter 6 examines the participants' later career journey and their coaching beliefs and experiences. These findings enable a more detailed analysis and explanation of how my interpretations of the data either support or contrast with the findings of the literature, particularly in terms of the original research problem. Chapter 7 revisits the aims of the research, summarises and concludes the findings and discusses the implications for future research.

This chapter has introduced the research topic and outlined the structure of the thesis. The following chapter will identify the gaps in the extant literature and clarify in more detail why this research is important.

Chapter 2 **Literature Review**

The previous chapter highlighted the issues associated with addressing the low rates of female representation at senior levels in organisations. This chapter expands on these issues and discusses key concepts and theoretical debates concerning gender, women's leadership development and executive coaching and mentoring for women. The chapter begins by discussing the debates around barriers to women's progression (2.1), and introducing gender theory and the glass ceiling phenomenon. Women's leadership development (2.2) is subsequently explored as a means of addressing these barriers and gender imbalance. This includes a discussion on relevant developmental theories and in particular social cognitive theory. The final section analyses executive coaching and mentoring research (2.3) to understand the support that coaching and mentoring has offered to women in their advancement to senior levels.

2.1   **Barriers to Women's Progression**

2.1.1 **Gender Theory**

Since the 1970s, gender theorists have drawn on a variety of theoretical viewpoints and disciplines such as sociology, psychoanalysis and philosophy to examine gender and to develop gender theory (Chodorow, 1999; Smith, 1987; Butler, 1999; Collins, 1999; Connell, 2006). The more pertinent aspects of the theory relating to work and organisations will be analysed, and research on the causes of the glass ceiling and potential solutions will also be discussed.

Within organisations Acker's (1990) influential research on gender discrimination in the workplace led to an increasing research focus on gender theory and gendered organisations. Her research, updating previous work by Kanter (1977), challenged the assumption that organisations were gender neutral and not shaped by gender inequalities or unconscious biases. Kanter's (1977) concept of gender neutrality reflected the fact that early organisational theories ignored gender as a factor worth analysing (Zimmer, 1988). Kanter proposed that 'while organisations were being defined as sex-neutral machines, masculine principles were dominating their authority structures' (Kanter, 1977, p. 46). Similarly, Acker posited that organisations were gendered and subject to subtle and pervading inequalities that disadvantaged women in their roles and progression. However, as part of this exploration it is important to acknowledge the contextual shift away from the predominant view of the white middle-class male, which was seen as a pervading and dominant feature of the worldview of such gender theorists.

Gender theory has continually evolved since Acker's time, and the way it 'organizes our identity, structures our interactions and organizes institutions and rules' is now more widely discussed (Wharton, 2012, p. 19). The gender inequality debates, mentioned above and within Chapter 1, have also developed and now include concepts such as second-generation gender bias (Trefault, Merill-Sands, Kolb and Carter, 2011). This is synonymous with a complex set of subtle and often unconscious forms of human intervention that impact on women's advancement to senior levels (Carter, 2011; Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013).

Wharton (2012) develops Acker's work and takes a sociological perspective to identify three frameworks for understanding gender: firstly, the individualist approach views gender as part of the person; secondly, the interactional approach views gender as focusing less on individuals and more on the social context within which individuals interact; and thirdly, the institutional approach 'relate[s] gender to large-scale patterns, such as welfare states' (Wharton, 2012, p. 17). Wharton (2012) further argues that gender is embedded in the informal relations of the workplace, and because of this women are excluded from the formal exercise of authority and decision-making on the job, reinforcing the barriers that impact on their progression.

The concept of the gendered organisation as opposed to the gender-neutral organisation, is an important development within gender theory and broader organisational and developmental research (Ibarra *et al*., 2013). Different positions exist on how gender and power relationships are regarded within organisations (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). From a feminist perspective, organisations use gender as a 'basic pillar of organising' rather than having a gender-neutral approach (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004, p. xiv). This strongly contrasts with research that suggests organisations are 'gender neutral'.

While debates on gendered and gender-neutral organisations continue, there has recently been less discussion around the gender binary and more around the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Calas and Smircich, 2006; Corlett and Mavin, 2014). This concept highlights the complex interrelationship of many forms of identity such as race, sexuality, age and class, and the impact this has on forms of discrimination.

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Benschop and Doorewaard (2012) revisited their original work (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998) to examine whether the gender subtext from Acker's original research had changed. Their review of the gender literature embraces intersectionality, layered processes and power, and they conclude that: 'Layered gender processes as the interplay between structural, cultural, interaction and identity processes in organisations are still relevant' (Benschop and Doorewaard, 2012, p. 233). Benschop and Doorewaard highlight the interrelationship and complexity of organisational contextual issues facing female leaders and their career development. Their reference to intersectionality and identity processes supports the concept of 'doing' identity work (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002), which relates to a 'dynamic' approach to identity within an organisational context, and is a growing theme in contemporary gender debates in organisational studies and leadership research (Sinclair, 2011; Wharton, 2012; Corlett and Mavin, 2014). This debate also serves to highlight the difference between psychological and sociological perspectives of how a person's identity develops. Traditionally identity formation from a psychological perspective is regarded as a personal, individual development. However, this differs from a sociological perspective, which holds that identity is continually evolving as part of an ongoing negotiation between the self and social relationships (Sinclair, 2011; Corlett and Mavin, 2014).

As discussions evolve, the role that gender plays in identity formation and development is being recognised as one of a number of contributing factors such as race, age, nationality and class, which together form an intersectionality of identities (Corlett and Mavin, 2014). This further extends the discussion away from just the gender binary and recognises the

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concept of multiple identities. Multiple identities relate to 'multiple, shifting, contradictory and ambiguous identities' (Collinson, 2005, p. 1436) and convey how an individual's various identities co-exist. The premise is that the intersectionality of identities is a dynamic shifting process of experience rather than a fixed framework or self-identity categorisation (Corlett and Mavin, 2014). This dynamism is reflected in Mavin and Grandy's review of identity work being 'complex, contradictory, fluid and indefinite' (Mavin and Grandy, 2013, p. 248).

My own understanding of this evolving gender debate is that gender is a dynamic form of social construction rather than a biological determinant. An individual's understanding of his or her gender is, therefore, dynamic and constructed and is developed on an ongoing basis through his or her social interactions. I believe, therefore, that gender is best represented by a spectrum or the concept of intersectionality, rather than by a binary. The concept of 'doing and undoing gender' is regarded as a further aspect of this debate (Kelan, 2009), and I acknowledge that people can change and adapt their gender during their life, according to circumstances and environment. However, in current UK social and organisational environments, while accepting that the relevance of gender should not be paramount, I have difficulty accepting certain aspects of the argument that the relevance of gender can be ultimately reduced or 'undone' (Kelan, 2009). This is particularly unlikely given the topical focus of gender within debates concerning the limited presence of executive women at senior levels in organisations. This aspect is now discussed further relative to the glass ceiling.

2.1.2 Glass Ceiling – Conceptualisation

The origin of the term 'glass ceiling' is generally attributed to Hymowitz and Schelhardt's (1986) *Wall Street Journal* article on corporate women, which reviewed the barriers confronting women at senior levels in corporate environments. Bryant (1984), however, used the term even earlier in her book *The Working Woman Report*, which examined the status of women in the workplace. The glass ceiling phenomenon is synonymous with the issue of women's lack of progression to senior organisational levels.

Despite the focus on issues for women at work and within institutions, there is controversy about the glass ceiling phenomenon (Benschop and Brouns, 2009; Connell, 2006; Werhane and Painter-Morland, 2011). Benschop and Brouns (2009) critiques the glass ceiling itself and argues that it has taken on a life of its own in the absence of research to determine its existence. Another critique relates to the premise of the binary nature of gender, and argues that regarding the glass ceiling as 'two fixed categories of persons – men and women – defined by biology' is unhelpful because gender is a 'dynamic system', not a fixed dichotomy (Connell, 2006, p. 838). A similar argument concerning the fluidity and dynamic nature of gender is found within gender research specific to women and leadership. Werhane and Painter-Morland's (2011) discussion of gender and systems thinking suggests that both gender and notions of leadership are socially constructed and thus subject to revision and change. They challenge the traditional firm-centred stakeholder models and the hierarchical leadership paradigms, which they argue perpetuate male styles of leadership as being the most aspirational.

Empirical studies concerning the existence of and reasons for the glass ceiling define a perspective of the glass ceiling that construes a person-centred, situation-centred and social system (Singh, 2007), similar to Wharton's (2012) concepts, or sometimes a combination of these (Oakley, 2000). The overlapping barriers associated with the glass ceiling range from corporate practices, such as recruitment and retention, to cultural practices, such as stereotyping, while the main causes of these barriers are cultural reasons rooted in feminist theory (Oakley, 2000). The inherent cultural nature of these glass ceiling issues is also discussed by Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) in their twenty-year review of the glass ceiling phenomenon. They conclude that women are at a systemic disadvantage due to entrenched biases from work practices and cultural norms. They describe how 'gender discrimination now is so deeply embedded in organisational life as to be virtually indiscernible' (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000, p. 127). In support of this argument, from a social constructionist perspective, Weyer (2007) compares and contrasts social role theory and expectation states theory to explain the persistence of the glass ceiling for aspiring female leaders, and proposes that the inherent gender differences in these theories will result in evaluation bias against women. From this perspective the only way to resolve the glass ceiling phenomenon is to change social structures and reduce the differences in status and power between male and female leaders (Weyer, 2007).

The broader contextual and organisational cultural issues impacting on the decisions a woman takes regarding promotion and advancement, is also acknowledged by Liff and Ward (2001). Their case study of a UK high-street bank explored whether the under-representation of women at senior

levels could be explained in part by the messages they were being given. These messages related to the promotion process and responsibility of senior jobs. They argued that there was a perceived incompatibility between parenting and senior roles, and that the broader context and culture of organisations had an impact on women's perceptions of their career progression. Mercer (2011) also points towards unconscious organisational bias with regard to women's lack of career advancement.

The disparities women face in advancing their careers within organisational hierarchies has also been addressed at an individual level (Ragins, Townsend and Mattis, 1998). Their research on the causes of the glass ceiling targeted the most successful women in companies and aimed to identify the obstacles they faced in advancing their careers, and the key strategies they used to overcome these. Their findings identified organisational culture as a key issue that contributed to the presence of the glass ceiling, but also highlighted the disparities in perceptions between female executives and their CEOs. The women identified the following as critical factors for their career success: consistently exceeding performance expectations, developing a style that men were comfortable with, seeking difficult or high-visibility assignments and having an influential mentor. The research also specifically highlighted stereotypes and an exclusionary climate that limited women's career progression. The presence of stereotypes, preconceptions and exclusion from corporate networks is further supported in more recent research focusing on the barriers women face (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005; Eagly and Carli, 2007).

There are alternative concepts to the glass ceiling, which vary in their focus on the number of barriers that exist or the types of barriers that are faced (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Scholarios and Taylor, 2011; Ernst and Young, 2012). Eagly and Carli's (2007) 'labyrinth of leadership' suggests that there isn't just one glass ceiling that impacts women's progression to senior levels but a number of different obstacles along the way. They view the description of one absolute glass ceiling barrier at a specific senior level in organisations as misleading and unhelpful. They further propose that 'the glass ceiling metaphor conveys a rigid, impenetrable barrier, but barriers to women's advancement are now more permeable' (Eagly and Carli, 2007, p. 1). This supports Ernst and Young's (2012) research that initially disputes the existence of the glass ceiling. However, further reading clarifies that Ernst and Young regard the concept of a single barrier for women's representation as outdated, while still acknowledging the barriers associated with the concept.

A similar proposal for two levels of glass ceiling, the first on entry and the second within career progression opportunities, has also been made. Scholarios and Taylor's (2011) research into why men progress to senior roles more than women studied role segmentation, but highlighted the disproportionate representation of women in mass routine roles as opposed to higher status managerial roles. Scholarios and Taylor (2011) argue that domestic responsibilities create and reinforce barriers to career progression.

In addition to the debate over the various levels and causes of the glass ceiling, alternative metaphors have been put forwards to describe the obstacles that female leaders face in advancing their careers. The 'glass

cliff' concept (Ryan and Haslam, 2006; Bruckmuller and Branscombe, 2011) concerns the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership positions in failing organisations. Ryan and Haslam (2006) researched UK FTSE 100 companies by reviewing pre- and post-appointment share prices. They highlighted that women were more likely to be given opportunities for senior roles than men in organisations that had consistently performed poorly. However, Adams and Funk (2012) rejected this argument in their review of United States (US) chief executive officer (CEO) appointments and proposed that women were more likely to be appointed in times of financial success.

Additional metaphors such as Kee's (2006) 'sticky floors' are used to describe how women can be held back in lower-level and lower-paid roles in organisations. Ng and Wiesner's (2007) 'glass escalator' further highlights the lack of career opportunities for women and the rapid progression of male peers. Smith, Caputi and Crittenden's (2012a) review of 'glass ceiling' metaphors provides yet another perspective, by splitting these metaphors into two themes: those that legitimise the argument that women lack certain attributes needed to reach the top, and those where stereotypes and discrimination against women are largely responsible for causing the glass ceiling.

A new contrasting perspective to the glass ceiling concept is also emerging. Smith, Caputi and Crittenden (2012b) argue that each woman has a choice as to whether to pursue and achieve a position of power. They propose that, rather than there being organisational barriers to progression, women may sabotage their own progression with self-imposed barriers through their attitudes and beliefs (Smith *et al*., 2012b). Related to this, but less

controversial, is the argument that women may be deliberately choosing not to be considered for senior-level roles, as they have less interest in senior roles than men (Litzky and Greenhaus, 2007). The premise that women may be more reluctant than men to put themselves forwards for senior positions has also been suggested (Doherty and Manfredi, 2006). This debate is still evolving and Litzky and Greenhaus (2007) discuss other reasons for women's failure to progress by exploring stereotypes and recruitment biases within organisations. Lyness and Thompson's (1997) assessment that the issues impacting women's career progression are complex, is not an understatement even seventeen years later.

In addition to highlighting the debate on gender within organisations this inequity has also encouraged the emergence of a number of development interventions to address the issue, which will now be discussed.

2.1.3 Glass Ceiling and Change

Options for resolving these barriers to progression vary in their breadth of recommendation, and focus on societal, organisational or individual interventions. The Davies (2011) report adopted a broad societal approach to tackling the glass ceiling issues and recommended certain initiatives to be adopted by organisations. This included looking at the 'supply' of women for organisations, such as encouraging their professional development to enable this internal pool of talent to be available when required. Another recommendation was to look at the 'demand' for women by organisations, by changing how appointments to senior positions are made and by educating chairs and executives on recruitment barriers (Davies, 2011). Also important was looking to enhance the general professional development of women both within the corporate sector and outside the

corporate mainstream (Davies, 2011). There is furthermore a continuing debate about the use of quotas as a forced positive discrimination approach to improve the representation of women at board level (CIPD, 2012). This is seen as an alternative to using approaches such as focusing on improved support and access to selection, development and career progression opportunities (CIPD, 2012). Arguments for bridging the gap between addressing broader inequalities within society and the culture of organisations also exist (Ridgeway, 2001).

At an organisational level Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) review three historic approaches to tackling the glass ceiling within organisations: encouraging women to act like men, accommodating women and emphasising the differences between men and women. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) regard these approaches, however, as avoiding the primary issue of addressing the organisational structures and cultures that inhibit women's career progress (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000 p. 129). They advocate the alternative approach of making incremental change involving the education of men and women regarding these systemic practices.

At an individual level practical career options for breaking the glass ceiling have been suggested (Hurn, 2012; Vinnicombe and Sealy, 2012). A focus on successful career women who have made this progression and can act as role models to other women has been recommended (Ernst and Young, 2012). The approaches that CEOs, HR managers and women themselves take to developing female leaders have also been discussed. Valerio (2009), for example, calls for further research to be made into the effects of development programmes such as coaching and mentoring on the advancement of female leaders.

Coaching and mentoring tend not to be cited solely as interventions for supporting the encouragement of women into senior management positions. Academic research into how to help break the barriers of the glass ceiling from an individual developmental perspective, using coaching and other interventions is, therefore, limited (Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al*., 2011). Although executive coaching as a relevant development intervention is only referenced in a few research studies (Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al*., 2011), this aspect will now be explored further alongside other leadership development interventions for women.

2.2 Leadership Development

This section presents an overview of leadership development and its associated interventions to provide a context for the discussion on women's leadership development. Social cognitive theory and leadership development interventions for women and women's experiences of these interventions are then more specifically discussed.

Armstrong (2009) demonstrates how the evolution and development of leadership theory was initially described from leader-centred perspectives, such as charismatic (Weber 1947), situational (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969) transactional (Bales, 1950; Burns, 1978) and transformational perspectives (Bass, 1998), but that it is more recently being described in interdependent relational terms (Binney *et al*., 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Lee, 2003). Authors such as Uhl-Bien (2006) introduce a 'relational' perspective that describes leadership as socially constructed, so that it is not only

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concerned with the individual leader but also with a process of social change. This perspective, according to Uhl-Bien (2006), regards relationships, rather than authority, superiority or dominance to be key to new forms of leadership.

This evolution and transition in leadership theory and styles has impacted on the associated leadership development interventions (Northouse, 2004). A key aspect of this is the transition from a focus on the leader's development, centred on personal characteristics, traits, skills, style and behaviours, to broader aspects of the environment, relationships and the team. The types of leadership development vary and a review of past, present and future initiatives highlights how activities like coaching, mentoring, action learning and 360-degree feedback are increasingly key elements of current leadership training programmes (Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004). This focus on individual development techniques is also evidenced by the use of coaching, among other options, becoming more prevalent (Wasylyshyn, 2003). The use of coaching to address the need for interpersonal and leadership skills and to ensure a return on investment in leadership programmes is also advocated (Ashley-Timms, 2012).

Other types of effective leadership development include activities that encourage behavioural development, such as 360-degree feedback (Chappelow, 2004) and action learning, as well as job rotation (Ohlott, 2004). The delivery of leadership development interventions has also evolved (Burke and Collins, 2001). Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004) argue that this change demonstrates a move away from purely classroom-based leadership training towards development with a focus on building

relationships, especially those that are linked or embedded in a person's actual work situation. The consequent transfer of development emphasis to the individual has also been noted, as leadership theory moves towards the relational aspects of leadership, such as focusing on identity, authenticity and emotional awareness (CCL, 2011). How this will impact on future leadership development interventions is yet to be fully determined.

2.2.1 Women's Leadership Development

The key debates surrounding leadership development for women focus on either identifying the unique challenges facing female leaders (2.1.1), understanding and addressing the potential differences in leadership style between men and women, or identifying the different leadership development interventions that address the needs of women in organisations. These latter two issues will now be discussed more fully.

Rosener's classic article (1990) was unique at the time in framing the problems and opportunities that exist for women in organisations. However, Rosener (1990) found some unexpected similarities between male and female leaders along with some important differences. The transactional and transformational leadership styles classified by Rosener suggested that women are more associated with an interactive, participative, transformational leadership style. The findings suggested that women are succeeding because of, not in spite of, certain characteristics generally considered to be 'feminine' and inappropriate in leaders. Her work emphasised the unique contribution women could make to an organisation in terms of empowerment and leadership.

As with any such work, however, it is important to remember the context in which it was written and that women at that point in time were still fighting equality in terms of policy and legislation rather than second-generation biases (Ibarra *et al*., 2013). Critiques of this work, therefore, now argue that this classification served to strengthen gender stereotypes, and propose that second-generation female managers are now doing things in a different way (Werhane and Painter-Morland, 2011).

Rosener's (1990) assessment that women had more of a transformational leadership style, although relatively simplistic and with a broader discussion than the gender binary, is still regarded as relevant by some current researchers (Eagly *et al*., 2003; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2001; Powell, Butterfield and Bartol, 2008). The relevance of transformational leadership and an understanding of this style of leadership in this research relates to its link to a leader–follower perspective of leadership, encouraging support and coaching within organisations, which has relevance to the relational theory of development (Uhl-Bien, 2006) and the development interventions that are associated with this. The relational viewpoint of leadership theory emphasises the importance of individualised relationships, that is, doing things with people rather than to people (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

A number of subsequent research articles exploring the differences between male and female leaders have focused more on how this may impact the design of leadership development interventions (Valerio, 2009; Ely, Boyce, Nelson and Zaccaro, 2010; Beeson and Valerio, 2012). However, there is a contrary argument that the self-reported data in some

of this research only indicates an insight rather than evidence into gender differences (Burke and Collins, 2001).

The recommendations for women's leadership development vary from generic mixed-gender leadership development programmes, to women-only development programmes (Clarke, 2011), and also to more specific interventions including training, networking, coaching and mentoring. The theories underpinning these leadership programmes range from theories of socialisation such as social learning, to general learning theories including cognitive development theory, transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1978) and identification theory, which was developed specifically to explain gender socialisation and in particular the acquisition of gender identity (Bem, 1983), where gender identity refers to people's own sense of themselves as men or women (Wharton, 2012).

The social cognitive theory of gender development focuses more on the sub-optimisation of development because of the impact of gender (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). The theory is founded on an agentic perspective of human self-development, adaption and change, where people are regarded as contributors to their life circumstances not just products of them. Concepts of efficacy and role modelling are associated with this theoretical perspective, so there is also an overlap with career development approaches and development interventions.

Ely *et al*. (2011) acknowledge Bussey and Bandura's (1999) arguments, and their conceptual framework offers an alternative approach for designing leadership development interventions for women. Pedagogical theories,

they believe, have failed to keep pace with practice, and a number of leadership development programmes are in fact generic programmes that are packaged for female leaders with no real difference in their approach. This argument results in a framework for women's leadership development incorporating theories of both leadership and gender. Ely *et al.*'s (2011) organisational research findings present a move away from first-generation intentional bias and exclusion of women towards second-generation gender bias, where the bias in terms of barriers and exclusion is less obvious.

In their review of designing women's leadership development programmes, Ely *et al.* (2011) discuss the issues associated with these second-generation forms of workplace gender bias. They suggest three actions to support women's access to leadership positions, which include educating both women and men about second-generation gender bias, creating safe identity workspaces to support transitions to bigger roles, and anchoring women's development efforts in a sense of leadership purpose to give women insight into themselves and their organisations. They believe that having an awareness of these biases can help to improve leadership development interventions designed for women, and can also help with identity work and the 'double bind' of female leaders. This 'double bind' that women experience (Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland, 1956) relates to how women who achieve in distinctly male arenas are seen as competent but less well liked than equally successful men (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs and Tamkins, 2004). Ely *et al*. (2011) also review and critique previous approaches to women's leadership development that showed no gender difference (Martin and Meyerson, 1998) or focused on 'fixing the women' (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Ely *et al*. (2011) highlight the

mismatch between qualities attributed to women and qualities thought necessary for leadership. Ely *et al*.'s (2011) study recommends leadership development to counteract second-generation gender bias and particularly the use of 360-degree feedback tools with coaching, leadership networks and development in leading change. However, within their research there is little discussion on the specifics of this approach. Learning to build relationships, manufacture consensus and help a team to work together for a common purpose is, among other attributes, also regarded as being of key importance to leadership development programmes for women (Ely *et al*., 2011).

More recently Ibarra *et al*. (2013) have expanded their original argument to advocate that organisations should do more to help women to gain a sense of themselves as leaders rather than just supporting them with traditional high-potential leadership development programmes. They propose that the main focus should be on identity construction processes and the building of authenticity through leadership development. This focus on identity and personal developmental aspects, such as authenticity, rather than broad generic development programmes supports the move towards more relational aspects of leadership (Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer and Hogg, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

The use of leadership programmes to provide a safe and supportive environment for development is seen as an effective way of assisting women's advancement and representation at senior levels (Clarke, 2011). Debebe (2011) also explored the transformative impact of women-only training as a means of creating a safe environment for female leaders. Her

qualitative research supports the creation of a transformational learning environment just for women that is sensitive to gender issues and adopts learning practices that recognise this. Women-only development programmes were regarded as a supportive environment for improving self-confidence and learning new skills, and a useful addition to other strategies for increasing the number of women at senior levels. While Vinnicombe and Singh (2003) proposed that women-only management training was an essential part of women's leadership development, they did not see these programmes as a substitute for other support mechanisms, such as coaching and mentoring.

Critiques of women-only leadership development programmes take a cultural feminist perspective to argue that these programmes serve to perpetuate the masculine norms of leadership. The negative and exclusionary impact of certain aspects of women's development interventions is also discussed by Gabriel (2005), who highlights the use of masculine principles in business school programmes based on game and military metaphors as an exclusionary impacting factor on the success of women's development programmes. Syed and Murray (2008) also believe that despite ongoing equal opportunity legislation and diversity programmes, women remain disempowered in the workplace.

Other potential development options for women, such as networking, are also proposed (Tharenou, 2001; O'Neil, Hopkins and Sullivan, 2011). Tharenou's (2001) longitudinal study into the impact of education, training and challenging work, as well as interpersonal skills, argues that these play an important role in the advancement of women, especially at senior levels.

This research proposed that networks are an important part of female leaders' development, more so than just the formal leadership development interventions. Similarly, O'Neil *et al*. (2011) discuss the value of networking in their qualitative research study. Their research discusses potential differences in how networks are perceived by their members versus how they are perceived by their executive leadership team. They also discuss how the career development of an individual is seen as being the individual's responsibility as opposed to the organisation's. In contrast Gremmen and Benschop (2011) question the conclusion that networks are always beneficial, and contend that some professional women's networks are not enabling.

A consequence of women's failure to progress is an increasing number of women opting out of corporate roles and adopting kaleidoscope careers, reflecting the changing priorities over the course of a person's working life (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). This issue of opting out of corporate roles is developed further in Sullivan and Mainiero's (2007) research, which proposes an alternative model to the identified 'traditional' male career model of linear career progression. The authors suggest that the progress of women is based on authenticity, balance and challenge over the course of their working life, and that HR practices for retention, recruitment and development should be designed to take these aspects into account. Their alternative model to linear career progression also accords with O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) proposal of a three-phase model of women's career development linked to the life stages of women.

2.2.2 Women's Experience of Leadership Development

Qualitative, experiential research concerning women's leadership development is limited (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003; Ruderman and Ohlott, 2005; Clarke, 2011). Research is often related to sectors, such as education or the church, or is country specific. The limited examples of executive women's experience of leadership development either focused on women who had taken part in leadership development programmes (Ruderman and Ohlott, 2005; Clarke, 2011) or shared the general experiences of female executives (Coffey, Huffington and Thomson, 1999; Cormier, 2007). Ruderman and Ohlott's (2005) study and analysis of the experiences of women as they went through a leadership development programme identified five themes: authenticity, connection, agency, wholeness and self-clarity.

Where the senior female leaders were targeted to understand the factors enabling or blocking career progression the findings highlighted the complexity and transition of women within organisations (Coffey *et al*., 1999). Their findings highlighted the difficulty of finding leadership development techniques that address the unique needs of women in organisations. Similarly, research by Cormier (2007) focuses on the issue of retaining as well as developing female leaders to address this gender imbalance at a senior level. This qualitative research study, conducted in the US, interviewed women who had broken through to senior levels in organisations, to understand the ways in which women could be better supported in their career progression. The strategies recommended for supporting women included reducing isolation, improving cultural integration and increasing networking opportunities. Individual, team and

group coaching were also recommended as a solution (Cormier, 2007). These studies are, however, based upon US or Australian contexts, and a number of them have been written by coaching practitioners who specialise in coaching women or maternity returners.

Of the empirical studies conducted to address the lack of progression for senior female executives the majority recommend mentoring and networking (CIPD, 2004; BITC, 2010; CBI, 2010b) or internship and training as development interventions (Davies, 2011). Where coaching does appear as an intervention it is done so within the context of facilitating women to meet an organisation's needs (Pitcher, 2009). The recommendations from the Davies (2011) report also include a focus on consolidating and improving the provision of training and development for potential board members. Within these recommendations coaching as a development option is only covered as a tool within the leadership development options or mentioned within highlighted examples of organisations that have used or recommend development initiatives, such as mentoring and coaching, to address the issue of supporting women to move up the ranks. However, mentoring, leadership development skills training and role models are regarded as being more prevalent than coaching as a preferred means of developing women (Singh, Vinnicombe and James, 2006; Beeson and Valerio, 2012; Hopkins *et al*., 2008). Whether executive coaching and mentoring can support women's progression will now be considered with reference to the literature on mentoring and executive coaching.

2.3 Mentoring

Mentoring's adoption as a leadership and general development intervention has been established over a considerable period of time (Garvey, 2014). Research into mentoring and specifically the mentoring relationship has also been undertaken over the last thirty years (Kram, 1983). More recently Ragins and Kram (2007) noted that mentoring, at its best, can be a 'life-altering relationship that inspires mutual growth, learning and development' (Ragins and Kram, 2007, p. 3). Mentoring relationships, they believe, have the capacity to transform individuals, groups, organisations and communities. The research concerning mentoring with specific reference to women will now be discussed.

2.3.1 Mentoring for women

A review of the research on mentoring for women serves to highlight how ideas have moved away from questions of access to mentoring and development opportunities for women that were prevalent in the 1970s, and are now moving towards gaining a better understanding of power, cross-gender relationships and career progression (Ehrich, 2008). Further research focuses on the issues of mentoring female executives (Maxwell, 2009; Kim, 2007), such as mentor–mentee gender combinations (Fowler, Gudmundsson and O'Gorman, 2007) and the importance of matching genders (Campbell and Campbell, 2007). The value of formal mentoring schemes for female executives has also been explored in Blake-Beard's (2001) study, which reviews the literature and empirical research and compares the use of informal and formal mentoring relationships. She

recommends that mentoring should be part of a number of interventions to support executive women.

Following Noe, Greenberger and Wang's (2002) literature review of prior and current mentoring research, which advised that more research was required into formal mentoring relationships, new research into the benefits of formal mentoring specifically for female leaders has taken place using quantitative studies based on surveys of mentees (Tharenou, 2005; Hoigaard and Mathisen, 2009). Tharenou's (2005) study, comprising a sample of Australian professionals from different sectors undertaking mentoring programmes over the course of a year, found that mentor career support increased women's advancement more than it did men's. Additionally, Fowler *et al.*'s (2007) study of five hundred participants explored the perceptions of mentees and mentors on gender differences against an itemised measure of mentoring functions. The results suggest that gender may not be as influential in the mentoring relationship as previously thought (Fowler *et al*., 2007). Similarly, Hoigaard and Mathisen's (2009) quantitative study, based on client self-reported questionnaires, found that mentor relationships improve the mentee's level of job satisfaction, career plan and perceived behaviours as a leader. However, there were no significant differences found between the gender of the mentor and job satisfaction. The importance of matching gender was also discussed within Campbell and Campbell's (2007) research, although they concluded that there was no apparent advantage associated with matching mentee and mentor by gender. Additionally, Tolar's (2012) qualitative collective case study focused on understanding the mentoring experiences of high-achieving women. Reflections and insights shared by the women

contribute to the debate on the benefits and challenges of mentoring relationships (Tolar, 2012).

Mentoring is not, however, without its issues as a development option. The inequities of mentoring as a leadership development intervention and the differences between the mentoring received by men as opposed to women were used to explain why men still get more promotions than women (Ibarra, Carter and Silva, 2010). A recommendation was made that sponsors receive training on the complexity of gender and leadership to counteract the strong evidence that men being mentored receive more sponsorship benefits than women being mentored (Ibarra *et al*., 2010). Related arguments that focus on mentoring relationships recommend mentoring as an option for addressing women's progression (Leck and Orser, 2013). However, the authors do not substantiate their arguments and there is little discussion on their rationale for recommending mentoring over coaching as an intervention.

2.4 Executive Coaching

Executive coaching is distinguished from mainstream coaching in that the assumed outcomes of executive coaching are changes in managerial behaviours with potential increases in organisational effectiveness (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Overall there is limited empirical research and outcome studies on executive coaching and gender within executive coaching literature (Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Grant, 2009; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011).

Feldman and Lankau's (2005) research into the construct of executive coaching examines how coaches' professional training, clients and types of coaching impact the effectiveness of the coaching. They concluded that the academic research on executive coaching has trailed behind the practitioner literature and focuses on a review of academic research on the outcomes of coaching. This builds on the perspective of West and Milan (2001), where development coaching has as its objective the development of optimal effectiveness in a leadership and managerial role. They foresee businesses making major investments in coaching in the future, and as such coaching will become more rigorous in its approach and more clearly measurable than it is at present. They also acknowledge that the therapeutic value of one-on-one coaching has often counteracted the need to measure its return on investment. There is no specific gender perspective to this research but it highlights that further research is needed, given the impact that executive coaching has as an effective development tool for senior leaders.

Similarly, Passmore and Fillery-Travis's (2011) literature review updates the earlier seminal work of Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) and Kilburg (1996), and categorises the literature based on the nature of coaching, coach behaviour studies, client behaviour studies, coach–client relationship studies and organisational coaching impact studies. Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) consider the options for potential coaching research and recommend further research on the impact of gender in coach selection, arguing that such research would provide additional knowledge to societal and diversity questions and the opportunity for women's shift to sustainable senior positions in organisations.

From an alternative perspective Lowman (2005) has also called for more research into the area of executive coaching that is not just an account of practice. Where research has taken place into executive coaching within leadership development interventions it has been specific in its focus on researching the coaching of high achievers, and highlights the need for future research in this area (Jones and Spooner, 2006; Feggetter, 2007; Seamons, 2006).

2.4.1 **Executive Coaching for Women**

A database search of existing research on executive coaching for women highlights that there are a limited number of publications on its efficacy as a leadership development initiative for professional advancement. Lavendt and Kauffman's (2011) annotated bibliography of dissertations and theses offers limited references to gender research. A similar dearth of research into coaching women was noted in Grant's (2009) annotated bibliography of executive coaching research between 1937 and 2008. There are, therefore, relatively few insights into coaching women, especially from a coachee perspective. Much of the available research is specific to an organisational context based in the US or Australia (Benavides, 2008; Galuk, 2009; Skinner, 2012). Galuk's (2009) phenomenological study explored what the experience of coaching was like for executive women, and additional research based on a constructivist grounded theory of Australian women's experience of coaching, has also been conducted by Skinner (2012). While focusing on gender and the coachee's perspective, Skinner proposed a central theme of professional identity construction as a leader. The research developed a conceptual framework for professional identity formation (Sealy and Singh, 2010), and applied a gender perspective. Two

studies that have incorporated a UK context, however, are Leimon *et al.*'s (2011) mixed methods study, which focused on senior UK female leaders, not all of whom had been coached, and Broughton and Miller's (2009) study, which included the UK as part of its European review.

An additional review of the organisational context of coaching for women again highlights that there is limited research available (Peltier, 2001; Passmore, 2009). In a specific chapter on coaching women, Peltier (2001) recognises that organisations potentially represent the male viewpoint, and discusses stereotypes and differences between men and women in the workplace, including the socialisation of women's roles. He acknowledges that as gender is a 'central aspect of our identity', effective coaching for women requires a coach's awareness of these issues, as well as an interest in them (Peltier, 2001, p. 206). Passmore's (2009) book on diversity in coaching contains a chapter on how to coach women (Passmore, 2009, pp. 237–254). However, there seems to be a binary discussion concerning becoming an archetypal male leader versus relying on soft skills, which seems overly simplistic. Such a limited contextual understanding of coaching women in organisations suggests that more research is necessary in this area, as a more nuanced discussion is important to reflect the complexity of this area.

The limited research into the meaning or impact of coaching on executive women's development has focused more on the coaches' perspective of the relationship and outcomes. Sheppard's (2009) survey of coaches suggests the importance of coaching as an intervention for women's development in terms of generic aspects, such as confidence building,

leadership style and addressing work–life balance issues. While there are aspects of research related to gender, these tend to focus on certain aspects of the coach–coachee relationship, such as Gray and Goregaoka's (2010) research on matching. Their qualitative study suggests that female coachees choose female coaches, but a subsequent quantitative analysis revealed no definite bias in choices made.

Research concerning gender career success and coaching is also limited. Perrewe and Nelson's (2004) study, for example, examined how specific skills such as political skills can be developed through coaching and mentoring, and they recommend further research into this area. However, it could be argued that their research is limited in terms of the depth of focus on coaching within their interviews. It is difficult to determine the effectiveness of executive coaching when there is limited research on the outcomes of such coaching interventions. Where research has been conducted, the self-reported change of the clients in their leadership behaviours is the most common form of evaluation (Ely *et al*., 2010).

2.4.2 **Women's Experience of Executive Coaching**

There is limited research available on the experience or impact of coaching on executive women's development from the coachee's perspective (Benavides, 2008; Leimon *et al*., 2011; Skinner, 2012; Worth, 2012). Leimon *et al.*'s (2011) research, aimed at coaching practitioners, focuses specifically on coaching women and explores how coaching supports women's development as leaders. The mixed methods research involved a questionnaire and interviewing twenty-five women. The research focused on whether there were objective reasons to treat women differently in coaching. Questions concerned what topics women should be coached on

and at what stage in their career, and whether any coaching techniques and approaches work particularly well for women. In summary, Leimon *et al.*'s (2011) research aims to understand what women have achieved through coaching, what their experience of coaching is and how this has helped them to progress and develop their careers. The authors conclude that while coaching for women and gender awareness within organisations needs to be improved, further research is required.

Broughton and Miller's (2009) research also recommends coaching as a relevant development intervention. The study interviewed three UK women as part of a broader European survey on the factors that encouraged or slowed their career progression and on the benefits of self-confidence, skills and work–life balance that coaching can bring. The research was sponsored, however, by a coaching organisation in the US, and is focused on US and European organisations. More recent research has explored specific aspects of women's coaching. Skinner's (2012) study examines the construction of a leader's professional identity, and explicitly tailoring coaching to support this development. Worth's (2012) heuristic inquiry explores the phenomenon of coaching women towards authenticity in the context of higher education, and proposes that coaching can provide support to women and specifically to their development of authenticity. Overall it seems that the research and literature available on women and coaching still raises questions about the relevant issues that impact on women's career development.

This chapter has given an overview of the relevant theories, concepts and research related to this study of executive women's experiences of coaching and mentoring. A perceived gap in the literature has been

identified, as captured in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 – Literature Review Focus

The continuing focus of this research is, therefore, to explore the executive woman's experiences and the role that coaching or mentoring has played as a development and support mechanism for her. This study will develop the insights from Leimon *et al*. (2011) and look into coaching and mentoring as a development intervention to support female executives (Benavides, 2008; Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al*., 2011; Skinner, 2012; Worth, 2012). The next chapter outlines the methodology and assumptions for this research.

Chapter 3 **Methodology**

The preceding chapter discussed concepts and theoretical debates concerning gender, women's leadership development and executive coaching and mentoring to explore the themes that underpin this study. This chapter discusses how I approached this research within an interpretivist philosophy, and describes my associated methodological choice of IPA. Integral to this are the important assumptions and beliefs that support the overall approach to my research: from the theoretical underpinning, to the choice of methods for the collection and analysis of data. The research approach is captured in Figure 3.1 below.

| Interpretivist Paradigm | IPA Methodology | Method – Interviews | IPA Data Analysis | Presentation of Data |
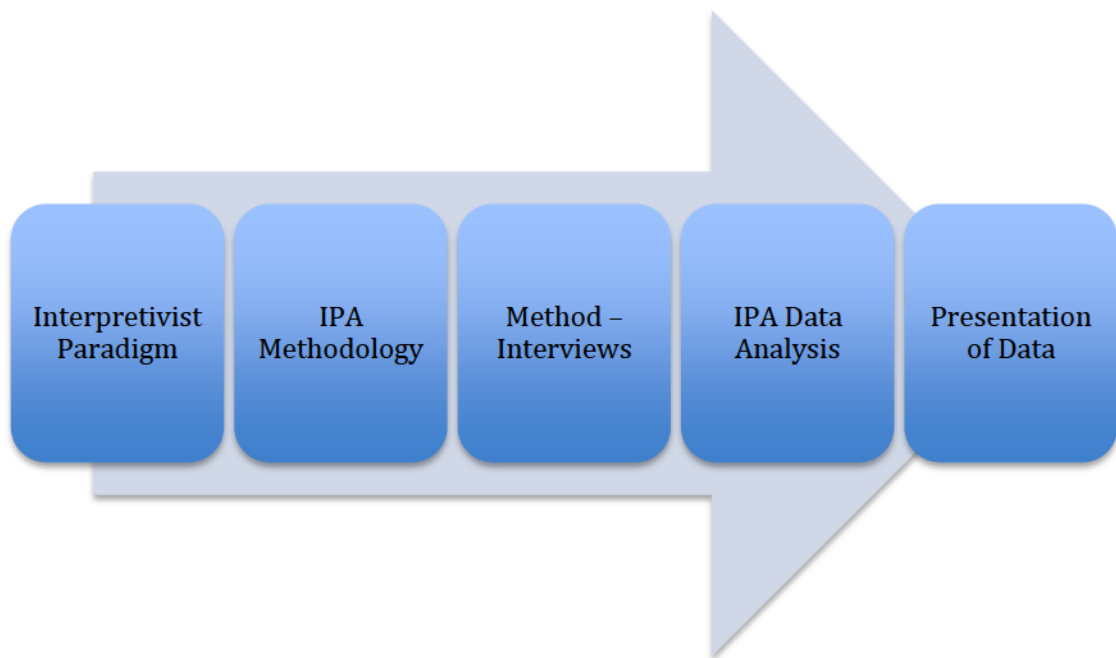
Figure 3.1 – Research Design

3.1   **Research Philosophy**

To address the research problem I initially considered my personal paradigm, defined as a 'basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Guba, 1990,

p. 17). The philosophical considerations and academic debates that underpin research and methodology decisions have extended greatly since I first undertook master's-level studies in 1995 and again in 2005, as has my understanding of this field. Reflecting on this I believe that my commercial background, where a mindset of fact-based decision-making and a quest for certainty fits most closely with a positivist paradigm, strongly influenced my prior assumptions. However, my cumulative life experiences, my professional HR experience and the completion of my Master of Arts (MA) degree in Coaching and Mentoring in 2005 have moved me more and more into an interpretivist position. An interpretive paradigm, according to Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012), enables an in-depth exploration and understanding of phenomena through human interaction. In interpretive research 'human beings are understood not as objects but as agents' (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 46). Similarly, according to Symon and Cassell (2012) 'interpretive traditions emerge from a scholarly position that takes human interpretation as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world' (Symon and Cassell, 2012, p. 21).

In terms of ontology, my position is that multiple realities are shaped by the individual's perception and conception. I recognise that 'in perceiving or knowing the world we create it' (Symon and Casell, 2012, p. 18). At an epistemological level I am constructivist and interpretivist in my view that knowledge emerges from the context and from relationships and interactions between the researcher and the researched. Understanding at this level is co-created by the participant and the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). At an axiological level I recognise that research is value laden and relies on the understanding of my own values as well as the

interpretation of the participants. I recognise that by virtue of my gender and the influence of my background and professional qualifications in HR, leadership development, coaching and mentoring that I have my own frame of thinking. Related to this I have aimed, through reflexivity, for heightened awareness and understanding of my own beliefs and values that could impact on my interaction with the participants and my interpretations of the findings. These beliefs and assumptions were introduced in Chapter 1 and will be covered in later chapters through accounts of reflexivity. Integral to this, I am also aware that with interpretive research the researcher's understanding evolves during the research process. This requires an iterative process of researcher sense making, as 'initial research expectations are treated as educated provisional inferences that will be considered and explored' (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 53).

3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

Research methodology as a 'general approach to studying research topics' encompasses both philosophical and theoretical commitments (Silverman, 2003, p. 1). The interpretivist stance, focused as it is on exploring people's meaning making, in this case female executives and their career development, implies a qualitative research methodology. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue, the choice of a qualitative research methodology is an activity that locates the observer in the world and involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This implies an 'emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 8). However, within such qualitative research methodologies there is a wide range of different epistemological stances. Understanding the kind of knowledge sought for

the type of phenomenon under investigation is, therefore, a key consideration.

3.2.1 **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

In line with my philosophical position, the proposed research methodology is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 2004; Finlay and Ballinger, 2006). This experiential, qualitative approach to research offers a methodological framework that was developed by Smith (1996). Initially IPA as a methodology had an early emphasis on health psychology, but more research studies using IPA are now emerging from applied psychologies such as counselling, education and occupational psychology (Smith *et al*., 2009). The underpinning research philosophy and theoretical assumptions of IPA also recognise many aspects of the hermeneutic philosophy associated with Heidegger (1927) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). IPA thus connects with the core ideas from a number of phenomenological philosophers, and Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2013) regard IPA as having an epistemological openness, arguing a position somewhere between critical realist and contextual constructivist. IPA intellectually connects closer to hermeneutics and the theories of interpretivism, and 'combines an empathic hermeneutics with a questioning hermeneutics' (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p. 51). IPA involves attempting to understand individuals' experiences, how they made sense of them and the meanings of those experiences (Smith, 2004).

Smith and Osborn (2008, p. 53) identify IPA as inherently characterised by a double hermeneutic, whereby 'the participants are trying to make sense of their world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants

trying to make sense of their world'. It is this emphasis on interpretation that moves the IPA researcher away from mainly describing the individual's experience towards an understanding of the phenomenon that is context specific and inclusive of both the individual and the researcher (Clarke, 2009).

IPA, however, does acknowledge that 'access [to the lived experience of others] depends on and is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity' (Smith, Jarman and Osborn, 1999, pp. 218–219). It is meaning-focused and 'committed to understanding the first-person perspective from the third-person position, so far as is possible, through intersubjective inquiry and analysis' (Larkin, Eatough and Osborn, 2011, p. 321).

My choice of methodology also allows recognition of a priori knowledge, which is seen as an integral part of interpretive methodologies and should be explicitly acknowledged (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 26). Experiential knowledge is recognised as shaping the research focus and plays a key part in how the research is conducted. For example, my prior knowledge has been used in the data generation phase to gain access to a community of participants. The subsequent interpretive data analysis and requisite personal reflexivity enables an understanding of those aspects of the coaching relationship and organisational context. IPA also requires the self-reference of reflexivity (Steier, 1991) to inform both the interpretive methodology and the research process. This reflexivity is shared in the research methods (3.4) and data analysis approach (3.5.2) sections presented later in this chapter.

The potential limitations of IPA concern the level of articulation and ability of the participants to communicate their experiences (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty and Hendry, 2011). Additionally, in their review of IPA research in health psychology, Brocki and Wearden (2006, p. 101) note that researchers using IPA have varied in the way they have dealt with the 'interpretative facet of the approach'. They recommend that instead of analysis being descriptive, more acknowledgment of the beliefs and reflexivity of the researcher should be included to improve the interpretive aspect of the research. I am mindful of these issues, and sharing my reflexivity throughout this thesis should assist understanding. Furthermore, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012, p. 41) state:

> … a methodology informed by interpretivist presuppositions which hold that we live in a world of potentially multiple intersubjective social realities in which the researcher (as well as the researched) is also an interpreter of events that transpire and sometimes an actor in them, an interview might be conducted to ascertain how the particular person interviewed experienced the event in question, and if different interview participants provide different versions of the event, that is normal and to be expected.

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) see such differences between the participants as being of 'real interest to the researcher as the researcher is interested in the several interpretations, in order to understand where the differences of experience and interpretation lie. These are key ideas that derive from hermeneutics and phenomenology' (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 44). Additionally, Weaver and Olson (2006) point out that an interpretive approach is more concerned with giving voice to the participants. Researchers are therefore less concerned with making a judgment about the validity of the experience.

3.3 Research Methods

Smith and Osborn (2008) describe semi-structured interviews as the exemplary research method for IPA. These interviews are regarded as 'best suited to one which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences' (Smith *et al*., 2009, p. 56). The aim is to design 'data collection events which elicit detailed stories, thoughts and feelings from the participant' (Smith *et al*., 2009, p. 67). Therefore semi-structured face-to-face interviews, which allow the researcher and the participants to engage in active dialogue, were chosen as the preferred data collection method.

3.3.1 Interviews

The guidance available for qualitative interviews differs according to the philosophy of the author and whether interviews are regarded as assisting an interpretive philosophy or as a tool purely for data collection (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Alvesson, 2011; Symon and Cassell, 2012; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). For example, Rubin and Rubin regard interviewees as 'partners in the research enterprise rather than subjects to be tested or examined' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p.12).

IPA researchers (Smith *et al*., 2009; Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2013) recommend the use of a well-constructed interview schedule, which should guide the interview while also facilitating a participant-led approach. The aim is to achieve a level of shared engagement and for participants to talk about what has significance and existential importance for them. The development of the interview schedule is regarded as a key preparation step before the interview takes place. In accordance with IPA's

recommendations I identified and ordered themes relevant to the research question, and developed specific questions around each theme. The schedule was short, with no more than ten questions, and included potential prompts and probes, suitably phrased to suit the participants. When used at the interview the schedule should, however, be fluid and allow for flexibility. The interview format is further discussed later in this chapter (3.3.4) and detailed in Appendix C.

More generic guidance such as a need for more intense listening than in normal conversations (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 14) is useful, and served as a reminder when approaching this phase of the research. In light of this guidance I was mindful, therefore, of the need for adaptability during the interview, as the researcher–participant interaction is unpredictable and invented afresh each time.

In contrast, Alvesson (2011, p. 6) offers a critique of the interview and suggests a 'reflexive pragmatism', recognising the complex and contestable nature of any meaning derived from the interview situation. As a result I focused on ensuring that my participants were as experienced and knowledgeable in the subject area as possible and reflected a variety of perspectives in their experiences, and that I had 'critical consciousness of the problems of interviewing' (Alvesson, 2011, p. 7). This was achieved by considering the interview questions in advance as I prepared the interview schedule for ethics approval, and by utilising the schedule for the pilot interviews. I also used different techniques during the interviews, such as encouraging participants to give a metaphor for their experience of coaching and mentoring, and I wrote a reflexive note after each interview to

consciously capture my thoughts and reflections on how the interview had progressed.

3.3.2 **Pilot before Interviewing**

Pilot interviews are widely recommended in qualitative as well as quantitative research (Baker, 1994; Kim, 2010). I conducted two pilot interviews as an opportunity to review the outline interview schedule, the appropriate sequencing of themes and potential exploratory questions. I chose the pilot participants based on their level of experience of the phenomenon under study and their availability. For the first pilot interview I used the outline interview schedule, and the participant was open and shared her experiences. However, the second participant had a more introverted personality and the interview was harder to conduct, and her responses much briefer. This participant therefore needed more prompting to expand on her thoughts and experiences.

I transcribed the interviews immediately so that I could listen to the recordings and read the transcriptions to gain feedback on my approach. As a result of the pilot interviews I adjusted my interview schedule and questions to ensure more time for rapport building and to have several initial open questions that would enable the participant to share her experiences without being immediately asked a question exploring coaching and mentoring experiences.

With regard to the interview setting, the first interview was conducted at the participant's workplace and this helped with controlling interruptions and noise. The second interview was conducted away from the participant's workplace and unfortunately in an environment that became very noisy with

other people. I resolved to ensure a quiet environment for subsequent interviews. Overall, however, I thought that the advance preparation and use of an outline interview schedule was helpful for achieving my aim of a conversational interview rather than a structured question and answer session.

3.3.3 Research Participants

In order to be theoretically consistent with IPA's orientation, the participants for my research were purposively chosen on the basis of their experience of being coached and mentored. I used the extensive network of contacts related to my roles as an HR director and self-employed coach/consultant. In these roles I have been responsible for the design and procurement of leadership development interventions and coaching. My network of professional executive coaches, HR director peers, and leaders of organisations are all involved in diversity, women's interests and leadership development interventions, including executive coaching. I sent out an initial specific request for support via email to twenty-one direct contacts, and through them nine other contacts were found, including a member of parliament (MP), a Harvard business alumna and several business consultants.

The contacts were given a forwarding email to identify whether any of their coachees would be interested in taking part in the research. If they were, the coachees emailed me and I then contacted the interested potential participants directly. I did not, however, use my own previous or current clients to find participants, as I recognised the potential dependency problems.

In selecting the participants I was aware of the limitations of using a snowballing approach as identified by Magnani, Sabin, Saidel and Heckathorn, (2005) in that I could have included further participants with similar experiences as the participants that were selected. However, I found that the approach was consistent with IPA's orientation to produce a homogeneous group of appropriately experienced participants, and given the available time and resources it was an effective means of recruiting participants (Denscombe, 2002; Faugier and Sargeant, 1997).

Through my contacts I identified two pilot interviewees and twelve potential participants. I made informal contact with them via telephone to confirm that they were appropriate research candidates: executive women working at senior level, who had experienced coaching and mentoring and had been coached and mentored by more than one coach/mentor (Appendix A). When their suitability as participants was confirmed, the women had the opportunity to raise queries, which at this stage related only to ensuring data confidentiality. I subsequently sent out a formal invitation by letter/email including the participant information sheet (Appendix A).

Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the research participants. The names are pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. All participants are executive women working in UK organisations and they have all reached senior or board level positions. The women work in HR, specialist, and operational roles in sectors such as public health, education and local authority, and in large private-sector organisations The women are aged mostly between mid 40s and mid 50s, with a couple of participants being slightly younger or older than this, and they have all been

coached and mentored as part of their career, either on an informal or formal basis.

Table 3.1: Research Participants					
Participant	Role	Sector/Industry/ Profession		Age Range	Coaching & Mentoring Experience
Athena	HR Director	Private	Manufacturing	50-54	Occasional
Eleanor	Consultant Director	Public	Education	45-49	Frequent
Elizabeth	Managing Director	Private	Engineering	50-54	Moderate
Emily	HR Director	Private	Telecomms	45-49	Frequent
Erica	Board Director	Private	Manufacturing	45-49	Occasional
Helen	Partner	Private	Legal	40-44	Moderate
Jane	Director	Private	Legal	40-44	Frequent
Maggie	Board Director	Private	Pharmaceuticals	50-54	Moderate
Marie	Director	Public	NHS	45-49	Moderate
Simone	Director	Public	Healthcare	55-59	Moderate
Susan	Director	Public	Education	50-54	Frequent
Virginia	Managing Director	Private	Marketing	45-49	Occasional

Source: Fieldwork data.

Occasional = 2 or more coaching programmes; Moderate = 4 or more coaching programmes; Frequent = long-term relationship with coach and 6 or more coaching programmes.

Scheduling the interviews was challenging, as the participants were extremely busy. It took time to get responses, and prompting emails were sent to ensure dates were scheduled in diaries. I aimed to meet the participants at their own office location and actively avoided busy places for meetings. This met with the IPA guidance to ensure a physical setting that creates a safe and comfortable environment to encourage the sharing of the participant's experience and stories. My data collection period lasted from early February 2013 to early July 2013.

My initial decision on the number of participants to interview was influenced by debates on recommended numbers and research that indicated that twelve interviews were appropriate. This latter argument is particularly

salient if the research explores common experiences among a group of relatively homogeneous participants (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). I also observed that initially IPA research involved varying participant sample sizes. However, as the methodology has evolved the latest thinking is that the participant sample should be smaller, and the guidance given by Smith (2011) is that four to ten participants are appropriate for a doctoral-level study. The twelve interviewees in my research participant group therefore make a slightly larger sample than IPA suggests. However, I believe that the participant group of twelve women offers a rich and strong case, while still allowing the depth and experience-oriented analysis proposed by IPA. Most important, however, is that the sample is homogeneous. Obviously, there was a practical reason as well because from the outset there was a chance that one or more of the participants would be unavailable or would withdraw during the process. In summary, the recruitment process resulted in two pilot interviews followed by twelve face-to-face interviews.

3.3.4 **Interviewing**

As mentioned above, IPA guidance on data collection notes the importance of rapport building. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) recommend an initial phone call with the participants to build rapport, and I followed this suggestion. I found that this initial telephone call helped to ensure there was an element of rapport and trust at the scheduled interview and before the audio equipment was switched on.

The design of the interview schedule also ensured an outline framework in order to introduce myself, cover ethical and administrative procedures and explain that I was interested in their experiences and what they thought, rather than there being any right or wrong answers. I commenced with

ensuring the consent form (Appendix B) was signed and then addressing any questions from the participants, giving reassurances on confidentiality, and so on. Since my intention was to facilitate the sharing of stories, thoughts and feelings about the experience, I aimed for open, exploratory questions with a focus on meaning and sense making. The questions were open and neutral with direct and indirect questions used to elicit experiences and examples around the themes of the context and experience of the coaching or mentoring and the development the women had experienced. The key requisite was to ensure a relatively loose interview outline (Appendix C). Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011, p. 757) advise: 'Interview schedules should be short, starting with broad, general questions that allow the participant to set the parameters of the topic, not the other way round.' Smith *et al*. (2009) also highlight the 'rhythm' of the interview, where as the interview progresses the participant relaxes and is more likely 'to move from the descriptive to the affective, from the general to the specific, and from the superficial to the disclosing' (Smith *et al*., 2009, p. 68).

In line with this recommended 'rhythm' of the interview I commenced by asking the participants to describe their career experience to date, which encouraged them to talk and provided a starting point for me to consider their life, career experiences, and so on. Where appropriate I asked questions and probed to elicit descriptions of their feelings, behaviours, actions, opinions and views concerning their experiences of career barriers, leadership development and coaching or mentoring, to better understand these experiences (Appendix C).

I focused on listening intently to their responses and making notes to identify links between items, which acted as reminders to come back to later in the interview. I found that the flow of the discussion highlighted themes and it was important to listen carefully to what they said and then explore these at the appropriate moment, so as not to break the flow of thought for the participant. Towards the end of the interview I also asked if the participants could think of a metaphor that would describe their experience of being coached or mentored, as a means of encouraging different ways of uncovering and describing the experience. The use of metaphors has been discussed in qualitative research (Moser, 2000) and was an interesting approach to incorporate, as the participants were either immediately able to describe one or required some additional thought. In some cases participants emailed me following the interview with their response if they were unable to think of a metaphor at the interview. The metaphors that arose in the discussions, either spontaneously or in answer to the specific question to describe a metaphor, have been incorporated in the findings chapters to illuminate the participants' experiences. I remained respectful of their time and support for my research by checking their continued availability after the scheduled time had elapsed and by thanking them after the interview and with a follow-up email. I also made notes after each interview to capture immediate thoughts (Appendix D).

The interviews were mostly held in the women's workplace and each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. Overall, I focused on being highly engaged, listening carefully and asking sensitive, exploratory questions.

3.4 Data Analysis

To enable an understanding of the data analysis approach I will first provide a description of the transcription process.

3.4.1 Transcription

There is no clear guidance on the use of external providers for transcription using an IPA methodology. The guidance relates more to the format of the transcript to allow note making during analysis, and the importance of ensuring that the transcription is at a semantic level (Smith *et al*., 2009). Smith *et al*. recommend 'verbatim transcription that does not need to be as detailed a transcription as conversation analysis as IPA focuses on content' (Smith *et al*., 2009, p. 73). Given the number of interviews carried out within a relatively short period of time and a concern over ensuring the typed accuracy of the actual transcript, I therefore sourced a reputable transcription service. The tapes were submitted to the provider at the end of each interview. I committed to carrying out a quality check with the tape against the transcript when it was received to check for gaps and errors.

I recognise that the initial transcription can be regarded as a form of interpretive and reflexive activity with an opportunity for meaning making in listening to the conversations again. To address this I listened to the tapes a number of times to assist the interpretative process, in addition to reading the transcripts.

3.4.2 Data Analysis Approach

The aim of IPA data analysis is to provide a rich, transparent and contextualised analysis of the accounts of the participants. The analysis

and initial commenting should be focused on illustrating the importance of the participants' inputs and experiences of the phenomena (Smith *et al.*, 2009). To fulfil this aim and based on these proposals all participants were interviewed before any transcripts were analysed to reduce cross-contamination, and I followed IPA data analysis guidelines. I present below the IPA data analysis approach using the steps suggested by Smith *et al*. (2009), which also supports my reflexive approach to this research.

Step 1 – Reading and Rereading

I read and reread the individual transcripts to gain insight and awareness of the participant's experience. This enabled me to become familiar with and stay close to the participant's world. I also listened to all the tapes individually a number of times. This supported my entering into active engagement with the data. As I read the transcripts I developed a sense of the richer sections of data and where links occurred across the data. I also made notes to capture initial thoughts (Appendix E). For example, Helen continually referred to her current circumstances at various points in our discussion and it was necessary to consider the links and context from earlier in the meeting. I ensured that enough time without interruption was allowed for this phase of the process to assist the interpretative process.

Step 2 – Initial Noting

I created a revised version of the transcript that enabled me to mark it up, and I initially examined each transcript to see how the participant talked about things that mattered to her. Anything of interest was noted in the margin. Each transcript was then analysed word by word, line by line, for three main areas of interpretation, highlighting descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments. This involved considering key phrases, capturing

initial thoughts and using handwritten notes on the transcript template (Appendix F). Descriptive coding focused on the subject being discussed within the transcript, such as Helen's reference to glass ceilings and the challenges she faced. Linguistic coding focused on language and non-verbal cues. For example, Erica used humour and the metaphor of games a number of times to make her point. The metaphors were helpful for exploring meaning and for understanding the participants' experiences of coaching and mentoring, but were not as successful as I originally anticipated due to the limited number of strong metaphors given. Conceptual coding focused on starting to question the underlying meaning behind phrases and experiences. For example, Virginia highlighted the 'imposter syndrome' in one of her examples.

Brocki and Wearden (2006) argue that IPA aims to go beyond a thematic analysis, and to achieve this I committed to these levels of interpretive activity. This involved reviewing my initial individual descriptive themes, after conducting further interpretation using linguistic and conceptual analysis. For example, Helen's description of a glass ceiling was regarded metaphorically as the 'rules of the game' and was part of the concept of the gendered organisation. I was constantly aware that the aim of IPA analysis is to describe patterns in the data. The concept of immersion in the data (Robson, 2002) supports this, as the immersion, that is, the consuming activity of interpreting the data and being open to interpretation enabling insight, intuition and creativity, allows the interpretation to go deeper with each level of review. To help my understanding I attended an IPA training course run by London IPA Training (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2013), which was very supportive. Smith *et al*. (2009) also give good guidance.

As I completed each stage of the initial analysis I reviewed my transcript template to ensure my comments stayed close to the transcript. It is easy to drift off-track, as there are so many thoughts, similarities and contradictions throughout each transcript. This stage is important to gain different perspectives on the participant's world and gives a framework for the first-time user of IPA. In practice this meant that I allocated set times within my working diary to allow for 'immersion' when I would not be disturbed, and conducted the analysis in blocks of time to allow for insight, reflection and interpretive activity. Reflexivity is critical to this stage of the analysis, and throughout the data collection and analysis process I kept a research journal of my thoughts as I conducted each interview or reviewed transcripts. This helped to capture my thoughts, reflections and decisions. As part of the analysis stage I read and analysed these notes relative to the original interview (Appendices D and E).

Step 3 – Developing Emergent Themes

In this step I moved away from the transcript to map connections and patterns between my notes. This reduces the volume of detail and involves abstraction and contextualisation. The themes continually evolved and I consequently had many different versions of theme headings. For example, theme headings changed from ceilings to barriers to reflect the nuance between an obstacle rather than a perceived physical barrier to advancement. I found it helped to read the transcripts again to understand these nuances and I also allowed sufficient time between readings to absorb and reflect on the themes.

Step 4 – Searching for Connections across Emergent Themes

I clustered and colour-coded the themes to enable a framework to be produced (Appendices G and H). A table was produced capturing the draft themes for each individual. This was a difficult exercise and choices had to be made about the emergent themes. For example, areas such as resilience were particularly interesting but may have related to a passing comment rather than a more detailed passage. I grouped a number of themes according to context, as there were so many sub-theme possibilities (Appendix I). I then went through the other transcripts in the same way. Analysis was completed on each transcript before moving to the next and the analysis cycle for all twelve participants took a period of over six months.

Step 5 – Looking for Patterns across Cases

The initial output of a table of themes for each participant allowed cross-referencing of the themes across the participant group. This enabled a cross-case analysis to look for patterns and themes across the individual cases (Smith *et al*., 2009). To support this, the individual case themes emerging from the data analysis were subsequently cross-referenced across the accounts to produce a summary master table of themes (Appendix K).

For example, the majority of participants described differences between their coaching and mentoring experiences, regarding the content and the sequential nature and timing of the support they received at relative points in their career development journey. The nature of the interview also covered stories of career journeys, and it was possible to ultimately organise the emergent themes in terms of the temporal moment they were

located, such as early career mentoring and later career coaching. However, I found the initial ordering stage took a long time, as there were many versions and cycles of thought (Appendix J). The size of my sample meant that I had to try many different ways of organising the themes. To ensure that individual themes were captured I had to keep abstracting and subsuming themes to ensure that the master theme caught the individual participant themes as well. I captured notes on my thoughts throughout this stage to assist my reflexivity.

Step 6 – Presenting the Data

Writing up the analysis and considering the presentation of data is an integral part of the interpretive cycle. This stage allowed further consideration of my initial analysis, and assisted interpretation and the refining of themes. The systematic way that themes and participant quotes were brought together also enabled the themes to be accessible as the writing began. However, balancing the participant's voice with my voice through interpretation took practice and skill development. This is an iterative exercise and I found the writing to be crucial to get deeper into the themes and consider how best to present them. The findings chapters present three superordinate themes (career challenges, early career journey support, and later career development and legacy) and eight associated subordinate themes, which emerged through the detailed interpretation of the participants' accounts (Fig 3.2). The themes presented capture both the essence of the experiences for the individual participant and the similarities and patterns in the data of the overall group of participants (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The table of recurrent themes (Appendix L) supports Smith *et al.*'s (2009) guidance on handling data from larger

samples. The presentation of these themes is further discussed later in this chapter (3.8).

Additional Data Analysis Reflexivity

According to Smith *et al*. (2009), the qualities required of the researcher are: open-mindedness, flexibility, patience, empathy, willingness to enter into and respect the participant's world, and the ability to understand the participant's perspective as far as possible. I would agree that all these attributes are required, and I thought that I possessed these qualities at the outset. However, I now concur with and accept Gilgun's (2010, p.173) statement that 'we are often unaware of what we think, believe and the implications or interactions until we write about them and discuss [them] with others'. For example, some of the participants' stories had a particular resonance with me because of shared context or circumstances. This helped to open up thoughts and bring them into consciousness. This process of understanding has highlighted that to become a novice again was for me the biggest test of humility, and encouraged profound learning. I have aimed throughout to respect and understand the participants' perspectives, but the biggest learning has been about myself. Immense mental agility is required to ensure this level of analysis and to write it up. I still regard myself as being in the process of 'evolving' my skills. I took comfort that Smith *et al*. (2009) also recognise there is no right or wrong way to conduct the analysis.

3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is fundamental to the interpretivist paradigm and IPA methodology. To support this my starting position in relation to the research and the rationale behind my choice of study, together with my assumptions

held at the beginning of the research, are covered in Chapter 1. My epistemological stance and my discussions and reflexivity on the interviewing process and the formulation of research questions are presented in this chapter. As part of this, I have considered the double hermeneutic and my contribution to the construction of meanings. I have also balanced this with acknowledging that it is impossible to remain 'outside of' the phenomena while conducting research. I have considered reflexivity at a personal level and reflected on and shared my own values, beliefs and experiences that have shaped the research. To assist this reflexive process I made notes immediately following the interview to capture my interpretation of the situational context and how I experienced the event (Appendix D). I also took notes to capture my thoughts and reflections during the data analysis process (Appendices E and H). To further encourage a reflexive approach I joined a regional (north-west) IPA research group and shared my analysis with the group for peer review purposes. As a result, my understanding of IPA, interpretive research and data analysis in particular developed considerably during the doctorate process. The notes I captured in my research journal represented my reflexive thoughts through the data collection and data analysis stages, and were particularly helpful as I experienced the various levels of interpretive analysis (Smith *et al*., 2009).

An important additional factor within IPA and discussed by Willig (2008, p. 56) is the recognition of the 'hermeneutic circle', according to which parts can only be understood from an understanding of the whole, but the whole can only be understood from an understanding of the parts (Schmidt, 2006). This understanding, therefore, of where I was as a researcher as part of the hermeneutic circle in relation to my assumptions and experience

throughout the research process, supports a reflexive approach. For example, I share age, gender and some contextual experiences with the participants, having worked in organisations at a senior level. I am also close to the research topic, having personally experienced coaching and currently working as a coaching practitioner. I also believe that coaching is a positive experience and has the potential to support personal growth as well as skills development. I have further considered reflexivity at an epistemological level and how my research question has defined or limited what could be found (Willig, 2008, p. 10). This was discussed within Chapter 1 and will be revisited in Chapter 7. Additional accounts of reflexivity are shared through the data collection and data analysis phases.

3.6 Quality of the Research

I accept that there is much debate on the 'rigour' of qualitative and IPA research studies (Sandelowski, 1993; Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal and Smith, 2004; Barbour 2007; Brocki and Wearden, 2006; Pringle *et al*., 2011). Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2013) acknowledge that IPA's approach so far has been to provide explicit detail to reflect the commitment and rigour with which a study is carried out. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) also suggest useful frameworks to evaluate and demonstrate the validity of IPA research. An interesting suggestion is found in Yardley's (2000) four main criteria: sensitivity to context, commitment to rigour, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance. I used these criteria to reflect on the quality of my research. I also adhered to more recent guidance for rigour in IPA studies specifying that the narratives should resonate or strike a chord with the reader (Smith *et al*., 2009; Van der Zalm and Bergum, 2000). The quality criteria specific to IPA studies

relate to whether the study is acceptable, safe, borderline or unacceptable (Smith, 2011).

To meet the criteria I have subscribed to the theoretical principles of IPA in that the research is phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic, as described earlier in this chapter (3.2.1). My attendance on an IPA training event supported the development of the required skills to ensure this. This chapter also gives transparency to the research approach and methods so that it is clear what has been done. The analysis should also be coherent, plausible and interesting, as discussed earlier in this chapter (3.4.2) and as demonstrated by Chapters 4 to 6. Smith *et al*. (2009, p. 73) also recommend contextualising the interview and as a minimum making notes after the interview. Contextual accounts are given in Chapter 4 and an example of an interview note is also provided (Appendix D). The recommendations are that more specific criteria are also provided in the sampling and evidence for each theme. In this sample, given that I interviewed and analysed twelve participants, it is recommended that I allow extracts from at least three participants for each theme. The main measure of a good and acceptable IPA research study is that the data and interpretation are strong. The recurrent themes demonstrate this evidence of sampling (Appendix L), and the findings chapters and conclusion also discuss this approach.

To further ensure the 'trustworthiness' of the research I have made my beliefs and choices as a researcher explicit throughout this chapter, and have embedded accounts of reflexivity within each part of the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I have been clear with the steps I have

taken to the data analysis approach (3.4.2) and the impact of my reflexivity on this process (Appendices E, H, J and L).

3.7 Ethics

The ethics of conducting qualitative research meant that my ethical responsibilities as a researcher were focused on causing no harm to my participants. To support this I respected and maintained the participants' confidentiality through the data collection and analysis stages of the research and ensured that prior to the interview process the participants were briefed on the ethics of the project and received a participant information sheet (Appendix A). This information sheet outlined issues such as the participant's right to withdraw and the confidentiality of the participant. I completed ethical procedures and documents for ethical approval prior to interviewing the participants and ensured that they were still comfortable with the use of recording and note-taking within the interview. At each point of contact with participants I reminded them of the confidentiality of the project and addressed any queries. Thus in the research I adhered to the ethical considerations of Wiles (2013) concerning qualitative research such as ensuring informed consent, providing information to participants, gaining consent to record the interviews and ensuring the confidentiality of the participants. In addition to reviewing guidelines (Weis and Fine, 2000; Hatch, 2002; Cresswell, 2007), I noted and adhered to the regulations of the Oxford Brookes Research and Ethics Committee, as well as professional ethical guidelines and legal regulations.

3.8 Presentation of Data Analysis

In order to provide an appreciation of the participants' working life experiences and give additional insight into this interpretation, contextual and career information concerning the participants is provided in Table 3.2 and Table 3.3. This supplementary knowledge of the participants enhances understanding as their stories and experiences are weaved throughout Chapters 4 to 6.

Each participant has been given a pseudonym to protect her confidentiality. To summarise Table 3.2 and Table 3.3, of the twelve participants eight were graduates and four had chosen not to go to university. All but one of the participants had gone on to achieve additional master's-level or professional qualifications. All of the participants had experienced a number of roles and organisations in order to progress their careers, with some working overseas. Only one had stayed with the same organisation since her graduation role and for her entire career to date. Half of the participants mentioned family or children at interview. The majority had experienced some form of career barrier.

This additional participant insight aligns with the interpretivist perspective and positions the sample. Smith *et al.* (2009) also advocate the importance of presenting the findings 'in a full narrative account which is comprehensible, systematic and persuasive to the reader' (2009, p. 109). The intention in the findings chapters, therefore, is to give a sense of each individual, to maintain the idiographic nature of the analysis, and to enable the presentation of cross-case comparisons. To achieve this and further

Table 3.2 Participants' Career Overview						
Participants	Graduate (Y/N)	Postgraduate Qualifications	Number of Role/ Organisation Changes	Children (Y/N)	Career Summary	Career Barriers (Y/N)
Athena	N	Master's & Professional Qual.	8 roles 5 organisations	N	Left school at 18 – 'had enough of school'. Progressed quickly through management with roles that 'captured her imagination'. Gained additional qualifications as she switched professions to progress her career to director level in a male-dominated sector.	Y
Eleanor	Y	Master's & Professional Qual.	11 roles 7 organisations	N	Graduate fast track with highly structured, rigorous and competitive career development. 'Driven to achieve' and career oriented. Moved sectors and organisations to advance her career.	Y
Elizabeth	Y	Master's	10 roles 5 organisations	N	Generalised away from her graduate technical specialism and advanced within 'traditional' male environments to become a CEO. Experienced different cultures and organisations through working abroad.	N
Emily	Y	Master's	7 roles 5 organisations	Y	Worked in 'blue chip' organisations, predominantly in male-dominated environments. Experience of different sectors, industries and organisations, always in an HR role.	Y
Erica	Y	Master's & Professional Qual.	5 roles 6 organisations	Y	Non-UK born with an 'eclectic background to roles and industries'. Had risen to a very senior level by taking roles and opportunities that interested her.	Y
Helen	Y	Professional Qual.	3 roles 1 organisation	Y	After graduating with a professional specialism, remained with the same organisation post qualification. Had progressed quickly but then hit a plateau or ceiling.	Y
Jane	Y	Professional Qual.	6 roles 3 organisations	Y	Post graduation had qualified professionally. Had switched organisations and industries to gain experience and remained within the same profession.	Y
Maggie	Y	Master's	8 roles 4 organisations	Y	Had moved abroad post graduation to gain specialist experience. 'No definitive career plan' but had risen to a very senior position in a male-dominated industry.	Y
Marie	N	Master's	4 roles 3 organisations	N	Initially trained as a nurse and had 'risen through the ranks' to a senior director position in the NHS. Had taken additional qualifications to progress her career.	Y
Simone	Y	Master's	6 roles 6 organisations	Y	A graduate who was slightly older than the other participants. Gave a different perspective based on career tenure. Had moved roles and locations within the same public sector industry to develop her career.	Y
Susan	N	None mentioned at interview	5 roles 4 organisations	N	Started her early career in the NHS. Shifted her career into another sector to reach senior level positions. Her career plan related to wanting to be in charge and 'control her own destiny'.	Y
Virginia	N	Professional Qual.	10 roles 9 organisations	N	Having left school at 16, she identified her chosen profession and had taken qualifications to progress her career. Now a managing director (MD), having set up her own company within a group of companies.	Y

Table 3.3 Participants' Coaching and Mentoring Experience Overview

Participants	Introduction to Mentoring	Male or Female Mentor(s)	Introduction to Coaching	Male or Female Coach(s)	Organisation funding for coaching	Trained as a Coach/Mentor	Experiences of Coaching & Mentoring
Athena	Via indirect line manager	Both	Via a trusted person in her network	Male	Company paid for initial sessions; she paid for additional sessions	Y	Occasional
Eleanor	'A really, really good boss'	Male	Referral to a coaching company via network, 'I got myself a coach'	Both	Y	Y	Frequent
Elizabeth	Via line manager	Male	Internal coach	Both	Y	N	Moderate
Emily	Via line manager	Both	Organisation arranged for her as part of development	Both	Y	Y	Frequent
Erica	Via line manager	Both	Via a leadership development programme	Both	Y	N	Occasional
Helen	Very supportive immediate line manager	Male	Requested from her organisation and organised herself to deal with glass ceiling issue	Male	Y	Y	Moderate
Jane	'Immediate line manager really looked after me'	Male	Organisation arranged for her as part of development	Both	Y	Y	Frequent
Maggie	Found mentors herself on an informal basis	Both	Via a leadership development programme	Both	Y	Y	Moderate
Marie	Found mentors herself on an informal basis	Both	Organisation arranged for her as part of development	Both	Y	Y	Moderate
Simone	'Phenomenally supportive immediate boss'	Both	Referral to a coaching company via network, instigated herself	Both	Y	Y	Moderate
Susan	Immediate line manager	Male	Part of a career package when leaving an organisation	Male	Y	N	Frequent
Virginia	Immediate line manager, 'fabulous mentor'	Male	Organisation arranged for her as part of development	Female	Company paid for initial sessions; she paid for additional sessions	N	Occasional

* Occasional = 2 or more coaching programmes; Moderate = 4 or more coaching programmes; Frequent = long-term relationship with coach and 6 or more coaching programmes.

illustrate and inform this discussion, the essence of the participants' voices is contained for reference within tables and will be referred to within the text to highlight relevant insights. Individual participant examples will also be interwoven with my interpretation of their experiences. Informing the findings generated by the research, a summary discussion is subsequently presented in conjunction with the key extant literature at the end of each chapter. The chapter titles and underpinning themes are captured in Figure 3.2 below.

Career Challenges (Chapter 4)	Early Career Journey (Chapter 5)	Later Career & Legacy (Chapter 6)
Barriers	Mentoring Experiences	Coaching experiences
Coping Strategies	Networking	Coaching Relationship
	Group Development	Coaching & Mentoring Others
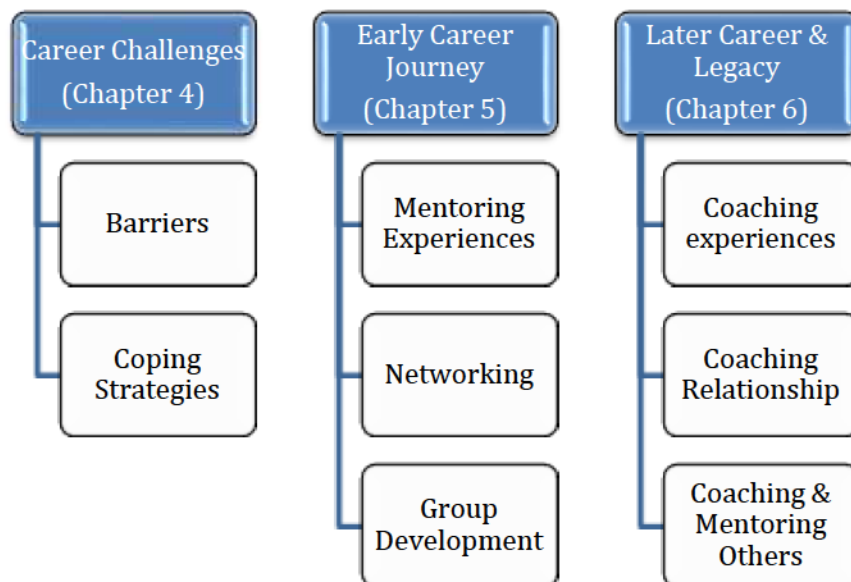
Figure 3.2 – Data Analysis Chapters and Themes Overview

This chapter has examined the philosophy and methodology of this research. A reflexive account of the data analysis approach has also been provided. The following three chapters present the main themes that emerged through my detailed interpretation of the participants' accounts: career challenges, early career journey support, and later career development and legacy. The findings illustrate the richness of the

participants' experiences of coaching and mentoring. The topics also emphasise the remarkably similar steps on the participants' unique journey to success and the nature of the support that they received to navigate their career. The initial theme of career challenges is explored in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 **Career Challenges**

In this chapter the participants who had experienced the most career barriers in their organisations discussed the coping strategies they employed to overcome these obstacles and move forwards. Essentially these strategies either led to, or impacted on their coaching and mentoring experiences, which are discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6. I will commence with an exploration of the varied career barriers encountered by the participants and will subsequently examine their coping strategies.

4.1 Barriers and Glass Ceilings

The majority of the participants had faced barriers to career progression at some stage, and they were invited to describe the nature of these barriers. The differences in their experiences relate to the type of barrier and their perception of whether this impacted their overall career advancement. Their descriptions varied along a continuum of overt sexist behaviour, glass ceilings and the impact of a male-dominated working environment, and revealed their perception of covert 'exclusion' from the many facets of organisational life.

Athena, Eleanor, Erica, Helen, Maggie and Virginia acknowledged their experience of the glass ceiling and other metaphors for this barrier (Table 4.1). However, their mention of additional considerations such as 'nationality' (Athena, Maggie), 'personality' (Erica), and 'ageism' (Virginia) indicated their perception that these barriers are not just gender related. This suggests their general awareness of being treated 'differently' in some way from the 'majority', in terms of career development. For Athena, Erica, Elizabeth and Maggie their exposure to other countries and cultures

	Table 4.1 – Career Barriers		
	Barriers in my career	**Male-dominated working environment**	**What this means for me and my career**
Athena	*'There were both – gender and nationality.'*	*'[It's] heavily male-dominated, quite a macho culture. It's quite tough in there as a woman.'*	*'You have to be very resilient.'* *'[It has affected] the way I've been allowed to operate, rather than necessarily in terms of promotion.'*
Eleanor	*'[I have] come across the glass ceiling, cliff, escalator and the labyrinth.'* *'[I was] offered a job that no self-respecting man was going to take because it was damaging to their career.'*		*'If you are assertive you get pushed back by men because you are being too assertive.'*
Elizabeth	*'Maybe I've been around it too long to notice. I was promoted through every company I've worked in and supported.'*	*'[The organisations were] all very male-orientated. [I was the] first woman they'd taken on in a X role. I'd already got the job [when] he asked whether I could drive.'*	*'[They] had to treat me as an honorary male, even though I was the person who knew more about the business than my boss, who was next to me, which was quite funny.'*
Emily	*'It makes a difference on what roles you're in. In HR I haven't experienced it to the same extent.'*		
Erica	*'I've experienced a lot of glass ceilings but I don't know if it's because I'm female or because of my personality.'*	*'[It's] an extremely masculine culture, and old-fashioned.'* *'Business is a man's game. They have been doing it for many years and we haven't.'*	*'It's hard to get into a role if people don't see you in the role.'*
Helen	*'I'm banging my head against that glass ceiling and whether I'm going to break it, I don't know, whether things are going to change in my lifetime.'*		*'My progress was slow.'* *'It's so tough … they actually fall out of the race themselves without anybody doing it.'* *'The higher up the food chain, [the] less [it is] about how hard you work and [the] more [it is] about how Machiavellian you are.'*
Jane		*'If [men] want to chat about something with one of their colleagues they'll just go to the pub together or go and have dinner together.'*	*'You have to be pretty robust, pretty self-sufficient.'*
Maggie	*'"Glass ceiling" is used for females. It can also be for different nationalities or race … I've had a lot of help not to be hampered by it.'* *'I broke through the ceiling.'*		
Marie	*'I wasn't really conscious of a glass ceiling, because [I was] encouraged by people.'*		*'There are assumptions made, because of either my role or my gender.'*
Simone	*'You didn't have women at the top when I started.'*		
Susan		*'[I was the] only female on an all-male team. I felt very excluded.'*	*'A life-changing experience, because that's what made me change my career.'*
Virginia	*'[It's] absolutely brutal. There's a glass ceiling concept and there's some ageism creeping in.'*	*'Some of the concepts of bowing and scraping to these senior old men turns my stomach.'*	*'If I express quite a robust opinion, it's not accepted because I'm female.'*

through their career assignments could also account for their heightened perception of being 'different' from the majority, and in a clear minority. Maggie's glass ceiling experience relates to her having been the youngest person and the only woman in certain environments, which brought its own pressures for which she had ultimately sought coaching support. Maggie recognised the impact of the glass ceiling and said: 'I've had a lot of help not to be hampered by it.' This reference to support was also echoed by Elizabeth and Marie, who acknowledged how they received encouragement and support to overcome this potential barrier.

This is also captured in Virginia's perspective on the glass ceiling. Her belief is that the impact of these barriers varies in how it is treated by different sizes of businesses.

> *'If I was at P&G or Unilever or Diageo I would have some official recourse, but in a small business like this, it's really tough.'*

Within small businesses it was much more difficult, from her perspective, to resolve gender barriers because of the lack of support or channels to address the issue. This demonstrates her need for support to overcome these barriers and the challenges of the working environment. In contrast, Emily had experienced barriers within one operational role and had seen instances of the barrier as part of her HR role, but personally she didn't feel she 'had experienced it to the same extent.' As an HR professional and director in a number of organisations, she felt that she had not actually experienced any barriers other than pay inequality. She did, however, share her thoughts and experiences of the glass ceiling barrier being dependent on 'role' rather than 'level'.

Helen's story demonstrates the challenges and personal impact that such a barrier can have on a woman and her career. Helen was actively battling a more 'traditionally' defined glass ceiling at the time of the research. Helen had risen rapidly in her role after graduation and matched her male colleagues' achievements, but her aspiration to reach the upper echelons of equity partnership had not yet been fulfilled.

> *'I just feel sometimes as if I'm banging my head against that glass ceiling and whether I'm going to break it, I don't know, whether things are going to change in my lifetime.'*

Her use of a physical metaphor and the literal impact of the barrier were notable, as was her lack of belief that things would change. Her frustration at the energy she had exerted to understand how she could get through this barrier was also apparent. She described another physical metaphor:

> *'[I was] hitting a bit of a brick wall – [I was told] "we want you, we want more women like you", but my progress was slow compared to others, other males I would say, not other females.'*

Here, though, Helen highlights the duplicity of the messages she is receiving from her professional environment. Her further use of the term 'Machiavellian' to describe the way she perceived she had to operate to succeed, also suggests a duplicitous working environment. This is supported by her description of her experience of organisational life and her career as being like a 'poker game'. She also described 'political games', which gives an additional insight into the difficulty of the challenges she faced. This language and metaphor were used to illustrate the complexity of her situation, and she described how her mentor had 'taught her the rules' to support her through these games. Her biggest irritation was that the rules and measures by which she could progress were not clear. There was a great sense of frustration in not knowing what the real rules of the game were: 'the unwritten rules, it's knowing what the unwritten rules are'.

Helen's use of metaphor to describe the environment she faced was enlightening and supports her creation and recreation of meaning in the environment and situational context she found herself in. Helen's perspective of what women might want from career support alludes again to the game-playing aspect of the context.

> *'One is a level playing field and secondly, an understanding of what the rules are because I think sometimes women don't actually get to know what the informal rules are, and it's access to that, because how are you ever going to get there if you don't actually know what the rules are?'*

Helen's repetition of the term 'rules' reinforced her logic that there must be rules that were, in effect, an exclusionary barrier. The impact of this barrier on her was patently clear.

> *'It's so tough that people actually get to the point where they think, I just don't have the energy for this any more, so they actually fall out of the race themselves without anybody doing it.'*

Her use of the third person ('women' and 'people') to describe the situation and the decision point she had reached for herself was also compelling, suggesting that Helen was effectively taking a view from another place, putting herself outside of the situation in order to process the impact on her. Objectively she was trying to make meaning of the situation she herself was in. Her resilience and tenacity were keeping her there, when many had just left or were about to leave. There was a sense of pessimism about the outcome but she was resigned to keep fighting despite deliberating the opportunity to leave.

A variant of the glass ceiling barrier was encountered by Eleanor, who described her experience of the 'glass cliff' (2.1.2), where women are more likely to be in or offered precarious leadership positions (Ryan and Haslam, 2006).

'I was given a huge, very difficult project, very little money, virtually no staff, and it was a political hot potato; and after about six weeks I really hit the wall and I went to speak to a number of senior people about the project and was it actually achievable, and two of them just laughed out loud and said, "well you do know how many men turned the job down don't you?" In terms of that being an example of a glass cliff, a woman being offered a job that no self-respecting man was going to take because they thought it was damaging to their career, yeah, a really good example.'

The physical descriptor of this barrier is again present in her reference to having 'hit the wall'. Her perception that 'no self-respecting man' would accept the role left it unsaid that as a woman she would. Remarkably, while Eleanor recognised that the career opportunity she had been given was a glass cliff, she also described this as a 'lucky break'. Her recognition of the dual aspect to this career opportunity was profound and acknowledges her acceptance of such 'high-risk' opportunities to develop her career.

Simone's account was different from the other participants. She was slightly older than the rest of the women and reflected on her early career experiences during the interview. Her insight into how women, herself included, had been actively discriminated against in senior roles was an informative account of how work used to be for some women and how the societal context through legislation has changed some aspects of the working environment. Although a lone occurrence in this group of women, I thought it interesting to share her insight.

'Certainly [after] my first maternity leave I came back to appalling discrimination. At the time if nurses/sisters took maternity leave the expectation was if they wanted to come back to work they didn't come back to a sister's grade, they came back to a more junior grade … That was the '80s. I was furious at the time but in the end sort of walked away from it.'

Her reference to initial anger and then compliance highlights more broadly that although overt discriminatory acts may have been curbed by legislation, acceptance of the status quo is still apparent. This ironically was

also suggested as being the case for most of the other participants. Simone's account also seemed incredulous to me as a woman who had entered the employment market nearly ten years after her, or perhaps I had forgotten similar aspects of my own earlier career experiences. Her reflections on maternity leave and flexible working also highlighted how her options to progress had been limited at that time.

> *'I was very keen not to take time out with the children because my perception was that I would come back in at a much more junior level.'*

Having 'endured' this level of discrimination throughout her early career, her current viewpoint was positive and she appeared optimistic about her current career opportunities.

> *'I would have no qualms, would not feel discriminated against in going for a more senior position because of my gender.'*

Simone felt that early mentoring support from a male boss had assisted her. Simone's experience would today be described as unacceptable, but she had come through this challenge and wanted to move on.

The varied experiences shared by the participants highlight the problematic nature of defining the concept of career barriers. The ability to effect a sustained change to their situation is also absent from these accounts. This is discussed further within the next section.

4.2 Male-dominated Working Environments

In addition to glass ceiling career barriers, Athena, Elizabeth, Erica, Jane, Susan and Virginia spoke of the male-dominated working environment that they had experienced in their roles and career development (Table 4.1). The predominant language and rhetoric relates to their description and perception of the 'masculine', 'macho' gendered and 'exclusionary' nature

of the environment they worked in. Athena's statement that 'it's quite tough in there as a woman' articulates her general feeling of being different, and how hard it is being a minority in her working environment.

The presence of 'boys' clubs' as a form of male domination that acts as a barrier to career development, is illustrated by Susan and Jane's accounts of their workplaces. Here the exclusion they each faced from social and organisational networks as the only woman at a senior level, impacted their ability to develop within their organisations, ultimately causing them to review their career options. Susan's account shows the impact on her career of the exclusion she had experienced.

> *'At that time, I was the only female on an all-male team. This was a particular group of people, I felt very excluded. They would go away for boys' weekends away, you know, they'd go on the booze cruise to Calais.'*

Susan had suffered in this environment over a period of three years. She related the impact of this experience on her.

> *'I didn't really know how to deal with it, and I think what I did was personalise it all, so instead of thinking, you know, this is just a bunch of tossers and I need to go and work somewhere else, I started to think, well, this is because I can't do the job, they must think it must be because I'm not really up to this job, and then that spiralled out of control, really, and I left.'*

Susan's reference to the internal personalising of her situation demonstrates that she believed the problem was hers and related to her capability, which highlights the impact of this male domination on her confidence and level of self-belief.

> *'Actually a pretty difficult experience and actually a life-changing experience, yeah, because that's what made me change my career.'*

The situation led her to leave the organisation, request coaching and mentoring support and ultimately change her career direction. Despite this experience, it was striking that Susan didn't believe that she had

experienced a barrier: 'I've never felt prevented from taking a senior post because of my gender.' I observed how she had interpreted the original meaning of the glass ceiling (Davies-Netzley, 1998) in a different way. This is an interesting perspective, given the experience she described. In comparison with the other participants, this was a situation where the exclusionary acts of her colleagues affected her ability to progress in her role and ultimately her career. However, Susan did not regard this experience as having caused her career to suffer, because it occurred when she was already in a senior role, and she had subsequently transferred to another senior role elsewhere. It was noteworthy that following her coaching support, Susan spoke of how she would now deal with the situation differently. At the time, however, it had affected her judgment, confidence and ability to deal with the situation.

Jane's account illustrates the impact on her career of the 'boys' club' exclusionary barrier to career progression in a different way. Jane believed this exclusion also impacted on her identity as a woman.

> *'You're sat at the table, you look differently, you speak differently, you don't want to drink three pints of beer so it's just much, much harder to get there and to be comfortable at every level in an organization.'*

This potential exclusion via the 'social drinking' of her male colleagues was a very sensitive issue for her career development. As she spoke of how going to the pub was an exclusionary activity, this was juxtaposed with wanting 'social time with the management team'. Jane, therefore, recognised the importance of social/informal time for a management team to be together, but there was a perception that as a woman she was being excluded. Conversely, Jane was also concerned about her perception as a

woman being included in this 'boys' club' environment and illustrated what it meant to her to work in such an environment.

> *'Just no thought given to being a woman or walking into a room full of men, all of the dinners. I have to really think about what I wear. I won't wear that dress because it's a bit tight.'*

The dilemma for Jane highlights her perception of the sexual dynamic in her relationships with male colleagues in a predominantly male environment. Jane, however, didn't want to be like the other women in her organisation who joined in with these 'boys' clubs'.

> *'Well, at X the female partners were sort of lads in skirts. They'd go out and they were one of the boys, which they did by drinking ten pints and swearing.'*

This depiction of her female colleagues conveys her disdain of their efforts to integrate and suggests her struggle with her own identity at this point in her career. To maintain her career she had to ensure she was included, no matter how much she didn't want to be part of these activities. Jane had sought coaching to deal with some of these aspects of exclusion and 'fitting in'.

Athena provided another insight into what she faced in this male-dominated environment.

> *'I think it is just generally tough. It is assumed that, as a woman, you won't have the stamina or the energy, almost, to conduct yourself at the highest level in some of those organisations, and secondly, I have experienced where frankly you are considered, I suppose, inferior intellectually because you are a female.'*

It is interesting that Athena noted both the physical and psychological impact of this work environment on her. It is this holistic impact that pervades her career and also affects the way that Athena, as a woman, perceives that she is 'allowed to operate' in her role. This raises the question as to why she stays in a position where she cannot operate in the way she would like to. This question is addressed to some extent in her

recognition that 'you have to be very resilient', which suggests that compliance with the status quo is necessary, and again highlights the perceived physical nature of this environment, noted earlier in Helen's account. This pervading experience of domination was captured again when Athena spoke of the consequence for her of proving herself.

> *'When demonstrating that you can add your worth to the process and to the organisation, constantly you're aware that they're almost looking for you to trip up, so that they can say you're not up to it.'*

The inference is that she is controlled, on the lookout for offences rather than gaining the support to do her role. This physical language is also captured in words such as 'robust' (Jane, Virginia), 'pushed back' (Eleanor), 'tough' and 'fall out of the race' (Helen), and alludes again to the stereotypical strength and domination of males in this environment (Table 4.1). It is an unspoken rule that you have to fit in and be 'strong' like a man to make it.

Interestingly, Virginia, Eleanor and Helen also commented on the way they perceived that they were 'allowed to challenge' this male-dominated environment.

> *'If I express quite a robust opinion, it's not accepted because I'm female and there's a "oh she's off on one again". They have actually said sometimes "it's the wrong time of the month".'*

Virginia's example and commentary illustrates the specific gender focus of this challenge in her context. The women's perception of not being able to question the status quo, and their compliance to the standard way of working is an interesting phenomenon and is analysed further below (4.3.1).

Having discussed the participants' experiences and perceptions of the various barriers of gender, race, age, personality, male dominated working

environments, boy's clubs and the exclusion they faced, the impact of these experiences on the participants and how they managed to develop their careers despite these barriers is now explored through their coping strategies.

4.3 Coping Strategies

This section explores how the participants facilitated and maintained their presence in the career 'game'. The women had two main coping strategies in handling and effectively overcoming the gendered barriers to their career development: adaptation and sacrifice. The first strategy was used by eight of the participants, who believed they had to adapt their style or self-concept to be successful in their workplace (4.3.1). The second strategy was used by ten of the participants, who gave up or balanced aspects of their personal life to develop their careers (4.3.2).

4.3.1 Adapting for Career Development

Athena, Eleanor, Elizabeth, Emily, Erica, Helen, Jane and Virginia all discussed how they had adapted their working style in order to succeed in the environments they worked in. Their approaches varied from conformance to business and male stereotypes such as 'playing golf' (Virginia) and being 'more direct and dominant' (Emily), to changing behaviour (Athena, Jane, Elizabeth, Eleanor) or setting themselves apart from 'the rules of the game' (Erica) (Table 4.2).

The strong desire to 'fit in' to the organisation in an acceptable way was apparent for Athena, Eleanor, Jane and Virginia. The demands of working within the confines of the system 'biding your time' (Athena) and doing so

	Table 4.2 – Coping Strategies – Adapting for Career Development	
	How I've adapted to fit in my organization	**What adapting means to me**
Athena	*'[You] have to bide your time and keep plugging away and just not take it personally.'* *'[You] search for different ways of finding solutions to problems and different ways of getting around situations and how to present something to your colleagues.'*	*'You'll be sitting in a meeting, the room will go quiet and they'll look at you, carry on the conversation and if you want to speak up you'll be down as some kind of squawking fishwife.'* *'You can see a lot of time becomes wasted and perhaps less optimal solutions are put forward because that's the route that you need to take to get it heard.'*
Eleanor	*'You have to be better, more visible, more vocal, more understanding, more patient, more diplomatic. You have to know more people, you have to network more thoroughly and you have to do all that under the radar.'*	*'[I had to] really live on my wits and be incredibly likeable in order to get the support to do the job I needed to do.'* *'Men didn't accept me because I'd been brought in from head office to do a job that they thought they should be doing, and the women didn't want to support me because I was a woman, not doing the role of X, which is what women did.'*
Elizabeth	*'I've had to adapt a little bit … because I've always worked in X, data rational companies so it might not be a man thing, it might just be the nature of the work I'm doing.'*	*'Maybe you have to change your approach without even knowing it, subconsciously.'*
Emily	*'[I] used my femininity to an advantage.'* *'I would be more direct, more dominant.'*	*'I wouldn't show my emotions the same.'* *'[It was] a political, aggressive organisation, harder there; you had to be quite two-faced.'*
Erica	*'I don't play by their rules, but I'm aware of the rules.'* *'You have to be willing to stand by your convictions and also be ready to walk away.'*	*'You cannot go to work ten hours a day and pretend, because people notice.'* *'[You] have to be very authentic throughout your career.'*
Helen	*'I know certainly I am not very good at playing political games.'*	*'You don't want to come across as negative and challenge it.'* *'You look as if you are the slightly mad eccentric bra-burning feminist, so you have to tread it very carefully.'*
Jane	*'[You have to be] chameleon-like but if you're not good enough at that then you actually become untrustworthy.'* *'[You] have to be more gobby to be heard and have to be better as well in order to be there.'*	*'It is difficult to manage your authenticity. You do have to check who you are.'* *'The minute you're emotional about anything you just lose credibility.'* *'[I] deal with it with humour.'*
Virginia	*'I even took up golf to try and be able to get some dialogue.'*	*'I don't get a fair voice.'* *'You have to position things a lot more.'*

because you are a woman, is clearly suggested. How they adapted their style and ways of working is illustrated in Eleanor's account.

> *'It is still difficult being a woman. You have to be better, more visible, more vocal, more understanding, more patient, more diplomatic. You have to know more people, you have to network more thoroughly and you have to do all that under the radar so that you don't challenge and threaten your male colleagues, and that really, really hacks me off, actually, that you've got to do all of that, but you do. You have to.'*

The resentment of this situation is notable, as is the reference to not upsetting the status quo. The dilemma of doing this in an organisationally acceptable way and in a personally authentic manner was also apparent.

> *'If you are assertive you get pushed back by men because you are being too assertive, but in a man they think that it's a real gift. In a woman it's, you know, get out of my sight, you're pushing yourself forward too much.'*

Eleanor highlights the double standards apparent for her between men and women, which meant that she had to tread a path between recognising what women thought of her and how men wanted her to act.

> *'There were occasions where the men didn't accept me because I'd been brought in from head office to do a job that they thought they should be doing, and the women didn't particularly want to support me either because I was a woman, and why was I not doing the role of X, which is what women by and large did in the '80s. I had to really live on my wits and be incredibly likeable in order to get the support in order to be able to do the job that I needed to do.'*

What people thought of her was, therefore, of great importance to Eleanor. For example, she stated, 'I wouldn't want to be called a "queen bee"'. Her gender ideology 'battle' acknowledges that she is trapped between two worlds and illustrates her adaptation to this gendered organisational context. These 'double bind' aspects caused Eleanor to consider her own authenticity and led her to seek coaching support. Eleanor's authenticity dilemma is a personal consequence of adapting to her working environment.

The other women who raised this had a variety of other issues related to their perceived requirement to adapt. These varied from a similar quest for authenticity (Jane and Erica), a wish to consider and 'position' their actions (Virginia) and a frustration at the ineffectiveness of the ways they have to work (Helen and Athena). The time, consideration and effort required to fulfil their roles and develop their careers within the rules and operating practices of a working world established by others are apparent. Coaching was used by Helen, Jane and Emily to manage this challenge.

The preference to remain authentic was an important consideration for Jane and Erica. In particular, Jane spoke of her need to fit in and adapt her behaviour and language in order to be included. This, however, also impacted on her authenticity.

> *'I find that I have to be quite chameleon-like but if you're not good enough at that then you actually become untrustworthy, so people notice that you're changing your behaviour, because men don't; men just are who they are and whatever … You have to change your behaviour in order to fit in and speak the language and everything.'*

Jane captures, similarly to Eleanor, the double standards at play in their working environment. Jane, however, was more explicit about the personal adjustment that she had to make and how she didn't want to be the deferential type of person she felt you had to be in order to succeed in that environment, through 'brown-nosing'. It was perceptible that Jane found it a challenge to manage her personal feelings while selecting the right strategy to achieve career success.

> *'I mean, I'm quite an emotional person and the minute you're emotional about anything you just lose credibility.'*

This illustrates again Jane's struggle with her identity in this working environment. In contrast, Emily had less issue with her identity as a woman in a male-dominated environment, and her adaptation related directly to her

gender. Emily was the only participant who spoke to me about using her femininity when adapting her style: 'I've never not used my femininity to my advantage.' Emily felt that the use of her femininity within her current organisation was a calming influence and a distinct advantage to the team. Adapting her style between different organisations and cultures was also highlighted and Emily described what this meant to her. When asked if she had adapted her style between two different cultures she recounted, 'yeah, absolutely, I'm more authentic here than I was there; I wouldn't show my emotions the same'. She had adapted her open style to cover her emotions, such as 'crying in the toilets'. In her current organisation she felt that she could be more authentic and true to her values, as she was working in a less male-dominated and 'macho' environment.

Erica's struggle to maintain authenticity related specifically to how she perceived women role-playing their working lives rather than being authentic.

> *'Personally you have to be very authentic throughout your career because I've seen people go down with stress because they put on a mask every time, and that is the worst you can do because at the end of the day, don't ever get so locked in that you can't live without the company, because you can always change company.'*

She was adamant that she maintained her authenticity in terms of being a woman, highlighted by her use of metaphors to describe how to handle men 'in the game' and recognising that 'we're playing in a man's world'. Erica was very open, making the assumption that as a woman she herself was drawn into the game: 'I automatically assume the man is the more senior' was an interesting insight. Erica had observed and experienced differences in the way men and women act in the workplace.

> *'That's business. Business is a man's game because they have been doing it for many years and we haven't. We are still playing by*

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> *our girls' rules, where they're playing at their boys' rules, and it's different things.'*

Erica was acutely aware of the signals men sent out 'in the game', and although she was clear that she didn't want to be the same as the men she worked with, she was also sure that she needed to be aware of it. Her objective outsider approach, rising above this game and watching what was happening, was how she managed this aspect of her career. This was again manifest in her approach to carving out her own way, rather than feeling that she had to 'act like a man' or compromise her authenticity.

This need to 'fit in' with other people's perceptions was an important issue. Athena and Helen both describe how they perceived a demand to manage how they raised problems in an organisationally acceptable way. The phrases 'squawking fishwife' (Athena) and 'bra-burning feminist' (Helen) highlight their perception of the negative connotations of challenge in their environments. Their extreme and 'stereotypical' phrases to describe any challenge to the status quo also capture their disdain for the way they believe they are being judged for their dispute.

Additionally, having to change their personality, or effectively role-play in order to fit in with the organisational context and culture was significant for many of the participants. However, a negative aspect of adjusting style or adopting inauthentic behaviour was being scared of being exposed or 'found out' by their peers. This 'imposter syndrome' is emphasised in Virginia's example.

> *'I don't think I'm as good as people think I am, and I think I've blagged my way this far. I've winged it and I've not got found out. I think I might get found out that I'm not actually as intelligent as they think I am.'*

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Virginia's experience conveys her reaction to her peers' extreme masculinity and how this had affected her self-confidence. Virginia and Susan both spoke of this adjustment, causing them to seek coaching to reconnect with their core personality.

For others the requirement to change was a broader issue than just a personal impact.

> *'I think that you can see a lot of time becomes wasted and perhaps less optimal solutions are put forward just actually because that's the route that you need to take to get it heard okay.'*

Athena's account concerns the less than optimal way she had to operate within organisations, and the ultimate impact on the organisation's effectiveness. She related her unease with the situation and felt that it took longer to reach an optimal solution. This suggests the belief that she is capable of more but is being held back or contained in order to comply with and not 'upset' the dominant culture and its practices.

For two of the participants, Eleanor and Erica, this requirement to adapt their style to fit with a broader organisational context had caused them to leave their organisation. Eleanor had left a role because she was wary of her new manager and didn't want to work with him. He had wanted to control her, so she left: 'I knew that I couldn't work with him and it was a completely animal instinct.' Eleanor had a strong desire for personal freedom and wanted career success on her terms. This suggests that in some circumstances the desire for authenticity overrides the perceived requirement for compliance with the status quo. However, Eleanor equally recognised that this move came at a time when she wanted to broaden her career horizons, rather than stay within the same institution for a longer period. Erica had also left roles where she hadn't liked her new manager:

'he betrayed my current boss who I really rated, so I didn't see any reason to support him.' Again, Erica had a strong motivation and drive to succeed on her own terms and remain authentic.

For the participants the complexity of managing their authenticity and also managing stereotypical assumptions of the role of women by both men and women was a palpable issue. Adapting was regarded as a strategy for coping with barriers to career development and for operating in a gendered, male-dominated environment. The women's perception of their need to adapt and comply with the established way of working suggests their recognition of being different. This 'difference' was also noted in the participants' views on career barriers and male-dominated environments, suggesting a general acceptance that this is the established institutional mindset or 'way of the world' in their organisations. In addition to ways of adapting, however, the participants shared another method that had helped them improve their working situation, namely making sacrifices and compromises.

4.3.2 **Sacrifices and Compromises**

Ten of the twelve participants spoke of how their career development and success had meant sacrifice or compromise for them personally (Table 4.3). The demands from their organisations to move roles and locations, with growing responsibilities equating to completing time at work while building their careers, meant the women had to make some tough decisions in terms of work–life balance issues.

The participants' concessions varied from sacrificing their personal life

	Table 4.3 – Coping Strategies - Sacrifices and Compromises	
	The sacrifices and compromises I have made	**What that means to me and my career**
Eleanor	*'[I] had to be totally mobile, totally flexible, which did render a bit of havoc with my personal life.'*	*'Is my home life important to me or is my career important to me?'*
Elizabeth	*'I'm a mother, two small kids, husband, house, jobs, extra promotions, more responsibilities. I think, how on earth did I do that?'*	*'You just get on with it and sometimes you just need to talk to people about that tension.'*
Emily	*'After they've had children and they're going back to work, they're not the same person, because you have guilt.'*	*'You always have guilt. The more senior you are you have to balance the choice of working and not working.'*
Erica	*'Many women who try to do everything, they kill themselves.'*	*'You cannot be the perfect mummy to pick up all the time. You cannot be the perfect, you know, baking cookies; you have to buy them.'*
Helen	*'You miss a lot of time with your children. You don't see your family much.'*	*'You make a lot of sacrifices. So many women just think, sod this, why am I killing myself for something which I might never get?'*
Jane	*'I want to go to the school gates and arrange a play date and just be involved.'*	*'[It's] really difficult … [it's] hard to be you.'*
Maggie	*'Balancing my family life and work life.'*	*'I will travel as much as I need to but the family comes first and stays put.'*
Marie	*I'm always at work and how do I manage my husband?'*	*'My head is still there [at work].'*
Simone	*'Because the children were under five, to get the balance I chose to stay at a particular level.'* *'I was working something crazy the way they'd restructured: seventy/eighty hours a week.'*	*'It really wasn't challenging enough, [so I] took the opportunity to do a distance learning MBA.'* *'I was very, very keen not to take time out with children because my perception was that I would come back in at a more junior level.'*
Virginia	*'I was working evenings and weekends.'*	*'[My current partner is] the first person I've had a proper relationship with since I started X, because I lived and breathed every second.'*

(Eleanor), to compromising their work and family life (Elizabeth, Emily, Erica, Marie and Virginia), and to working proactively to manage the balance between the two (Jane, Maggie and Simone). Their feelings varied from guilt (Emily), to a sense of missing out on home and family relationships (Helen). Overall there was awareness from the participants that a strong presence at work meant career development, and although this was important to them, compromise was inevitable. This was a challenge in itself due to the hurdles they faced in their career development. Eleanor, Elizabeth, Emily, Helen, Marie, Simone and Virginia had ultimately sought coaching support to manage the conflicts of their career and life balance, discussed further within Chapter 6.

An important concern for the majority of the participants was the compromise of not seeing or spending time with family as a result of pursuing a career, as highlighted by Helen.

> *'You do have to make a lot of personal sacrifices. You miss a lot of time with your children. You don't see your family much. You do make a lot of sacrifices, which is why I think so many women just think, sod this, why am I killing myself for something which I might never get?'*

Helen's perception of the inequity of her situation again surfaces here. She also expresses the 'unsaid' view of how some women see men dealing with this pressure to manage home and work. 'Men have wives! They don't have to deal with the domestic baggage. When little Johnny's ill, they don't get the call.' The energy it takes to maintain this compromise and the toll it had taken on Helen was apparent, especially given her own experiences with the glass ceiling (4.1).

The consequences of these sacrifices and compromises and what this meant to the women is also captured (Table 4.3). Eleanor's account,

illustrates both aspects of this dilemma and how her career success was achieved at a cost to her personal life.

> *'I've made sacrifices, no question about it. They've always been informed sacrifices … You had to be totally mobile, totally flexible, which did render a bit of havoc with my personal life.'*

Eleanor shares her decision to sacrifice her personal life and a chance to have a family to pursue her career development. Eleanor reflected on her sacrifice and reconciled it with the enjoyment she gained from progressing up the hierarchy. She recognised that the total flexibility that was required had impacted her personally, and she recalled the questions she had asked herself to decide whether she wanted a career or to be a mother:

> *'What is the most important thing to me? Do I want to be a wife, a mother? Is my home life important to me or is my career important to me? And although things have changed as I've got older, actually at that time, yeah, my career was important to me. It really was important to me.'*

Eleanor's repetition of the words 'it really was important to me' emphasise the decision she had taken and the finality of the choice she had made at that time. The word 'sacrifices' to describe her decisions, rather than 'compromises', suggests that she recognised the loss she had experienced. These sacrifices were regarded as 'informed sacrifices', as she acknowledged that she knew the choice that had to be made. For Eleanor, however, this personal sacrifice was balanced with her overarching drive to succeed and rise up the professional hierarchy, which came through strongly in the interview. The impact of needing to care for her parents later in her career, however, had meant that she had left a subsequent role in order to fulfil caring responsibilities. Eleanor's concern about the impact of this experience was on her career longevity: 'my worst fear [is] … can I get myself back in at that level?' Her concern for how she would step back in and continue to move up highlighted this tension: how her personal life had impacted on her career, as well as how she had

previously sacrificed her personal life for her career. This was a key insight on the vagaries of managing a career.

The pressure for the women to compromise in order to advance their careers is also captured from an alternative perspective by Erica's comment on not being the 'perfect mummy'. This relates more to compromising the pursuit of perfection in her home life in order to maintain her work life, and the question of how to balance this dilemma. Erica's view on why women don't make it – 'I don't know if we don't want it enough, or aren't willing to make the sacrifices' – is thought-provoking and highlights the compromise she believes women have to choose to make. The high levels of energy and resilience needed to develop and succeed in male-dominated environments and to conduct life in general in order to progress in their careers, was also apparent for these women.

An interesting insight came from Jane, Simone and Maggie's approaches to managing this compromise between career and family life. Their requirement for support mechanisms to proactively manage this was apparent from their comments. Jane's wish to be there for her family and to be involved in their lives, especially in the early years, had clearly shaped her choices and need for flexible working patterns, but this meant there was little time for herself. She shared her need for authenticity in her comment that it's 'hard to be you'. Similarly, Simone had used coaching to help her pull back from her career to regain a sense of work–life balance. An alternative strategy taken by Maggie was to focus primarily on her family life and then to balance that with her work life.

> *'Part of my rationale all the time has been about balancing my family life and work life, so we've always said I will travel as much as I need to but the family comes first and stays put.'*

Maggie wouldn't compromise on the impact a job had on her family life and took decisions in her career based on this. She mentioned how she had discussed opportunities and career choices with both her husband and her mentor based on the impact these might have on her family.

The women all spoke of the need to compromise their personal life to achieve career success. The degree of regret and impact varied, but their resolve to pursue their career was not diminished. They had succeeded because of the sacrifices and compromises they had made, and they had sacrificed and compromised a great deal.

4.4 Chapter Summary and Discussion

This chapter has discussed the barriers and challenges experienced by the women and the adaptation and sacrifices they made for their career advancement.

It is clear that the majority of the barriers and challenges faced by the participants in their career were experienced as gender-driven (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Ernst and Young, 2012; Ibarra *et al.*, 2013) and that a few women expressed that they had been in a position to challenge the male norm, which was associated with the 'double bind' of working in a male environment (Eagly and Carli, 2007). However, while acknowledging Eagly and Carli's (2007) argument about there being more than one glass ceiling barrier to women's advancement, the present research also shows that restricting this discussion of barriers and challenges to gender only (gender binary) neglects several other

intertwining dimensions. The women highlighted barriers related to age, nationality, personality and race as well as gender, and their experiences and perceptions of such barriers varied in impact and meaning among the participant group. It can be argued therefore, that a more nuanced discussion of gendered organisations is needed (Acker, 1990), which would take into consideration the multi-layeredness of barriers to career advancement that women might be confronted with (Calas and Smircich, 2006; Billing, 2011; Corlett and Mavin, 2014). This also addresses Mavin's (2006) call for further research into the context of women in senior management and their advancement.

The nature of these career barriers prompted a number of the participants to seek coaching and mentoring support in their working environment. This study therefore adds a new dimension to coaching research (Broughton and Miller, 2009) by including explicitly *how* women took action to cope with such barriers.

The first strategy the participants used was attempting to 'fit in' and adapt themselves to their work context. However, this was in most cases experienced and perceived as inauthentic and ineffective. The negative impact that these adapted working styles and behaviours had on the women's sense of authenticity, self-esteem and self-confidence was clear from many of their accounts. This supports Sinclair's (2013) research concerning the complexity of the challenge for female leaders to attain authenticity in their professional role. The participants' experience of coaching to support them in dealing with this issue aligns with Worth's (2012) heuristic research of coaching towards authenticity. Worth (2012, p. 129) shows how difficult it is for women to be themselves in the 'powerful,

oppressive and political environment' observed in her study, and how this prevents authentic behaviour and encourages the creation of masks. Worth's (2012) research took place in the higher education sector in the UK, and she recommends further research to understand the complexities of authenticity and how coaching might assist. The current research provides a further basis for suggesting that challenges to the authenticity of women take place in many different work settings, and that coaching offers relevant support to cope with these challenges (Chapter 6).

Chase's (1988) argument that women often actually collude in conforming to the status quo, exhibiting gender blindness in their own experiences of gender discrimination, is an interesting perspective. At one level this alleged 'collusion' was apparent in the participants' initial conformity to the status quo. But the fact that they acknowledged the gender barriers within the organisational culture and workplace practices, and recognised that for their career success they had to conform and adapt, runs counter to the idea of gender blindness on the part of the women.

In addition to fitting in and adapting to their work environment, the women's stories distinctly referred to coping strategies such as 'compromise' and 'sacrifice' as a way of remaining on their career paths. Although partly acknowledged in broader research, such research concerns women opting out of careers to manage their family lives rather than staying and balancing family and work life (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) discuss the impact of career contexts on women's changing views of their careers and career success, but their research focuses on the phased transition process of managing women's careers rather than the insight of the women themselves. The findings of this

chapter do not support the phenomenon of women self-selecting out of senior roles because of a reduced interest in their careers in comparison with men, as proposed by Litzky and Greenhaus (2007). Three participants in the current study had self-selected out of organisations due to a requirement for them to adapt their style or principles in order to succeed, but this is not the same as opting out because of a reduced interest in their careers. The findings furthermore differ from those of Smith *et al.* (2012b), which suggest that women may be self-sabotaging their careers or creating self-imposed barriers to their own development. The participants in my study showed through their compromises and sacrifices that their careers mattered to them. These findings, therefore, offer an alternative perspective and one that is contrary to the portrayal of women opting out of corporate life because of the nature of the gendered environment and their ability or desire to manage the barriers and challenges they encounter (Litzky and Greenhaus, 2007; Smith *et al*., 2012b).

In summary, this chapter shows that the women ultimately succeeded in advancing their careers, although their adaptation, compromise and sacrifice along the way can be argued to have been the 'associated costs' of this career success. The development and support that has helped them along their career journey is explored in the next two chapters, starting with their early career journey support in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 **Early Career Journey Support**

While Chapter 4 examined the multifaceted nature of the barriers and challenges that the participants faced in their careers, this chapter now focuses on the support and development the women sought and received as part of their early and mid-career journey. It begins with an exploration of the women's mentoring experiences (5.1), exploring the multiple roles attributed to their mentor, including career development support and assisting with their 'fit' in the organisation. Networking and other relational support for career development is then examined (5.2). Finally, group development programmes are appraised (5.3), to more fully understand the participants' career development experiences.

5.1 Mentoring Experiences

All of the participants had experienced mentoring as part of their career journey and it is notable that ten of the twelve women received mentoring initially via their first or early career line manager. Additionally, when recalling their mentoring experiences, there were a variety of positive adjectives to describe their mentor: 'absolutely fabulous boss' (Eleanor), 'supportive' (Helen), 'charismatic' (Jane), 'phenomenally supportive' (Simone) and 'fabulous' (Virginia) (Table 5.1). The positive and impactful support their first mentor provided for them is, therefore, apparent.

This suggests that the presence of a mentor, who is there to encourage and support the participant, is something that is important to early career development. The women's description of the importance of their mentor in historic terms – Simone had to 'think back to remember' and Virginia 'didn't

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	Table 5.1 Mentoring Experiences		
	My mentor(s)	**What a mentor does**	**How mentees see mentoring and the value of their mentors**
Athena	'*I got along extremely well with my professional line manager, who was based in Germany … We still do [get on] today.*'	'*[A mentor provides guidance] around [the] culture of the organisation, behaviours and things, to improve or enable those working relationships to develop faster.*'	'*[Conversation was] looser, a general high-level conversation.*' '*[It was] useful to have somebody who you could actually engage with.*'
Eleanor	'*My first mentor was a really, really good boss, absolutely fabulous boss, one of the most enlightened bosses I have ever come across.*' '*He was fantastic and he had a promotion up to the regional office and he brought me with him.*'	'*[A mentor is] very important, a trusted, wise counsel, more senior than you, and can help you much more with difficult situations connected to and around your job.*' '*He brought me with him and he was the one that put me through the fast-track career and got me on to specialist status.*'	'*[There have been] occasions in my career when I have been allocated a mentor on arrival at the organisation. That person hasn't necessarily stayed as my mentor. I would always look for a mentor if one wasn't allocated to me.*' '*It's that punchy, hand-on-heart wise advice that is absolutely invaluable in a mentor.*' '*[The mentor is] much more about you as a member of staff. They will be very aware of the diktat within the organisation.*'
Elizabeth	'*[My] line manager would work with me and help me and develop areas … another manager was a very tactical, aggressive task-driven guy.*'	'*[Mentors] help people crystallise their thoughts, help them make decisions.*'	'*[There are] lots of opportunities for mentoring, people you can talk to. [It's] very informal.*' '*I learned a lot about other things from him that really weren't about work, my work and my role.*'
Emily	'*I'm still in contact with my first HR director, who has now retired, but he still mentors me. I'll meet up once a year.*'	'*[Mentors help in] guiding them and providing some specialist skills.*'	'*I'm talking more task-related, that's what I would say where I'm being mentored.*' '*I'd say most of them [mentors] I've sought out.*'
Erica	'*My mentor throughout my career has been my husband, because he's been the one pushing me and I think women need pushing.*'		'*I've had a mentor everywhere I've been … it's been very pleasant, very nice people to get to know, but maybe I'm just not good at listening.*'
Helen	'*My immediate line manager – he was very supportive of me.*'	'*[My mentor would] pass me opportunities that would help open doors to the wider career path.*'	'*He was also my sponsor, [and] would push me beyond my comfort zone; at the time [it] was a bit scary.*'
Jane	'*I was very junior, [he was] very generous with his time, in giving me exposure to people and making those connections, giving [me] the opportunities to be in meetings to have experiences or to have opportunities.*' '*He really looked after me.*'	'*[Mentors give you the] benefit of their wisdom, experience, seniority … sponsorship. [They help in] opening doors, making connections, unlocking problems, having that authority, sort of "shadow of the leader" stuff.*'	'*[As a mentor you are] bringing your experience, [the] benefit of your wisdom, seniority.*' '*He was charismatic … I was very junior and he was very senior so that was much more about "do it this way".*'
Maggie	'*She was prepared to take a chance on me, move me into her organisation.*'		'*A mentor, I would typically instigate.*' '*I want to talk to somebody ... constructing how I want to be and how I want to show up, by looking at other people.*'

	My mentor(s)	**What a mentor does**	**How mentees see mentoring and the value of their mentors**
	Table 5.1 Mentoring Experiences (continued)		
Marie		'The reason I stepped into that [first role was being] largely encouraged by X, who encouraged me to look at that as a career option.'	'[A mentor is] someone whose opinion I value, someone that I watch, someone who is a great role model, that I would want to copy some of that.' 'I tend to seek out people who are more senior and learn from what they've done.'
Simone	'A phenomenally supportive immediate boss.'	'It was years and years ago now, [I] remember it with warmth, [that he] encouraged me to develop, and I suppose [he] managed in a very constructive way. Because it was early on in my career I didn't realise quite how beneficial it was.'	'If I were asked to mentor somebody I would be giving of my experience.' '[A mentor is] someone who's like a sponsor for you.'
Susan	I've had mentoring two or three times, once when I was making a decision to go for a very senior job … my boss, she mentored me.'	'[My mentor played] an informal, almost friendship kind of role [to] get me ready for at least applying for that sort of job.'	'I've always taken advantage of people that have wanted to help. [I've] always [been] career focused.'
Virginia	'[A] fabulous mentor, who believed in me, encouraged me.'	'I don't suppose I realised at the time I was being mentored.'	'He would show, tell and then let me do.'

realise at the time' (Table 5.1) – further suggests the positioning of this mentoring support at an early stage in their career. This inference, however, relies on the participants' ability to accurately recall past experiences, and could instead suggest their current heightened awareness of mentoring and other support interventions as a more recent form of career development.

5.1.1 Male and Female Mentors

The majority of the participants had initially received support from a male mentor, as this had been their first line manager, who was typically male. Half of the participants had only ever had a male mentor and half had experienced both male and female mentors during their career (Table 3.3). Maggie, Virginia, Jane, Simone and Helen all commented on the gender dynamic with their male mentors, which presented an interesting insight. Jane and Virginia's accounts of their mentoring relationship highlight cross-gender sexual dynamics. Jane relates an issue between herself and a senior male manager in her organisation.

> *'I'm very close to my boss's boss, which causes some issues, but there are people who believe in me and I believe in them and that's a strong relationship, and without that there's no way that you'd progress, I don't think.'*

Her implied concern is about a perception of suspicion from others in the organisation of their mentoring relationship. This is reconciled by Jane's recognition that she needs this 'strong relationship' and support to succeed in her career. However, the possible negative perception of others of their close relationship has the potential to make the mentoring process itself more difficult. She continues by describing how this impacts the actual mentoring process.

> *'If they want to chat about something with one of their colleagues they'll just go to the pub together or go and have dinner together,*

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but I have to think about how's that going to look if I go and have dinner just on a one-to-one with one of my male colleagues? What's everyone going to think about that? … The whole thing's harder.'

This highlights the problem for Jane of managing what she perceives to be an important part of her career support – a male mentor – against the connotation of a sexual dynamic. The dilemma concerns the difference between the one-to-one relationship of the mentor with the mentee and the broader relationship of the mentee with others in the organisation. The mentoring relationship requires a level of intimacy, interpersonal trust and emotional attachment, as described by the participants in their positive descriptions of their early mentors. However, the misinterpretation by others of an intimate but non-sexual relationship also has the potential to damage or limit the mentee's career. Jane's account highlights that this risk has to be set against the value that can be gained from the mentoring relationship in terms of career support and opportunities.

Virginia describes her experience with a senior manager mentor as him 'taking a shine to her', and her interpretation was that he felt an attraction to her as a mentee. She acknowledged that it helped her career develop because of his attention and support. The inference from Virginia was that she had managed this aspect of the sexual dynamic successfully for her career development. Virginia's account also highlights an additional dimension that women in this position have to negotiate in terms of progressing their career by benefiting from a key mentoring relationship with a male, but without a sexual interpretation being made by either the male concerned or the other people they work with.

From a different viewpoint, a preference for a male mentor was important for Helen and Simone. While Simone saw the advantage of a male mentor

as being the 'different perspective and challenge' that he had brought her, Helen felt that having a male mentor as a sponsor had been important to her early career opportunities.

> 'Men were getting some of the opportunities through word of mouth, through their male network and through their mentor and sponsor. It seems the way to get forward is to have some form of sponsor and, certainly, [in] my experience, having a male mentor and sponsor certainly helped me at the early part of my career.'

Helen perceived a distinct approach to career development for men and saw that her means of access to that career support was via a male mentor. Helen's mentor had helped her to navigate some of her early career challenges and secure job roles, as her organisation was very male-dominated. This suggests the power relation of gender and her perceived need for a male mentor to gain parity with her male colleagues for job opportunities. Her recognition that the male development strand is different and more appropriate for career development is a pronounced dilemma for her. Helen's struggle with the 'unwritten rules' of her organisation and how she navigated this in order to progress her career was detailed earlier (4.1).

In comparison, Maggie, having received support from both male and female mentors, highlighted the differences for her between the support she had received from both genders concerning her career development.

> 'It's not about careful looking after, it's more about challenge a lot of the time from the men, whereas the women provide that but they would also provide a bit more support around it.'

Maggie's reference to both the challenge and support she would receive from female mentors in comparison to mainly just the challenge from the males is a key insight. Maggie's mentors were useful for identifying and discussing career opportunities and encouraging her to apply for roles that she might not have considered herself to be qualified for. The male mentors were more likely to challenge her reticence to apply for a position. The

female mentors were more supportive by encouraging her and giving her recognition. From one perspective this supports the gender stereotype of women providing relational support and men providing the drive and confidence to apply for roles. However, Maggie valued the support she got from all her mentors, male or female, and this may just have been a style difference between her mentors.

The different roles of the mentor were a feature of some of the participants' mentoring experiences. These are now examined in a discussion of the multiple support of mentoring (5.1.2) and networking and relational support (5.2).

5.1.2 **The Multiple Support of Mentoring**

While all the participants related a formal reporting relationship through their line manager, they also highlighted the variety of ways their mentor supported them. When the participants' accounts were compared, it was notable that there were many individual interpretations of the role of the mentor and the value of mentoring as a career intervention (Table 5.1). Between them, the participants described two main types of mentoring support: mentoring for career advancement and mentoring for psychosocial support.

Eleanor, Helen, Jane, Marie, Simone, Susan and Virginia identified the mentor's role as facilitating job opportunities and providing the mentee with support and encouragement to advance their careers. Their accounts capture how their mentor's support had been important to their career advancement: '[he] put me through the fast track' (Eleanor), '[he would] pass me opportunities' (Helen), '[he was] opening doors' (Jane), '[he would]

get me ready' (Susan), '[he] sponsored me' (Virginia). The impact of this support on the participants' career is illustrated in Virginia and Helen's accounts. Virginia regarded her mentor's encouragement and belief in her as being matched by her mentor's provision of funding for her development.

> *'[He was a] fabulous mentor, who believed in me, encouraged me to do it and sponsored me to do day release and evenings.'*

This tangible career assistance was especially helpful to Virginia, as she had chosen not to attend university and wanted to gain a professional qualification.

In Helen's account the impact of the relationship is illustrated by her mentor's support: 'he was very supportive of me … [he would] also pass me opportunities that would help open doors to the wider career path.' The value to Helen was how this later extended beyond support to 'pushing her to take a role'.

> *'He was also my sponsor for my X application and would sort of push me beyond my comfort zone, which at the time was a bit scary.'*

This shows how the mentor's role moved beyond just giving her access to opportunities and encouragement, and encompassed (metaphorically) pushing her to advance her career. Helen recognises the mentor's role in effecting this career transition for her, also suggesting the perception that as a man her mentor is not thinking about the possibility of not making a career move. Helen's reference to her comfort zone also suggests the phenomenon of the 'confidence gap' between men and women, where self-doubt due to fear of failure or wanting to strive for perfectionism, for example, could inhibit some women from applying for roles they are in fact qualified for. The reference to the mentor's ability to 'open doors' again highlights the power dynamic of men in the workplace that women can use

to support and influence their career, as opposed to attempting to make their own way as a woman in the workplace.

Athena, Eleanor, Susan and Jane also more specifically identified the mentor's role as assisting the mentee's understanding and management of the organisation and its culture. They called upon their mentor to talk through and give them advice on how to manage certain cultural situations involving relationships (Athena), as a trusted 'wise counsel' (Eleanor, Jane) and on a more informal, friendship basis (Susan) (Table 5.1). Athena's account captures her thoughts about her mentor and the type of support she received.

> '*I got along extremely well with my professional line manager, if you like, who was based in Germany. I reported directly into the business and then had a dotted professional line to this other person, and she actually left shortly afterwards but we continued the dialogue. We still do today, and so she actually was probably the first person who when you were thinking about something or something didn't quite smell right, you were trying to think about the wider sort of issues, it was just useful to have somebody who you could actually engage with. It also helped me, I think particularly at that time, because she had the history of the organisation and I'd come in new and was looking at some pretty strange sort of things.*'

Athena valued the support her mentor gave her and recognised her mentor's importance in helping her to understand the culture of an organisation she had just joined. Her reliance on her mentor and need for support to understand the culture was especially demanding given the 'bizarre behaviours' she faced.

> '*Some of the behaviours that you were faced with were, at best, sort of threatening and at worst sort of acute bullying, and so having someone where you could actually talk through some of those things and make a judgment as to whether or not, what you were going to do about it, or how you were going to deal with it was actually very useful.*'

Athena's need to understand an environment that she describes in negative terms highlights how the need to 'fit' and manage the situation in order to

maintain her role overrides her concern about the inappropriate actions or associated organisational culture. At this stage in her career the need for belonging appeared paramount and her mentor assisted with this transition into the role and the organisation. Athena's relationship with her mentor was regarded as 'invaluable' and helpful in navigating the culture and behaviours of the organisation. This account also captures the impact of the contextual challenges to the participants' career and the important role the mentor had in facilitating an understanding of the culture Athena was working in.

Eleanor also referred to the trusted advisor role of the mentor, offering support and advising on organisational culture and politics: 'it's that punchy, hand-on-heart, wise advice this is absolutely invaluable in a mentor.' For Eleanor a mentor was:

> *'somebody in the organisation with really deep understanding of the organisation, or politics, behaviour and culture and being able to advise the more junior staff on how to deal with the politics.'*

Eleanor's reference to the mentor's depth of knowledge of the organisation and its culture and politics further suggests the socialisation of the mentee by the mentor as they transition into roles or as new entrants into a group. The organisation's need for socialisation is for its members to share the deeper-level assumptions and values of the organisation and its culture, which survive through having been taught to newcomers. The role of the mentor can be regarded as deciphering these operating norms and assumptions. Although this can be seen as a mechanism of social control, it may also suggest a means of adhering to the norms of the majority, in this case a mostly male majority.

Eleanor's reference to being 'more junior' also demonstrates the power difference between the mentor and mentee, with the mentee being reliant on the mentor to provide knowledge and insight into the organisation. The role is therefore depicted in similar ways to a parental or teacher-type figure, imparting knowledge and advice to his or her assigned students. To further support this inference Marie, Maggie, Jane and Virginia's value of their mentor as a role model also highlights this aspect of socialisation into the organisation's frame of reference (Table 5.1). Jane's comment, 'I was very junior and he was very senior, much more about "do it this way"', suggests the mentor as a 'personal embodiment' of how to 'fit' within the organisation.

In addition to assisting the 'socialisation' of the participants' cultural understanding, this also implies the importance of the mentor in helping the participants to create their initial professional identity at a time when they are developing as individuals, in their role and in their careers. This behavioural value of having a role model as part of the mentoring process aligns with social theories of identity formation, that is, the attributes, groups and professional experiences by which people define themselves in a work role (Schein, 1985). Interestingly, there was no mention of female role models by the participants, which highlights the predominantly male organisations the participants worked in at that time in their career.

An additional insight concerning the role of mentoring in career development and psychosocial support relates to Eleanor, Emily, Elizabeth, Maggie, Marie and Susan's ongoing and deliberate use of mentoring as part of their career development, which demonstrates the value of mentoring to these participants (Table 5.1). Their approach to the targeting

of prospective mentors varied from 'sought out' (Eleanor, Marie, Emily, Maggie) to 'taking advantage' (Susan, Elizabeth). Their ability to gain access to mentors was not raised as an issue by these participants. This deliberate approach to mentoring support to further their career development is illustrated by Eleanor and Maggie's accounts. Eleanor related how she always ensured that she sought out a mentor.

> *'There have been occasions in my career when I have been allocated a mentor on arrival at the organisation. That person hasn't necessarily stayed as my mentor, but I have always had a mentor and I would always look for a mentor if one wasn't allocated to me.'*

Here Eleanor describes her element of control in the mentoring relationship. The decision to continue the relationship and seek out alternatives is hers. Far from maintaining one mentor, Eleanor had used mentoring proactively with a number of mentors throughout her career for a variety of situations, applications, sponsorship and advice. Her ability to terminate the relationship and use a mentor in different ways was not an issue. This infers the value of the mentoring relationship to help with ongoing career development opportunities and 'wise counsel'. It further suggests a broadening of the mentor pool away from the initial line manager to other relationships that offer the same attributes. This shift to a choice of mentoring relationship also differs from the parental-type role the mentors are seen to fulfil as they guide and encourage the participants into the organisation and through their early careers. This could be regarded as a point where the women took deliberate responsibility and 'control' for their own career. As the participants developed their careers the support they sought also appeared more purposeful. This is captured in Maggie's account.

> *'A mentor for me, I would typically instigate and say I want to talk about X, and someone will either make the introduction or I'll go off and ask.'*

Maggie again illustrates her control of the mentoring relationship and the responsibility she takes to initiate these opportunities. This suggests her deliberate approach to finding mentors and sponsors at key points or transitions in her career. This is further clarified when Maggie relates her approach to terminating these relationships when they are no longer useful to her.

> *'I think decisions to move away from people … I've made a couple of decisions at times in terms of "I don't want to work with this person any longer and therefore I will look at somebody else".'*

Maggie's description highlights her instrumental approach to mentoring and development support. Maggie also regarded her development as 'a patchwork made up of positive and negative experiences from others that you learn from and leave or take on board'. It was always about being 'purposeful' and 'making things happen', and she applied this approach to her mentoring and career development.

> *'It's that quite analytical piece which might make me go and say, "I want to talk to somebody", so I will watch people all the time and then I will go and have one more conversation with someone about, "so when you're doing this, how did you do [it], what drove you to do it?" and then take out of that, so what pieces do I want to do and put in. So really it is quite … constructing how I want to be and how I want to show up, by looking at other people.'*

This highlights Maggie's deliberate approach to her choice of mentor and demonstrates that she has used a variety of mentors and role models in the construction of her professional identity.

Athena, Eleanor, Emily and Susan also interestingly developed a continued relationship with their early mentors. The longevity of this mentoring relationship suggests they considered it to be of great value. Eleanor spoke with fondness of the relationship she still had with her first boss, and was proud that she was regarded as one of his successful protégés, one of 'his golden triumphs'.

'He's so supportive, so inspirational. I wouldn't move in X without picking up the phone at the very least and probably going to have lunch with him to say, I thought about doing this. What do you think?'

Her mentor was used on an ongoing basis for key role changes and transitions. Eleanor discussed how this relationship had come to a natural conclusion when her mentor said he couldn't help her anymore because she 'had gone past him'. She accepted this but continued the relationship on a friend and advisor basis. Her understanding of the conclusion to the mentoring relationship as the mentee outgrowing the mentor was an interesting insight. This supports the choice aspect of a move to deliberate mentoring, and also demonstrates that ongoing relational support is important. The participants appreciated the positive nature of this relationship and wanted the support to continue, as it was important to their career progression and ongoing support network. The continued friendship and advisory support of the mentor suggests the strong basis of the relationship and its great value for the mentee.

Whether actively seeking mentors, taking advantage of mentor opportunities where they arose either within or outside their organisation, or maintaining mentoring relationships over a longer period of time, the women were focusing on developing their own careers. The participants' transition into using networking and other relational support to further enhance their career development, with the help of their mentor, was also a notable feature that will now be discussed.

5.2 Networking and Relational Support

When sharing their career experiences Athena, Erica, Emily, Susan, Marie, Helen and Jane all highlighted networking as an important element in their

career development. Their insights varied from the importance of networking to their career (Athena, Erica, Susan), and the importance of their mentor's support in networking (Emily, Marie), to their involvement in women-only networking (Emily, Helen, Jane) (Table 5.2).

The importance of the mentor's support in introducing networking is captured in Marie's account. She described how her mentor had assisted her networking skills.

> *'I didn't actually know what networks were and I sort of thought at that time that networking was cheating, that was my mind's eye of it, that networking is what you did to get favours from people; and then X said to me, actually, no, it's about when you give to people and then you get back, and now I'm considered really highly networked.'*

Her reference to networking as a form of cheating and with a negative connotation was enlightening given how, for men, a network is regarded as a key career support. The theory of social networking proposes that men are more likely to hear about job openings at senior management level because of the strength, breadth and longevity of their networks. However, the change to Marie's perception of networking through the influence of her mentor was an important insight. This suggests the mentor's role in highlighting the importance of networking, rather than just offering support or access to networking.

Interestingly Marie was also the only participant who referred to the reciprocity of networking and 'giving to get back', suggesting that her initial reticence at utilising networking was balanced for her by a more positive positioning of this method of support. The mentor's role in supporting this change of thinking is also highlighted in this account. Emily similarly spoke of how she progressed her thinking on networking and advanced her skills, and how her mentor had helped her with this.

	Table 5.2 – Networking and Relational Support
	What networking and relational support means
Athena	*'[I] worked very hard to develop [my network] and to grow and to maintain [it] in an active way, [and] build up some good, strong relationships with people who are in different walks of life, industries, roles, organisations. [It's] a safe haven where you can sit down and talk and arrive at the right answer.'*
Eleanor	*'A member of a recruitment agency who I got on very well with phoned me up and said this is a great opportunity for you.'*
Emily	*'No job is for life. The way you find out about most jobs are through your networks as opposed to advertising, so you have to build your relationships and networks, and mentors have helped with that.'* *'I look at some of my mentors, they've obviously helped me with my networking and keep, yeah, good contact, because that's one thing I'm not that good at is networking, certainly, and the mentors have helped me build networking groups.'* *'I've been involved in a women's return to work network group, following having children … I recommend it.'*
Erica	*'The more senior you get it doesn't matter how technically good you are. It's much more about your networking skills, your interpersonal skills, who you know and who you work with.'*
Helen	*'[I have been] involved in some women-only networking. They have some value because there is a lot of shared experiences … you do have to be careful that it is a supportive environment and it's not one where people are divisive.'*
Jane	*'I'm a member of the X club network of senior women … [I] went to an event with 55 very senior, very intelligent, very successful women. It was delightful.'*
Marie	*'I didn't actually know what networks were and I sort of thought at that time that networking was cheating, that was my mind's eye of it, that networking is what you did to get favours from people; and then X said to me, actually, no, it's about when you give to people and then you get back, and now I'm considered really highly networked.'*
Simone	*'I'm not particularly brilliant at using networks. I will apply in the open market.'*
Susan	*'[The leadership programme] was an opportunity to network and actually make friends with people who have since become senior X, which then gives you a really nice network, really helpful.'*

> *'I look at some of my mentors, they've obviously helped me with my networking and keep, yeah, good contact, because that's one thing I'm not that good at is networking, certainly, and the mentors have helped me build networking groups.'*

Emily's reference to her lack of networking skills again relates to the perception of differences in male and female career development support methods. It is suggested that the mentor, in most cases male, helps to facilitate access and skills development in the area of networking, where men are regarded as being more advanced. This was also discussed earlier in Helen's account of how her male mentor facilitated access to career opportunities.

Athena, Emily, Erica, Marie and Susan also raised the importance of networking for their career advancement, although they notably emphasised different ways in which it supported them. For Athena, Marie and Susan there was a stress on the interpersonal relationships and social support focus of the networking. They employed networking to build relationships for advice and support, and for the possible sharing of job opportunities. What is also noticeable here is the reference to the external aspect of networking, going outside of the organisation. This implies a transition from the internal organisational focus of the mentoring relationship to an external focus on other forms of relational support. The participants also related active and deliberate ways of getting and using opportunities to dynamically build and develop networks, which was regarded as particularly important for some of the women. Athena commented: 'I've worked very hard to develop [my network] and to grow and to maintain [it] in an active way.' Emily similarly discussed 'building' her network:

> *'No job is for life and the way you find out about most jobs are through your networks as opposed to advertising, so you have to*

build your relationships and networks, and mentors have helped with that.'

Emily and Erica's accounts acknowledged this need for networks to enhance their job opportunities as they advanced in their careers. The reference to an activity of building and developing and also Erica's comment on 'the more senior you get' suggests that networking is an ongoing and dynamic development throughout the participants' careers.

Jane, Emily and Helen were also members of women-only networks and were still active in these groups (Table 5.2). Emily had used the network to support her return to work from maternity leave, while Jane and Helen had joined the groups to network and gain support from the shared experiences they had encountered within the group. Helen's involvement in women's networks is interesting given that she had previously raised issues about networking as one of her career challenges. She described how as her career progressed she had felt excluded from the more senior career opportunities because of an informal network for men. Helen had 'lost out' in career and progression opportunities because her male colleagues were hearing of opportunities through their network and sponsors on an informal basis and word of mouth.

> *'A woman who wants to progress has to create her own opportunities from scratch and develop them while others seem to get more of, in the pub, "here, do you know X?"'*

Helen's comment on networking opportunities relates to her perception of the inequity of how men access available sponsors and their network in a much more effective and sophisticated way than women do. Helen felt that women missed out on the informal opportunities and support, suggesting she had progressed more slowly in comparison to male colleagues because of this. The perception that opportunities arise differently for men

and women was also described: 'I suppose my frustration was a sense of injustice in the way things happen.' The irony of the 'injustice' she felt was not lost given the fact that she was seeking equity partnership within a legal firm. Helen's additional choice of women's networks and her comment on the groups 'being supportive' and 'not being divisive' captures her need for support and relief from her contextual challenges (Chapter 4). It is also interesting that the participants' positive experiences and use of women's networking is different from their perceptions of women-only development groups. This will form part of the discussion in the next section on participants' alternative forms of career support consisting of group development rather than individual development.

5.3 Group Development

All of the participants had attended a group development intervention during their careers, either mixed gender or women-only leadership development programmes. Athena, Eleanor, Elizabeth, Erica, Helen, Maggie, Simone and Susan had attended group leadership development programmes. Their comments (Table 5.3) highlight the variety of organisational investment and value gained from these programmes, although the participants did not mention any organisational involvement in these leadership development programmes, other than their funding and arrangement.

Susan and Eleanor's accounts illustrate the value they gained from attending a mixed gender group leadership development programme. Susan's attendance on this course, from a career perspective, had the indirect consequence of helping her 'not to be afraid' (Table 5.3). The opportunity to compare herself against people at the same or a higher level

	Table 5.3 – Group Development	
	Leadership Development Programme Beliefs	**Women-only Leadership Development Programme Beliefs**
Athena	*'[In our] strategic leadership development programme … I was the only non-X person and the only one who didn't normally wear a trouser suit.'*	*'If we want to be considered equal players, take an equal part in things, we actually have to be able to deal with that.'* *'There are greater benefits from it being more mixed than a single gender, because I'm fairly resilient and robust individually, mentally pretty strong.'*
Eleanor	*'Their leadership development and management development programmes were second to none.'* *'[It was] a group situation, a more formal development programme. They [women] risk being overlooked.'*	*'I was quite quiet about the fact that I was attending it; still, opportunities for women's-only programmes is a way of hooking women in to be more aware [of] opportunities to discuss those kind of real nitty-gritty issues with women.'*
Elizabeth	*'I went into my first management role, first management course.'*	*'I don't feel a need to associate with other women particularly to get what I need in terms of the way I deal with things.'*
Emily		*'I've learned a lot from leadership programmes as a woman without men there, because we do experience things differently; I just wouldn't brand it that way … because of culture, and I think it can have certain connotations that they've only got there because they are women, and it backfires.'*
Erica	*'They spent an enormous amount of money on making sure you're a good leader.'*	*'I don't know if it's a weakness to be seen as a woman group in any shape or form, that is, that means that we're special, both negative or positive but probably mostly negative. That we need extra help, extra carrying.'* *'I don't want to be the handicapped in the room; we're suddenly seen as outsiders instead of being part of the group.'*
Helen	*'Over the last five or six years there's been a lot of development in leadership … [It] makes you come out of your little box.'*	*'I wouldn't have women-only ones to the exclusivity of men. The perspective that men offer, the insight that they can give is far more helpful in somebody progressing in their career than just women being supportive of each other.'*
Jane		*'I don't know how I would have had the conversation to have got myself paid for it to go on that course. I think they would have been deeply skeptical about it. I think they would have been very anxious that it was some sort of 21st-century suffragette movement or women's rights and we're all going to be burning our bras or whatever. So I think it would have been very badly received in the organisation.'*
Maggie	*'[It was about] management rather than leadership a lot of the time.'*	
Marie		*'Women's-only is not real life. It wasn't real, it wasn't such a hard-edge course.'* *'There's a tangible difference about a women-only programme. There was something about a kinship, about wanting other people to be as successful that wasn't as competitive as other programmes, whereas other programmes are often set up to be competitive.'*
Simone	*'It's the subtlety of [the leadership development programme]; it becomes another ceiling.'*	
Susan	*'What that [leadership development programme] did for me was allowed me to stack myself up against people who were at the next level up, and I could see that there wasn't anything there for me to be afraid of … [This] reinforced that sense of worth and capability.'*	
Virginia	*'Not much! Coaching was perhaps the most formal training I've had.'*	*'I know my needs are different. I think there's a whole language that's different between women and men.'*

and recognise that she could make the next step was as much a benefit as the actual content of the course. It provided a level of reassurance for her and gave her an opportunity to build networks. The programme also made her think differently through meeting people with higher-level jobs: it 'jolted me out of my thinking' and enabled 'thinking up and out of the organisation'. Again, development and support external to the organisation was raised, suggesting that a broadening of perspective was important to her self-confidence and career advancement.

Eleanor believed that she would not have been as successful in her career were it not for all the development support she had received from these programmes.

> *'Their [her organisation's] leadership development and management development programmes were second to none, and I have never been since in a more dynamic environment where people's careers were led. You had to prove yourself, but once you'd proved yourself the support that was given to you was extraordinary.'*

Eleanor's reference to 'careers being led' highlights the organisation's involvement in her career development, and 'once you'd proved yourself' there was an implied psychological contract between the individual and the organisation. The opportunities for her career once she had 'proved herself' were immense: 'the world was your oyster'. However, within the same account Eleanor countered this positive experience and related how she needed to adapt, work hard and 'fight' to get through the development programmes. Eleanor related that in comparison to some of the top management development programmes she had attended, coaching for her was the most beneficial because of her belief that in 'a group situation, a more formal development programme, they [women] risk being overlooked'. This highlights her acute awareness of being in the minority when attending leadership programmes, and the replication of this challenge in her working

environment. In both cases she was determined to find opportunities to help her overcome her minority position and prove her ability to successfully advance her career.

While the group leadership development programmes were well received by the women who attended them, two of the participants noted a perceived exclusionary aspect that potentially impacted the career progression of these women. Athena and Simone had both experienced their development programme itself as a source of exclusion. The behaviours of men on the course replicated their experiences of the gender barriers in their organisations. The symbolism of the leadership development programme to indicate the career aspirations of the women in their organisation was also clear.

> *'It's the subtlety of [the programme]; it becomes another ceiling. If you want to show and promote yourself, with the benefit of hindsight I probably should have gone for them, but they involved going away for a week and at the time I didn't particularly want to do that.'*

Simone felt that taking part in leadership development programmes was seen more as an indication that you had 'aspirations to progress' rather than it having a developmental impact.

5.3.1 Women-only Leadership Development

Nine of the participants had experience of women-only leadership development programmes (Table 5.3). Simone and Maggie had not attended any and Susan was about to attend one organised by her current employer. Most of the participants attended these women-only programmes as part of their career development. There was an interesting variety of perspectives in terms of the participants' level of support for these programmes. Some were not supportive of them, as women-only

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programmes treated women differently and were not 'real life' (Athena, Elizabeth, Erica, Helen, Jane). Other participants recognised that there could be some benefit for some women but felt that there may be a stigma attached to attending this form of development within their organisations (Eleanor, Emily). Finally, Marie and Virginia were supportive of women-only programmes.

Athena had experienced women-only development and women-only networking groups but felt that she preferred to attend a mixed gender programme. For Athena the 'unreal' situation was an issue.

> *'If we want to be considered equal players and able to take an equal part in things, we actually have to be able to deal with that.'*

Her reasoning was that she was 'a fairly resilient and robust individual and mentally strong'. In her role she had to deal with a mixed environment and she preferred mixed groups in order to gain more experience of how to handle the 'real world'. She could see the advantage for some people who would 'struggle with those things' and described those with less confidence as potentially benefitting from the experience. Athena's reference to resilience, robustness and mental strength implies her ability to deal with the male-dominated environment without additional support. It is interesting that she effectively sets herself apart from 'other women' who are not as resilient and robust, and that she sees a women-only development group as an intervention that might work for others but not for her. Athena's need to belong with the majority, through her use of a mentor to understand the culture of a male-dominated environment, is again reinforced.

Erica similarly highlighted the problem with women being treated as a special group, or separate in some way from the mainstream. However, her

view on the negative connotations of being seen as 'special, needing extra help' was more extreme.

> *'I don't want to be the handicapped in the room; sorry to offend the handicapped but it's probably worse being a woman in business anyway. If we pull together as a group, then we're suddenly seen as outsiders instead of being part of the group.'*

Her comparison to another minority and discriminated group was enlightening and highlights how for Erica her identity with her gender is coupled with and threatened by using this women-only development intervention. Erica related why these programmes wouldn't support her as a woman.

> *'I don't know if it's a weakness to be seen as a woman group in any shape or form, that is, that means that we're special, both negative or positive but probably mostly negative; that we need extra help, extra carrying.'*

There is a suggestion about a 'detachment' from the male majority in the organisation that is apparent in Erica and Athena's accounts. I have also included Helen's comment here, as this captures how she regards women-only development as separate from her career reality. This also relates Helen's instrumental focus on the value of the perspective of men.

> *'I wouldn't have women-only ones to the exclusivity of men because I do think the perspective that men offer, and at the end of the day, let's be realistic, most men are in higher positions, the insight that they can give is far more, you know, sometimes helpful in somebody progressing in their career than just women being supportive of each other.'*

Her reference to a preference for benefitting from the perceived and stereotypical agentic behaviours of men in her organisation rather than the communal and relational attributes of women is a continuing theme for Helen throughout her career support. This suggests that being a woman, separate and different from the mainstream, presents a dichotomy for organisations between adapting development programmes to take gender

into account, so as to avoid altering the system, and the reality that exists for women when they return to the organisation after the programme.

From a different viewpoint Jane and Emily, while accepting the place of women-only development, were concerned about the acceptance of these programmes by their current organisations.

> *'I don't know how I would have had the conversation to have got myself paid for it to go on that course. I think they would have been deeply skeptical about it. I think they would have been very anxious that it was some sort of 21st-century suffragette movement or women's rights and we're all going to be burning our bras or whatever. So I think it would have been very badly received in the organisation.'*

Jane's reference to a dated stereotypical view of women's equality suggests her perception of how deeply embedded the view of gender is in her organisation. Her overriding concern relates to not upsetting the status quo. Emily experienced formal women-only leadership development programmes early on in her career, focusing on areas such as assertiveness and confidence. Her view of these programmes again related to the context of the organisation and the cultural acceptance of the programmes. She felt that it 'wouldn't work' at some of the organisations she had worked in, including her current organisation. She described these separately as 'male-dominated organisations'. It is enlightening that the participants' concern about how this development was regarded by their organisations took precedence over the programme's content and suitability when it came to deciding whether to use this form of development.

For two of the participants, however, attending a women-only programme had made them reconsider their perceptions. Marie had been hesitant to attend such a programme, as she didn't regard the course as representing

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'real life' and she was worried about the stigma that men may have attached to her attendance.

> *'I had a real hang-up about going for it, and the real hang-up I had is women's-only is not real life. It wasn't real; it wasn't such a hard-edge course.'*

Interestingly, although having attended the course didn't change her mind about these concerns, she felt that she had benefitted from it. There was a real 'kinship' and she was able to compare how a topic had been run and managed on a similar mixed gender course, in which she had been a minority female, with how the same topic had been handled and presented on the women-only course.

> *'There's a tangible difference about a women-only programme. There was something about a kinship, about wanting other people to be as successful that wasn't as competitive as other programmes, whereas other programmes are often set up to be competitive.'*

Virginia's reasoning for supporting women-only development was different to Marie's, and came from her understanding that the needs and behaviours of men and women are different.

> *'I used to think that you shouldn't split the sexes, that you should all do it together, but actually since being here and being the only female at that level, I know my needs are different and I wouldn't feel comfortable in a group of men actually saying yes, I don't like the way they use their language or I don't like the way they look at me if I'm wearing something different, but in a group of women you're freer to be able to express that and I think there's a whole language that's different between women and men.'*

Virginia's reference to her identity and needs as a woman are highlighted in her account. She was now a supporter of this form of development because it addressed certain styles of communication and behaviours. There is also a suggestion that men get this kinship or reinforcement all the time and that women need something additional to obtain this type of relational support.

Markedly, the majority of participants were not supportive of women-only

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development, with the main concerns being the perceived 'stigma' to attending them and the fact that the programmes didn't reflect the 'real world' they faced in their organisation. Overall, therefore, the reality of the participants' working environment and the potential stigma of these programmes negated any potential positive 'kinship' aspect of this type of development support.

5.4 Chapter Summary and Discussion

This chapter has explored the support the women received and sought in their early career journey. Varying from organisational mentoring and group development to self-initiated relational support such as networking, these interventions assisted the women in advancing their early careers.

One clear finding was the importance of a mentor who provided both instrumental support and psychosocial support to assist the career development of the women in the early career phase. Tharenou (2005) established the positive impact of early career mentoring, but the participants in this current research, in contrast, did not advocate one type of mentoring support over another. This adds a unique insight to the growing body of research concerning the positive impact of mentoring for women's careers (Singh *et al*., 2006; Hopkins *et al*., 2008; Maxwell, 2009; Hoigaard and Mathisen, 2009; Beeson and Valerio, 2012; Leck and Orser, 2013). Although I have approached the subject of mentoring for women from a qualitative, experiential perspective that is seldom used, it can be concluded that the psychosocial role of the mentor to offer counsel, facilitate relationships and assist understanding of the work culture serves to operationalise the concept of organisational socialisation (Schein, 1985). In this way the mentor helps the women to 'fit in' with the rules, systems

and processes of the organisation. This supports the research of Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) and Sinclair (2011) concerning the impact of social processes on identity development within an organisational context. The data also reveal the importance of cross-gender dynamics in mentoring relationships by highlighting gender preferences in mentor relationships (Young, Cady and Foxon, 2006; Morgan and Davidson, 2008; Harden, Clark, Johnson and Lawson, 2009; Leck and Orser, 2013).

The transition to 'deliberate mentoring' was made by quite a number of the participants in order to further their careers. The support of interventions such as mentoring, networking and sponsorship for the career development of women is acknowledged within research (Singh *et al.*, 2006; Beeson and Valerio, 2012; Hopkins *et al.*, 2008). However, the deliberate targeting of mentors for career support by women is not something that is widely mentioned within mentoring and career development research. On the contrary, research proposes that women have difficulty in accessing mentors (Kanter, 1977; Ehrich, 2008; Morgan and Davidson, 2008; Leck and Orser, 2013). However, in contrast to arguments by Morgan and Davidson (2008), the women in this study did not raise 'access to mentors' as an issue in securing or continuing their mentoring support but instead highlighted the instrumental value they gained from these intentional mentoring relationships. Mavin, Williams, Bryans and Patterson (2014) recently offered the concept of 'woman as a project', which supports these findings of women's instrumentality in their own career development.

The majority of the women also acknowledged their use and active development of networking to advance their careers. The prevalence and importance of this networking supports Cormier's (2007) findings that

networking opportunities are of major importance in supporting women in their career progression. There is limited research, however, on *how* women network and even less on the deliberate building of a network and/or the role of the mentor in this (Broadbridge, 2010; Bierema, 2005). The accounts of women actively developing networks and using them for instrumental purposes to build social capital, extends Broadbridge's (2010) findings on the social capital value of networking for men and women. It also recognises Stead and Elliott's (2012) premise of the importance of women's negotiation of the 'social' practices and gendered processes implicit in their work context. In the present study, the women's successful negotiation of these networks and their need to develop this approach for their career success was apparent. The participants gave accounts of their deliberate targeting of mentors and their mentor's early support in assisting them to develop their network, which was of great importance to their careers, although this is less featured in mentoring research. The findings, therefore, highlight both the value to the participants' careers of building social capital and the dynamic interplay between mentoring and networking. This contrasts with the more usual practice of perceiving these two support interventions as distinct methods for accruing social capital.

Finally, this research points towards a negative perception of women-only development programmes and the potential stigma of attending this form of development. This calls into question the general idea that such programmes are supportive to women's career development in terms of countering the potential gendered nature of organisations (Hopkins *et al*., 2008; Valerio, 2009; Ely *et al*., 2011; Clarke, 2011; Debebe, 2011). Debebe's (2011) research argues for the use of women's leadership development programmes to create a safe and supportive environment for

female leaders. While her research demonstrates the value of individual transformation resulting from the gender-sensitive teaching and learning practices in such programmes, it does not acknowledge the organisational complexities that exist outside this environment. The women in my research did acknowledge the 'kinship' of being with other women but were very aware of the stigma of attending these development programmes, and in most cases decided against taking part in them. They were generally regarded as representing a false workplace context.

This chapter has examined the experiences of the women during their early career and the support they received from mentors, networking and group development programmes. This has addressed the call by Clarke (2011) for more research into how successful senior women make the transition to senior leadership, particularly through examining alternatives to women-only leadership development programmes. The following chapter continues with this exploration but focuses on themes related to the participants' later career, such as the purpose and value of coaching, the importance of the relationship with the coach and how the development of these women as leaders enthuses them to support the career development of others.

Chapter 6 **Later Career Development and Legacy**

Chapter 5 examined the early career support of the participants, encompassing the multiple dimensions of mentoring, networking and group development. The varied roles the mentor performed and their impact on the participants' early career was highlighted. In this final findings chapter the later phase of the participants' career development will be explored. Specifically the participants' coaching experiences (6.1) and the varied ways in which coaching has been supportive to the participants' career development is explored. The importance of the coaching relationship (6.2) and the participants' advocacy and legacy (6.3) are then examined as the women transition from receiving support in their development to supporting the development of others. This chapter essentially addresses the original research question and explores the role of coaching and mentoring in supporting these executive women's career development. It will also compare and contrast the participants' later career support and development with the mentoring support and development of their early career (Chapter 5), and will discuss how their career challenges (Chapter 4) led to their coaching support.

6.1 Coaching Experiences

The participants' coaching experiences varied and extended over different roles in their career, organisations and personal lives. Notably, these coaching episodes took place later in the participants' career as they assumed senior positions or line management responsibility, and in some cases there were current coaching relationships. All of the participants had experienced coaching as part of their career journey, with the frequency of the participants' coaching experiences varying from occasional sessions to

support on a more regular basis (Table 3.3). There were a variety of ways in which the participants had been introduced to coaching. Emily, Jane, Marie, Susan and Virginia received individual coaching arranged by their organisation, while Athena, Eleanor, Helen and Simone sought and arranged coaching for themselves. Elizabeth used an internal coach and Maggie and Erica received coaching following a group leadership development programme. This contrasts with their introduction of mentoring, which in the majority of cases was reliant on the participants' manager to initiate. The timing of coaching during their later career, however, could also relate to the relatively recent introduction of executive coaching for development purposes. The participants' organisation paid for coaching in all instances, although Athena and Virginia continued to pay for coaching themselves after the initial sessions had been paid for by their organisation.

The participants had a variety of interpretations of what coaching meant to them (Table 6.1). This included 'learning' (Athena, Eleanor), 'facilitating' thinking (Emily), being 'non-directive' and assisting in 'becoming more effective' (Marie), being 'holistic' (Erica), assisting in 'changing yourself' (Susan) and creating 'a personal journey' (Virginia). Jane's comment, 'helping you to help yourself', captures both the coach's support and the coachee's responsibility for action suggested in the coaching relationship. Although varied, these interpretations suggest two key features of coaching: the transition from the 'teaching' of mentoring to the 'learning' of coaching and the move in responsibility for the outcome away from the organisation (via the mentor) to the individual.

The variety of ways that coaching is interpreted suggests differences in the

	Table 6.1 Coaching Experiences		
	Coaching Beliefs	**My Coaching**	**Value of coaching to me**
Athena	*'It's around learning and overcoming situations rather than necessarily, if you like, a direct teaching and having something done to you.'*	*'[I have had] to deal with some particular situations where [I have been] at a complete loss to know what to do about it.'* *'[I have had to know] how to move some of the things where the culture was serious levels of bullying and harassment … [I have had to] deal with certain situations and to break down some of the barriers.'* *'[You have a] certain level of yourself invested in the whole process. I've spent half my life working in science, totally focused and totally objective on things, very able to kind of just park the emotive elements of things and look at things in quite an objective way.'*	*'[Coaching has been] enormously helpful, helping me to find a route through a particularly difficult sort of situation.'* *'[Coaching] can be tailored to the individual's requirement … [It is an] ideal solution.'*
Eleanor	*'[Coaching presents] the external viewpoint: why are you doing it like that, what are you going to get from that, what success do you hope to achieve, what is your learning?'*	*'It's that kind of experimenting and playing in a safe environment … They do encourage you to kind of play and almost quite deliberately mess about with stuff.'* *'It's the playing where you get the knowledge and where you get the stretch.'*	*'I think coaching is the single most beneficial aspect of development that any woman can benefit from, and, actually, probably any man, but yes, certainly women.'* *'There have been periods in my life where in talking to the coach I might not necessarily have gone for the promotion; I've gone for a sideways move and then I've moved up.'*
Elizabeth	*'With coaching I think you have to know what it is you want.'* *'[Coaching is a] bit more hands on, a bit more guidance, understanding their learning style.'*	*'If I don't know which way to play something. If I'm not sure culturally where I might need a bit of advice.'* *'There's a certain layer that you don't need to go through and I just didn't want to play.'*	*'Just having someone that you can just talk to. How do you balance all these things? A reinforcement of the positive.'*
Emily	*'[Coaching is about] helping you, or [to] facilitate you to come to your own conclusions in your journey. It's supportive.'* *'[Coaching is] more holistic [than mentoring], that's the difference.'*	*'I was the only woman who was on the board; it was somebody I could just go to for support, for guidance gravitas.'*	*'I see coaching helping me on my journey – I haven't finished growing; helping me think through my next journey and concentrating me on my next goal.'*
Erica	*'It's very much about work but it's focused on the more emotional part of work, more about things that affect you at work.'*	*'At my level it's not what is my next job, because there is no next job [up] for me; it's down or sideways. What I need is more how to navigate an organisation because I'm new to the organisation.'*	*'[Coaching shows you] how you become more effective … [It asks] are there any blockers [or] difficult stakeholders?'*
Helen	*'[Coaching] makes you go somewhere sometimes that you don't probably want to go. Know[ing] that you need to go there, but don't want to, makes you face it. You're not going to get the answer to that difficult question until you unravel some of the things that you want to ignore.'*	*'We delved, [and it] gave me an opportunity to vent my spleen and calm down.'*	*'[Coaching helps by] giving me the courage to do something that some of the men wouldn't have even thought twice about, and not only the patronage of [the internal coach], giving me insider tips, me being goody two-shoes.'*

	Table 6.1 Coaching Experiences (continued)		
	Coaching Beliefs	**My Coaching**	**Value of coaching to me**
Jane	*'[Coaching is about] helping you to help yourself and helping you to unlock your issues and think them through, and just asking the right questions.'*	*'Every now and then I've identified [coaching] formally and informally.'* *'I wanted a woman because part of the issues I wanted to talk about was being a female in a male environment.'*	*'[Coaching is] being able to talk about your shortcomings, able to explore things, a safe environment in which to think out loud, particularly if they're a third party.'* *'I think all CEOs, MDs should have a coach or mentor because it is a lonely place to be and I don't think you should make all of those decisions without bouncing them off, and you can't bounce all of the decisions off your management team because it's not appropriate.'*
Maggie	*'[Coaching helps with] a specific thing you want to deal with. [It's] much more direct [than mentoring].'*	*'I had this weight of the world kind of thing, I think, for a while and then someone said, why don't you get some coaching?'* *'Confidence, I think, and the inner talk to be able to free me up to do what I thought I could do.'*	*'[Coaching provides] a different perspective.'* *'[Coaching gives you] the prod and the poke and don't stop there you can do more than this.'*
Marie	*'[Coaching is] non-directive, helping the individual to take responsibility, find their own solutions using a number of different strategies.'*	*'[I used coaching for] managing my personal relationships.'* *'These are tough jobs. These are jobs where 30 per cent of directors lose their jobs every year. There is a very high risk and I think it's really helpful to be as effective as I can be.'*	*'[I am] humbled by someone taking the time to spend with me and to be focused on me and my improvement.'* *'More recently the coaching I had as part of this role was the best yet. I would not be here in this job still, had I not been coached, because of some of the difficulties in a working relationship.'*
Simone	*'If I was asked to coach somebody I would be using my coaching skills. I may call in my experience to challenge but my purpose would not be to use my experience.'*	*'[The benefits of coaching are to] get back in control of life and get [a] more sensible balance and perspective; and also for a sense of direction.'*	*'Owing to coaching, when the opportunity came up to run an operational set-up within X, I took the opportunity to go for it.'* *'It was really valuable to try and get some sort of sense of work–life balance again and some sense of direction.'*
Susan	*'[Coaching is] more formal, more firm, more constructive, restrictive; more about change, changing yourself and your patterns of behaviour.'*	*'[Coaching helps to] reconnect me with my skills and abilities and intuitions.'* *'[I have a] traditional sense of my place in the world. Coaching has been fundamental to me developing in a leadership role.'*	*'[Coaching] stripped away all of that archetypal feminine sense, [that] sense of low self-worth, low self-esteem, deference to men.'*
Virginia	*'[Coaching is] more of a personal journey [compared with mentoring].'*	*'[Coaching provides] help on how to handle these difficult situations.'*	*'[Coaching gives you a] few times where [you] can actually be you … [and] address all the frailties. I think for women [coaching is] essential.'*

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ways the participants have used coaching as support. For most participants their career challenges were an instigator for coaching support (Chapter 4). Eleanor, Elizabeth, Emily, Helen, Marie, Simone and Virginia sought coaching to support them through decisions involving sacrifice and compromise to balance their work and personal life. Helen, Jane and Emily had sought coaching to help them adapt to their organisations and ultimately to develop their careers. Virginia and Susan had also received coaching for identity purposes, to reconnect with their core selves because of their work context. The participants also described using coaching to develop skills in order to meet role or organisational needs (Athena, Elizabeth, Marie, Erica); for personal support to 'relieve the pressure' or manage the consequences of the context of their career (Susan, Maggie, Virginia, Helen); and to enable self-examination and introspection and to support career and personal life events (Eleanor, Simone, Jane, Emily) (Table 6.1). The participants were, however, consistent in their response that coaching provided support to broaden their skills, thinking or personal styles and supported their roles and careers.

The varying nature of their coaching support, from role maintenance and skill development to introspection and transformative support, and the value they gained from this intervention for their own personal growth and career development are explored in the following sections. These are centered on the accounts of Elizabeth, Virginia and Emily to illustrate the purpose of the participants' coaching and whether it has been supportive to them in their roles and careers. This also fulfils IPA's recommendation for substantial, discursive presentation, enhanced by both transcript extracts and my detailed analytic interpretations of the text (Smith *et al*., 2009).

6.1.1. Coaching for Role and Skills Development

For Athena, Elizabeth, Erica and Marie, the purpose of coaching was related to 'skills development' in order to fulfil their current roles and support issues impacting the organisation. Coaching was used to assist in 'managing my personal relationships' (Marie), and in 'situations where [I was] at a complete loss to know what to do' (Athena). Here the assistance was to support their learning for matters that were outside of their own capability to address (Table 6.1). Elizabeth recounted when she would employ coaching and how this supported her development.

> *'If I don't know which way to play something. If I'm thinking, right, enough's enough. If I'm not sure culturally where I might need a bit of advice. It would be really the consequences of my decisions that I would actually ask for some sort of coaching about.'*

Elizabeth's need to seek counsel and talk through her proposed actions is centred on ensuring she doesn't get her decisions wrong for other people. This suggests her coaching is for skills development and for meeting the needs of the organisation, rather than an introspective personal focus. Elizabeth's use of coaching for discussing the consequences of decisions that impact other people further suggests an external focus to this coaching, and she confirmed that she preferred her coaching to remain work-related rather than to have any overlap into personal aspects.

> *'I didn't need someone to say, where do you want your career to go? I don't know why. They did try. They tried to get me to do that and they wanted to get inside your head and all this sort of stuff … maybe when I'm twenty-five but not now.'*

Her reference to 'get inside' suggests the mental struggle she has had with her coach to discuss aspects of her self-concept or to develop self-knowledge. Elizabeth also related an emotional distance between what the coach was 'allowed' to focus on.

> *'She was asking lots of questions and I thought, you know what, you can go through the onions, can't you, but there's a certain layer that you don't need to go through and I just didn't want to play.'*

Elizabeth was very clear that there was a boundary to her coaching experience and that it was only for performance-related aspects. This emotional disassociation from her coaching experience suggests a coping mechanism for balancing her work and personal commitments (Table 4.3). Elizabeth was, however, self-aware and knew her coaching was to understand others and their perceptions of her. She distanced herself from anything that might be construed as personal or introspective development rather than tangible goal-oriented, performance-related development. This also suggests her reluctance to open up and be vulnerable in order to support her increased self-awareness. However, Elizabeth did refer to employing coaching for support other than role development when she mentioned the counsel or confidante nature of the experience.

> *'Just having someone that you can just talk to. How do you balance all these things? Also that you've still got what it takes and you're doing the right things, so it's like a reinforcement of the positive.'*

This account illustrates Elizabeth's self-belief but also her need for external validation, suggesting a level of vulnerability. This also suggests she is not getting this reinforcement or validation from any other source. This use of coaching for the relief of tension and balancing positive reinforcement, valued for its assistance in the organisational context she faced, shares similarities with other participants. The value of coaching to help them remain in their roles and to offer support was important. I reflected on whether this containment of coaching was related to Elizabeth and Athena's relatively limited experience of coaching in comparison with the other participants.

In the role/skill development arena Marie also raised the value of the support of coaching to enable understanding and 'manage personal

relationship' issues both in and outside of the workplace. This broader focus to coaching, incorporating introspection and personal aspects is now discussed.

6.1.2 Coaching for Career Challenges and Personal Support

Susan, Maggie, Helen and Virginia spoke of their coaching experience in emotive, introspective and personal terms (Table 6.1). Virginia related how coaching supported her emotionally through a difficult incident in her career, and how the impact of career barriers and her situational context had led to her coaching.

> *'His [a colleague's] style was just unacceptable. At one point we were having an argument and he told me that he wanted to put me against the wall and punch me. I think with confrontation, particularly in the workplace, I either close down or I fight and neither of which was particularly brilliant; and [my manager] just said "I think you just need some help on how to handle these difficult situations", so put me in touch with [my coach] and agreed to pay, which was a great help.'*

Virginia references her lack of skill in dealing with relationships set against a background of a 'confrontational' working environment. Her acceptance of the contextual situation is profound. This career challenge was her introduction to coaching and highlights the impact of the 'gendered' contextual issues that she faced (Chapter 4). Virginia continued to relate how coaching supported her through this incident and why it was helpful as a support method.

> *'When in a coaching session, I feel in my own personal safety bubble, where for once, it's just about me. Some of the discussions may touch on uncomfortable subjects but because I'm comfortable with my coach and know I'm not being judged, I can be truly honest and peel away the layers without fear of having those vulnerabilities used against me at a later point.'*

Her account is revealing when set against the context of her environment. The inference of being protected and safe in her coaching relationship is apparent from her metaphor. Her coaching is regarded as a free, safe

space, which allows introspection and being open without being judged. The suggestion of retribution highlights the anxiety of the situation and an inference of weakness. Her account of vulnerability is also interesting, related to her ability to manage uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure. The coaching relationship for Virginia is necessary in order to be open and vulnerable to enable self-development. The risk of being vulnerable presupposes a high trust environment in which one can be open with someone – in this case, the coach. Virginia related the value of coaching to her.

> *'It's hugely beneficial. It's one of those few times where you can actually be you. I'm talking of coaching rather than mentoring because with mentoring you still have a work persona … You can address all the frailties, you can stand up and be counted and say "I'm sick of being a wife or a mother" and it's the only real you time that you get because the rest of the time you are something for someone, somewhere, and I think that's a shame … I think for women [coaching is] essential.'*

Her reference to coaching as supporting her authentic self, and the difference for her between coaching and mentoring suggest how coaching facilitated her authenticity and helped to build her identity. This also suggests that Virginia perceives mentoring as maintaining her inauthentic self, her 'work persona'. This is highlighted again in a further quote that reinforces her 'need' to be someone else in the workplace.

> *'With a coach I felt free to air all my frailties and be absolutely brutally honest. With a mentor I've felt it's in the workplace and I need to be the person I want them to think I am.'*

The different work and real-life persona reference is an interesting insight into how she felt she had to manage various roles and identities in the workplace, and suggests Virginia was developing herself and/or her professional identity with the support of coaching. Virginia also felt that the value of her coaching experience had been personal to her as a woman, as well as impacting her performance at work. The irony of the dilemma she

faced was that she had to be strong to survive in such a macho and target-driven environment, but that this was the aspect that was causing her most difficulty with her boss, her peers and her own team. The coaching experience for Virginia went to the 'real core of me', helping her to deal with a personal issue that had impacted her whole working life. The coaching Virginia received 'has been perhaps funded by work, but more of a personal journey and not just "well, yes, I want to be the next CEO"'. Virginia also felt that her use of coaching again in the future would be more for her personal life and helping her as a woman. This focus on coaching reaching the core of a person was also a feature of Susan's 'reconnection' and was the essence of recovery and the regaining of confidence and resilience. The reconnection element to the women's self-identity was important. Virginia's account illustrates the valued support she received from coaching relative to helping her deal with a difficult situation in a challenging context, and highlights the difference she saw between coaching and mentoring. Her description of how coaching supported her is similar to the personal support that some of the other participants recounted. Marie, Virginia, Helen, Eleanor and Emily all described how their coaching had helped their personal relationships and circumstances and also helped relieve the pressure of working in their environment.

The depth of introspection and self-examination through their coaching relationship varied among the participants. Emily's account is now looked at in detail to illustrate this.

6.1.3 Coaching for Career and Life Transitions

Simone, Eleanor, Jane and Emily all highlighted how their coaching experience had impacted their career and personal circumstances (Table

6.1). Emily's account highlights the breadth of her coaching experience and how she effectively employed coaching to understand what she wanted out of life and her career, and how she balanced that with her family. Emily used different coaches in various organisational cultures and environments, and saw a difference between the task focus of mentoring and how 'coaching is more holistic, that's the difference'. Emily further related what the purpose of coaching was for her.

> *'Coaching for me is about the coach helping you, or [to] facilitate you to come to your own conclusions in your journey, so it's supportive.'*

The emphasis here is on her ownership of both the process and the outcome of the coaching, with the support and facilitation of the coach. The act of facilitation and a focus on her individual responsibility for action also reinforces a move away from the guidance and psychosocial support she described receiving from her mentor (Chapter 5). To understand this difference further, Emily related how she had initially used coaching to support her with a decision she had to make about her compromise between her work and personal life.

> *'My first experience of coaching was in X. It was coaching me through what I wanted out of life, and I was in my mid thirties and I wanted to grow my career, I wanted a family; I didn't think I could have both, and [my coach] helped me realise that I could have both. I could be a successful leader and also be a mum.'*

Her coach had supported her to realise that work and family weren't mutually exclusive: she could have both. This aspect of Emily's coaching suggests a difference from the perceived confinement and 'task' of mentoring in the career and internal work context. Coaching was used to support Emily through a key transitional decision point in her career. This career/personal life dilemma captures the range of issues brought to coaching and how the work context again influences coaching assignments.

Emily related a further experience of coaching when she returned from maternity leave. Here the coaching experience supported her in a different way.

> *'Maternity coaching, it's great, to build your confidence, to remember that you are, you can have it all, you can do what you need to do, you can be a successful woman and a successful mum and you don't have to beat yourself up for that.'*

Emily's reference to beating herself up emphasises the guilt she expressed at the compromises she had to make to balance her personal life with her work (Chapter 4). This suggests that Emily's coaching supported her in resolving this internal conflict between her own needs, the needs of her family and the requirements of her career. Her account also referenced coaching as a support in terms of providing validation at a key moment of transition, when she returned to the work environment after a period of maternity leave.

The use of coaching for transition and change is further illustrated as Emily related how she returned to coaching at various points in her career, specifically when she transitioned into and out of roles and organisations and life stages.

> *'One coach helped me between roles. I was between jobs, being made redundant and building my confidence up so I could get another job at that level, so I don't doubt myself.'*

Again the reference is made to the support of coaching in building confidence and reducing self-doubt so that she can maintain her career position. Emily further qualifies this reference to self-doubt, interestingly, by positioning her feelings using both the personal 'I' and the generalised 'we'.

> *'I feel, when I talk to other women, that we doubt ourselves, we lack the confidence. We will vocalise our lack of confidence more than they will, men will, so it just helps us give us that confidence.'*

Emily's account associates her at a gender identity level (women) and promotes a difference from men. This positions her lack of confidence by suggesting legitimisation or justification for this on a broader basis because of her gender. This reference to confidence and doubt also suggests the need to overcome the 'internal inner voice' of self-doubt and low confidence in her abilities. The recurring theme of confidence and how coaching supported her through her career was also used when Emily was again in a vulnerable and minority position.

> *'I was the only woman who was on the board, so to not show weakness it was somebody I could just go to for support, for guidance, for helping me orchestrate my first board appointment, help build my confidence to operate as an authentic peer with my male counterparts, who were all older; and I felt wiser and more confident, so it was to give me the confidence and gravitas.'*

Emily's reference to weakness reinforces the physical metaphors of strength and domination referred to in Chapter 4. Her need for support to operate as a peer and be authentic captures how the coach allowed her to be open and herself. For Emily this suggests using coaching to build the 'self' concept within social identity theory. This self-concept supports self-exploration, leading to self-awareness, which is the foundation for behavioural change. This is supported by Emily's reference to how her coach was 'helping me as a whole to be successful here, or successful for me in my next journey outside.' Emily also related how she used coaching at different stages in her career.

> *'I see coaching helping me on my journey, I haven't finished growing; helping me think through my next journey and concentrating me on my next goal.'*

This led Emily to reflect on the value of coaching to her.

> *'I think I'll always need a coach. I genuinely believe I will pay for coaching because I think it's lonely being a woman … I think it's more important for women, because it is quite lonely and we do operate differently to men. It helps you to operate in a male environment, because it's still a male environment out there and it helps to give you resilience in this male-dominated environment.'*

Emily's emphasis on the loneliness of her role in her work environment suggests the isolation she feels at being in the minority in her organisation, 'being different' (Chapter 4). The specific value of coaching to Emily, therefore, related to overcoming this 'loneliness' and building her resilience to cope with it through coaching. The coach also assisted her in overcoming her self-doubt, which had arisen through this isolation. Emily's coaching also encompassed skill building, mainly to influence male counterparts or bosses. The coaching ultimately assisted Emily's ability to remain in her professional role and also gave her the support to cope with family/personal issues that were external to work. The implication is that Emily was not getting this support from within her organisation. Notable from the participants' coaching experiences was the importance of the particular skills that the coach brought to the coaching relationship, and this is now discussed.

6.2 The Importance of the Coaching Relationship

Several of the participants highlighted their coach and specific qualities or attributes of their coach as being important to the coaching experience. These varied from the skills and qualities the women required from a coach, whether the coach was male or female and whether they were internal or external to the organisation.

The attributes of a coach considered by the participants to be among the most important to the coach–coachee relationship were 'authenticity' (Emily), 'trust' (Erica), 'rapport' (Helen), being able to 'respect' the coach (Eleanor) and specific communication skills (Athena) (Table 6.2). Trust was important to the participants, and interpersonal skills and attributes were

used to describe coaches much more so than were used for mentors. The descriptions of mentors instead related to their encouragement, guidance and social capital skills to effect career opportunities. It is also noteworthy that instead of the formal matching or contracting process of establishing a coaching relationship, as prescribed in coaching literature, the majority (eleven) of the twelve participants had met their coach as a result of a referral through a trusted colleague or their own network. There was also little, if any, mention of the specific approach or the techniques that the coach had used. Since this information was not evident from the discussions, it was therefore not possible to deduce any coaching techniques or approaches from the findings.

6.2.1 Internal or External coaches

Erica, Helen, Jane and Marie highlighted their need for the 'confidant' nature of the coach in their relationship, which allowed them to display vulnerability and openness within their coaching session. They also raised a preference for external coaches because of a perceived issue of confidentiality with internal coaches (Table 6.2). Marie's account captures this need for an external coach.

> *'I couldn't go to someone who is a peer, to have some of the conversations about other people, that just wouldn't be right. It has to be someone outside. Some of the conversations are about how I manage the relationship with my boss.'*

Marie's requirement for an external coach because of the nature of the coaching highlights her ethical considerations about sharing information about her manager. Equally this could also indicate a concern for potential retribution for sharing such confidential issues in the coaching relationship.

	Table 6.2 The Importance of the Coaching Relationship			
	Qualities of a Coach	**Male or Female Coach**	**Internal or External Coach**	**My Coach**
Athena	*'Exceptional communication skills, [able to] sort the wheat from the chaff, identify, pinpoint the issues, communicate and debate that.'*			*'[My coach would] guide and encourage [me] to work through the situation'.*
Eleanor	*'Somebody who I respect without any question.'*	*'Predominantly I've had female coaches. One [was] a male coach, extremely good, very much in touch with his female side.'*	*'[There are] pros and cons to having an internal coach, somebody who can put themselves outside the organisation and unpick the complications of those politics.'*	*'[The coach] challenged your innermost feelings, that's where my learning comes in.'* *'All of my coaches pushed me to the nth degree, [saying] just because you're a woman, why is that going to stop you?'*
Elizabeth			*'Because she worked for me, [it] doesn't mean she couldn't be a coach. [She had a] lot of experience in different areas.'*	
Emily	*'How authentic they were, how much I could relate to them.'*	*'[There are] things I wouldn't share with a male, as I would share with a woman.'*		*'[The coaches are] helping you, or facilitating you to come to your own conclusions in your journey, so it's supportive but they do hold a mirror.'*
Erica	*'I trusted him. He had good experience, a good sense of humour; he's very good.'*		*'It's very good because you would talk about things you wouldn't talk about here.'*	*'He coaches others in here [and] knows the culture … I wouldn't be able to tell you how the culture is in a British company.'*
Helen	*'[The] chemistry was good. [You] have to feel very comfortable, rapport, otherwise [you're] not going to open up and [it's a] waste of money.'* *'[He's] dispassionate [and] doesn't really have an interest either way.'*		*'[You're] telling people very confidential and very personal things.'* *'[You're not sure] whether they will inadvertently say something to someone else because of the wider good.'*	
Jane		*'I wanted a woman, [since] part of the issues was being a female in the male environment.'*	*'[There's] safety because it's a professional relationship, it's confidential and [the] person is paid to help you and won't go telling anyone else about it.'*	
Maggie	*'[Without] challenging questions, you can get into a spiral of thinking about things, with only one lens on it.'*			*'A coach can come in and cut through all of that and just ask … the basic question that you've been avoiding, or look at it in a very different way.'*
Marie			*'It has to be someone outside, [because] some of the conversations are about how I manage the relationship with my boss.'*	
Susan	*'[It's the] single most beneficial thing that you can do in your career, [so you've] got to find a good one.'*			*'He [the coach] was not a soft touch.'*
Virginia				*'With a coach I felt free to air all my frailties and be absolutely brutally honest.'*

In contrast, two of the participants felt that sometimes an internal coach was able to provide a better understanding of the internal politics and culture, as illustrated by Elizabeth's account. She had used both internal and external coaches and had called on the support of one coach who reported to her and worked for the organisation.

> *'It sounds weird because she worked for me, but that doesn't mean she couldn't be a coach. She could still coach me, because she had a lot of experience in different areas.'*

Elizabeth was satisfied with the level of support she got from this internal relationship. The difficulty of this relationship for the coach herself, given the internal reporting line, is beyond the scope of this research to determine.

Eleanor, however, was less partisan and raised the difficulties faced by internal coaches due to their closeness to the politics of the organisation in comparison to an external coach.

> *'It doesn't have to be somebody external. There are pros and cons to having an internal coach, certainly somebody who can put themselves outside the organisation and unpick the complications of those politics, that culture, that behaviour.'*

This view did not, however, preclude Eleanor from using an internal coach; she just felt that such a coach had to be more adept at managing the complex organisational politics. This suggests that internal coaches would need to take an objective stance or distance to overcome the entrenched beliefs of the organisation. This highlights the organisational context issues prevalent not only in the coaching agenda but also in the choice of coaching relationship.

6.2.2 **Male and Female Coaches**

An additional dimension associated with the ability to confide in their coach was a preference for a male or female coach. Eight of the participants had experience of both male and female coaches, while Virginia had only had a female coach and Athena, Helen and Susan had only had male coaches. Jane and Emily raised a preference for the gender of their coach. Although only two of the participants highlighted this I felt it was relevant to present, as their choice of coach by gender was important for addressing their career development context issues. More recently in her career, Jane had specifically sought the use of a female coach to help her.

> *'I said that I wanted a woman because part of the issues I wanted to talk about was being a female in the male environment and how that sort of played out.'*

Jane's need for belonging in the context she operated in impacted her quest for authenticity. Her aim was to get a better insight into how she developed her career in a male-dominated environment while retaining her authenticity, and a female coach had been helping her to understand this. Emily had used both male and female coaches but recounted that her current ability to share certain issues may be greater with a woman.

> *'[There are] possibly things I wouldn't share with a male, as I would share with a woman. I'm going through the change, so sharing that, because that affects your workplace at times, if you went through a hot flush, you can talk to a woman about it, but I'm not going to talk to a male coach about it.'*

This relates from a different perspective to how additional factors such as current life stage could impact the choice of coach by gender.

In the participants' descriptions of their coach's approach to coaching them, there were similarities to their mentor in terms of offering support and guidance (Athena). However, there was also a variance, as Eleanor, Emily, Maggie, Susan and Virginia regarded the challenges that the coach

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presented as being important, and specifically the coach's ability to challenge some of the participant's own barriers to change (Table 6.2). Maggie in particular found that this supported her learning.

> *'I think the challenging questions [are important] as well, because you can get into a spiral of thinking about things, really, and with only one lens on it, so a coach can come in and cut through all of that and just ask the different question, well, the basic question that you've been avoiding, or look at it in a very different way.'*

Maggie highlights the difference in perspective her coach provides for her and how this challenge encourages change. Maggie's coaching experience was focused on addressing her internal state and calming her internal dialogue to address difficult situations.

> *'This was very specifically about me getting my inner confidence, I think, and the inner talk to being able to free me up to do what I thought I could do.'*

Maggie had then sought coaching to address the organisational pressures and challenge to her confidence that this brought. It was intriguing that although she was the first and youngest woman in charge of her section she had not felt this pressure to be an issue until someone pointed that out to her.

In Transactional Analysis terms (Berne, 1961) the earlier discussions on the support of a mentor have the essence of a parent–child relationship, with the mentor performing a parental role for the participants. The participants in turn were seeking guidance, career opportunities and advice on how to fit within their organisations from their mentor. In the coaching relationship the coachee recognises that she has her limitations and is seeking the challenge of the coach in an adult-to-adult relationship to 'challenge innermost feelings' (Eleanor), to ask 'the question you've been avoiding' (Maggie) and to be encouraged to 'face up to behaviours' (Susan). Coaching as 'your own journey' (Emily) highlights the ownership of

the issues and the challenge and support that is offered through this relationship (Table 6.2). The coach does more than just encourage and support, as the mentor does. The coaching relationship appears 'adult' in perception and suggests an experience of transformational learning.

To illustrate the value to the women of the coach–coachee relationship, Susan and Eleanor highlight in different ways the support of their coach to challenge and change their thinking and behaviours. Susan's account illustrates the strong relationship she had with her coach and how she valued his challenge.

> *'If you can find a good coach, it is the single most beneficial thing that you can do in your career, I would say, but you've got to find a good one.'*

Susan was a key advocate of the value of coaching, as it had helped her self-awareness and understanding of what situations made her anxious. The balance between challenge and support from her coach was especially important for her development.

> *'He was not a soft touch, although he would let me offload the distress of that experience but not for long, you know, so once he felt that we were going from reasonable catharsis into some kind of poor me, victim mode then that absolutely would stop.'*

Susan's use of 'cathartic' to 'offload the distress' and her reference to 'victim' highlights how deeply affected she had been by the career challenge and the exclusion she faced (Chapter 4). Her coaching had supported her in recovering from what had been an unsettling and unpleasant experience for her related to her exclusion from 'boys' clubs'. Susan explains how coaching helped her to move from this 'victim mode' to taking action to resolve her issues, describing how her coach helped her: 'he really took no prisoners, he helped me to face up to some behaviours that had been unhelpful all through my career.' Her coach, she believed,

'stripped away all of that archetypal feminine sense, that sense of low self-worth, low self-esteem, deference to men, you know, it's stripped all that away'. She related how her coach supported her:

> *'[He helped to] just reconnect me with my skills and abilities and intuitions. [He] reflects all those things back to me and reconnects me with them.'*

These passages demonstrate how introspective Susan's coaching experience had been. They also show how her coach helped her to reconcile her prior experience with developing her identity and recovering her self-esteem. This highlights the impact of her contextual challenge on her levels of self-confidence and ultimately her self-esteem.

Susan had used her coach at specific times based on her own self-awareness, to give her confidence and to support her career, or when her anxiety levels were raised: 'I don't use him very often but when there are things that press my buttons, I'll sometimes give him a call …The trigger is about self-worth, women's stuff, this person is going to find me out.' Susan related an example of when she had contacted her coach.

> *'We were restructuring. I felt quite vulnerable. Although I knew I [could] do the job, I was really quite anxious that those things would go against me, so I spent a bit of time just talking back through [them] with [my coach].'*

The example again highlights her feelings of self-doubt and lack of confidence. The understanding is that her coach had helped not only to instill confidence but also to support and develop her as a person to the point where she recognised her own 'triggers' for seeking support. Susan also acknowledged that her coach had helped her by not allowing her to wallow in self-pity but had then given her the support and challenge to redefine herself: 'it helped me to see that I didn't have to be defined by my past.' Her coach had helped her to address this, and the process was so

successful that she had continued to use his support across organisations and roles over a period of fifteen years.

In contrast to Susan, Eleanor had used a number of different coaches. However, she was also keen to comment that the value of her coaching was dependent on ensuring a good coach. Her phrase 'the beauty of a really good coach' emphasises how the quality of the coach is important to the effectiveness of the coaching experience.

Eleanor valued the support of her coach and mentor in dealing with the politics of her organisation in different ways:

> *'A coach would unpick the complications of those politics, that culture [and] behaviour, and from a very dispassionate view say "so why are you doing it that way?" I don't think it's the mentor's role to do that.'*

Here Eleanor suggests the coach's role is questioning the status quo, in contrast with the mentor's closeness to the organisational politics. The mentor would take more of an advisory role to discuss how to deal with the politics rather than attempt to explain or resolve the situation. When Eleanor was probed on what was significant about coaching in addition to the personal support and challenge of the coaching experience, she described how she valued the freedom and safety aspect of the experience.

> *'They do encourage you to kind of play and almost quite deliberately mess about with stuff … It's the playing where you get the knowledge and where you get the stretch.'*

This is an interesting insight into how Eleanor risks being open and vulnerable, and is also an interesting feature about the safety aspect of coaching with a link to the language of 'play'. Her coach supports experiences concerning aspects of experimentation and development in a

safe environment. This experimentation, 'messing about' and playing in the safe environment of the coaching relationship, highlights the juxtaposition between the political game playing and the necessary adaptation to this in the external working environment. This further differentiates the coaching relationship from the mentoring relationship in terms of the depth of the coach's challenge to her thinking, through stimulating questioning techniques. The 'power' of the coach in her coaching relationship was also described as key to her learning experience.

> *'They've challenged your innermost feelings to the point where you're thinking my god, I'm not quite sure any more what I'm thinking, and that sounds a bit perverse but, for me, that's where my learning comes in.'*

This loss of 'intellectual' control for Eleanor in effect describes in a similar way the process of change, unfreezing and refreezing her thinking (Lewin, 1947) and transformational learning (Mezirow, 1978). This also indicates the intellectual capacity that Eleanor required from her coach and relates back to her need to 'respect' her coach. The strength of this relationship is also illustrated in Eleanor's interesting account of the impact of a coach outside of 'normal' coaching relations. Her account of how her coach assisted her through a difficult stage in her personal life is compelling. Eleanor was in a stressful role, undergoing a lot of change while supporting her dying father, and at a time when her mother needed surgery. She related her coaching experience during this period.

> *'My coach was immensely supportive. I know that a lot of people would say that coaches shouldn't advise, [but] my coach said "I am going to go into advisory mode. I think you need to leave this organisation." And I've never forgotten it and I've always been incredibly grateful for it … I think if you've got the relationship with your coach, I think actually there are times when the coach could and should step in and give advice. It's up to the individual then as to whether they take that advice but if you've got that sufficient sort of relationship, I think it's terribly useful.'*

It is illuminating to note how Eleanor referenced the support of her coach, the perceived boundaries of the relationship and how the coach had crossed these boundaries to help her with this work–life balance dilemma. In effect, he had stepped out of 'normal' coaching mode into a more directive and advisory mode. Eleanor had valued the flexibility of this support. Her reference to the strength of the relationship with her coach and the support and advice she received is similar to her continued relationship with her mentor (Chapter 5). This relational support was important for Eleanor and also suggests that this was something that was not available in her organisation. This may relate to the role Eleanor held in HR/organisational development (OD), where from my experience the need for impartiality and objectivity reduce the ability to forge close alliances with internal peers.

After examining the participants' coaching beliefs and experiences, the theme of coaching and mentoring others emerged, and this is now discussed.

6.3 Advocacy and Legacy – Coaching and Mentoring Others

A notable theme was that eleven of the twelve participants described how they transferred their coaching and mentoring experience and learning back into their own organisation by coaching or mentoring others. Athena, Eleanor, Emily, Helen, Jane, Maggie, Marie and Simone had also trained as coaches and mentors (Table 3.3). Their experiences varied from initiating a broad organisational initiative such as Eleanor's, where her role and experience of coaching led her to create a coaching culture, to coaching and mentoring their own teams or others within their organisation and beyond (Table 6.3). Their comments and use of adjectives and intensifiers to describe their support to others suggests their advocacy of

	Table 6.3 Advocacy and Legacy – Coaching and Mentoring Others	
	Coaching and Mentoring Others	**Coaching and Mentoring Other Women**
Athena	*'[There's] nothing nicer, ever, than seeing somebody succeed; [to] make some small impact, [a] positive impact, [to] help them along their way. That's wonderful.'*	
Eleanor	*'There were some very, very valuable people in the organisation who we could lose if we didn't think very carefully about how we were going to support and develop them. I brought in a coaching culture.'* *'I always use coaching techniques, pulling out the best of them themselves; it's incredibly valuable. It's that kind of lightbulb moment when somebody thinks they can't do something and then they realise that they can, and that's what coaching is. I find it just incredibly exciting.'*	
Elizabeth		*'With this diversity role I've got I would be a role model to young women coming into the organisation. They'll say, well, there is somebody at the management board who's a female and she's not HR.'*
Emily	*'We introduced a mentoring programme and I was a mentor to a number of graduates, so it was helping them on their journey.'*	*'Anybody on my team who came back, who'd had a baby, I got them a coach.'*
Erica		*'I coach and I mentor … you need somebody to push you and I push my women. Especially when they go on maternity leave, because then they lose a lot of confidence. I always make sure I get them back; they don't get scared of coming back. It's very important to me because that's when we lose them. So I watch them around that age.'*
Helen		*'I've been coaching other people … to assist women to progress into management.'*
Maggie	*'[I was] deliberately bringing coaching in, [asking] how will you coach each other, keep each other honest about living these values, how do you take coaching and authentic conversations forward? How do you listen properly as opposed to just listening to the words?'* *'[What] I find from mentoring is it makes me stop and think … [and] analyse how or why you do something, which I might not otherwise do.'*	
Marie	*'Part of my role [is] to encourage people, succession planning, assisting people … I cannot do my role without being coached. It's me also saying that to other people.'*	
Simone	*'[I use] the coaching approach because it's more empowering. I'd rather enable somebody to think than actually be telling them how to think.'*	
Susan	*'Four of my executive team I've sent to [my coach].'*	
Virginia	*'"I'm grooming you for your next role, you will leave me and when you do, go to a better and bigger role; that's my job done", and in some bizarre way I'm seeing them as a family, my children. I'm pushing them that way.'*	

coaching and mentoring, and also how the impact of their own coaching experience had encouraged them to help others. Marie was a promoter of coaching and also saw it as one of her 'guiding principles' to leave a legacy and coach others: '[it is] part of my role to encourage people, and I see it as just part of succession planning, as assisting people … I cannot do my role without being coached; it's me also saying that to other people.' Marie also describes how she used her networking contacts in order to create mentoring opportunities for her team; this impacted her performance and her team's performance and was to the overall benefit of the organisation.

Emily and Athena, having experienced career development support through coaching and mentoring, also wanted to support others in their career advancement. Emily wanted to 'help them on their journey' and Athena similarly suggested a supportive motive in her account.

> *'I think for me as an individual there is nothing nicer, ever, than seeing somebody succeed, so if you can think, if it's possible that you can make some small impact, [a] positive impact, and help them along their way, that's kind of wonderful.'*

Virginia's support as a coach and mentor for others was from a different perspective.

> *'I'll always tell my lot "I'm grooming you for your next role, you will leave me and when you do, go to a better and bigger role; that's my job done", and in some bizarre way I'm seeing them as a family, my children. I'm pushing them that way.'*

The comparison of her coachees as her family was enlightening, and reflected the support she had been given by her mentor and coach (5.1.2, 6.1.2). The participants' need to support others in their career development journeys was important to them. I considered whether this advocacy related to their altruism or their roles as leaders, or whether this was related to the introduction of wider organisational initiatives. For the majority I believe that they were either recreating the support they had received or ensuring that

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support was available where it had not been available for them. This is illustrated by Maggie, whose introduction of coaching for her team was seen as 'an opportunity for agitation' and for changing the culture, the processes/systems and the ways of thinking. Maggie, in addition to supporting the coaching of others, was also more explicit in describing how she approached this.

> *'It was very deliberately bringing coaching in, [asking] how will you coach each other, keep each other honest about living these values, but equally how do you then take coaching and authentic conversations forward? How do you listen properly as opposed to just listening to the words, and so on.'*

In her coaching and mentoring Maggie also saw reciprocal value for her personally for doing this for others.

> *'I think you get more out of it as well. One of the things I find from mentoring is it makes me stop and think … [and] analyse how or why you do something, which I might not otherwise do.'*

This enabled Maggie to reflect and consider her learning and development, an example of the double-loop learning concept (Argyris and Schon, 1978).

All of these participants were keen to support their team and saw it as a positive for everyone. The indirect benefit to the broader organisation was articulated by some of the participants, and is one that I believe exists by implication of their focus on relational leadership and people development. In contrast, Eleanor's impact may have related to the role she held within the organisation but her advocacy of 'the power of coaching' was clear.

> *'I realised that there were some very, very valuable people in the organisation who we could lose if we didn't think very carefully about how we were going to support and develop them. So I brought in a coaching culture.'*

Eleanor had a strong belief and conviction in the value of coaching for the individual and the organisation. This advocacy was also supported in the differences in the approach the participants took to introducing coaching

and mentoring for others. Although the majority of the participants had been involved in transferring their development and learning through coaching or mentoring back into the organisation, some expressed a preference for one method over the other. Eleanor and Simone had a clear preference for coaching techniques and approaches. Eleanor stated: 'I always try to use coaching techniques of pulling out the best of them themselves because I think it's incredibly valuable.' Simone had been trained to be a mentor as well as a coach but preferred to use a coaching style, as she felt that it was ultimately more empowering for the individual.

> *'I am far more comfortable with the coaching approach because it's more empowering. I would far rather enable somebody to think than actually be telling them how to think.'*

It is insightful that having experienced both mentoring and coaching, their preference was for the development of coaching.

In addition to coaching and mentoring people in their teams, five of the participants highlighted the need to specifically support other women. Athena, Elizabeth, Helen, Emily and Erica were involved in either coaching or supporting other women in their own organisations or through their wider network (Table 6.3). Elizabeth had responsibility for diversity issues within her organisation and was aware of her role model potential. Athena spoke regularly to women's networking groups and students to encourage their development, and she mentored on a regular basis. Helen, Emily and Erica coached and encouraged other women in their teams, and for them there was a need based on their own experiences to support other women that went beyond organisational obligations. Emily had ensured that for 'anybody on my team who came back, who'd had a baby, I got them a coach', in order to support their transition back into the organisation. This reflects her own struggle with the guilt and challenges she faced with her

choice to be a mother and continue her career (6.1.3). Erica's account also captures this need to support others and her own unique way of ensuring that she encouraged women to return after maternity leave.

> *'I coach and I mentor … You need somebody to push you and that's why I push my women. Especially when they go on maternity leave, because then they lose a lot of confidence. So I always make sure I get them back in … just two days a week, I don't care, as long as they don't get scared of coming back. It's very important to me because that's when we lose them. So I watch them around that age.'*

Her support here goes beyond offering assistance to the women to actively ensuring that she 'pushes' other women to return to work. This provision of coaching and development opportunities and support, assisting other women's advancement, suggests a sense of sisterhood, whereby women support other women in recognition of the lack of support they will receive from the organisation (Mavin, 2006). This act of support also suggests their aspiration that future women will not have to repeat the challenges the participants themselves faced.

6.4 Chapter Summary and Discussion

This chapter has discussed the participants' experiences of coaching and the purpose, meaning and value of coaching in their later career phase. The importance of the coach's skills and the challenge they give the coachee were also explored, as was the advocacy of coaching and its potential as a company legacy.

Coaching supported the female executives in various ways, including assisting skills development so they could remain in their role, facilitating introspection and providing support for specific career challenges, and also assisting with work-related or personal issues that had a major impact on their lives and initiated change. While these aspects are associated with

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general executive coaching research (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Stern, 2004; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Bachkirova and Cox, 2006) the women emphasised that coaching also assisted them with identity development, authenticity and transformational learning. This research therefore adds an additional dimension to the limited body of experiential research concerning coaching support for executive women in the UK from a coachee perspective (Leimon *et al*., 2011; Broughton and Miller, 2009; Worth, 2012). The present study also found the importance of development that assists identity construction and the building of authenticity, in accordance with CCL (2011) and Ibarra *et al*. (2013). It thereby extends the broader gender and leadership development literature on how to support women and overcome barriers to advancement (Sinclair, 2011; Mavin *et al*., 2014).

Additionally the women provided accounts of the comparison between coaching and mentoring and their transition from one support intervention to another in a career context. The participants' descriptions of how, and importantly when, these support methods were used highlights the contrast between the early encouragement and support of the mentor and the later challenge of the coach. Their accounts and insight into the similarities and differences between these two interventions add to the currently limited understanding of these methods as development and support interventions in coaching and mentoring research (Klofsten and Oberg, 2008). It is notable that these findings differ from Mavin *et al*.'s (2014) recent findings that early coaching is key for women's careers and that late sponsorship and mentoring are becoming more prevalent and may also play an important role in the success of women's careers. This subject is discussed further within Chapter 7 and is also a potential area for future research.

The importance of the coach's specific skills in an effective coach–coachee relationship was also highlighted in the present research. The women's accounts included their choice of internal or external coach support, and a few noted the impact of coach gender for supporting coaching needs and personal circumstances, with the women's choice of same gender coaches supporting Gray and Goregaokor's (2010) findings. These insights extend knowledge of the coaching relationship from the findings of Galuk (2009), who concluded in her research on Australian women that the coach was the biggest influencing factor on their coaching experiences. This also supports the importance of the coaching relationship and the qualities of the coach proposed by Passmore (2007) and De Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011), and the effective working relationship between the coach and coachee, acknowledged in executive coaching research (Bluckert, 2005; Jones and Spooner, 2006; Passmore, 2006; Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007).

Relative to both the focus of the coaching and the importance of the coaching relationship, it was notable that a few of the women highlighted their vulnerability and loneliness and described how coaching had supported them with these issues. Their ability to be vulnerable in the coaching relationship accords with Cox's (2012) research into trust in the coaching relationship in the context of peer coaching for men and women. Cox (2012) found that 'openness comes through trusting enough to make ourselves vulnerable leading to the confidence to share plans for the future and to reveal important values. This, in turn, leads to productivity in relation to the achievement of goals' (Cox, 2012, p. 439). Cox's (2012) insight reinforces the inference that trust and vulnerability seem inextricably linked. It also supports a study of executives conducted by Alvey and Barclay

(2007), which reported similar findings and concluded that confidentiality is the 'single-most important factor in developing and maintaining trust' (Alvey and Barclay, 2007, p. 22). Although there is limited research on the aspect of trust and vulnerability in the coaching relationship, especially for female executives, this study provides an insight into the subject, which could be explored further in future research.

In terms of the prospective outcomes of coaching, these were found to be broader ranging than the improved performance and development of the executive herself. The findings suggest that there is an impact from individual coaching on the organisation as a whole due to many participants going on to coach and mentor others and advocate coaching for broader organisational impact and possible organisational legacy. For these women, supporting others through coaching and mentoring their team or other people both within and outside the organisation was important. This aligns with Cunliffe and Erikson's (2011) interpretation of relational leadership, which recognises the 'entwined nature of our relationships with others' (Cunliffe and Erikson, 2011, p. 1434). Five of the women were particularly involved in supporting other women to develop and advance their careers, and this dual legacy and 'sisterhood' effect of coaching on the broader organisation is new to the research on coaching and mentoring female executives (Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al*., 2011; Worth, 2012). This also aligns to the broader gender literature where there are calls for research concerning women in management, accounts of sisterhood, and how women support and impact the development of other women (Mavin, 2006). With regard to broader executive coaching research, although it proposes that one of the aims of executive coaching is to enable a leader to achieve long-term organisational goals (Stern, 2004; Feldman

and Lankau, 2005), I found only one reference to the organisational learning impact of executive coaching (Swart and Harcup, 2013). There is also limited research pertaining to the disposition and motivation of mentors from a social psychology perspective (Allen, 2003) and to mentees' propensity to act as peer mentors to others (Roszkowski and Badmus, 2014). This current research therefore contributes to this limited body of knowledge.

Finally, the synthesis of the three findings chapters reveals temporal patterns in the use of mentors, networking, coaches, and ultimately coaching and mentoring others, as captured in Figure 6.1.

Career Growth

Mentoring
Networking
Sponsorship
Role Modelling

Career Development

Coaching
Networking
Group Development

Career Legacy

Coaching
Coaching & Mentoring Others
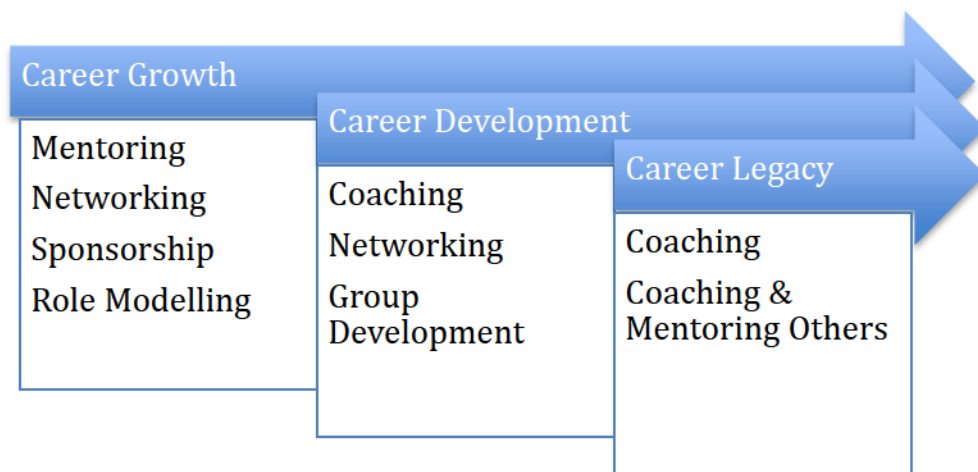
Figure 6.1 – Stages of Developmental Support

The adoption and timing of these support interventions provides an alternative perspective to the existing research on coaching female executives, which discusses coaching as a development intervention in isolation of these other factors (Leimon *et al.*, 2011; Broughton and Miller, 2009; Worth, 2012). It further emphasizes the research that indicates the

value women can accrue from investments in coaching and mentoring early in their careers to support personal development (Mavin *et al.*, 2014). This potential continuum of developmental career support is comparable to O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) research into the career development phases of women. Their research findings propose three stages of career development, displayed in Figure 6.2.
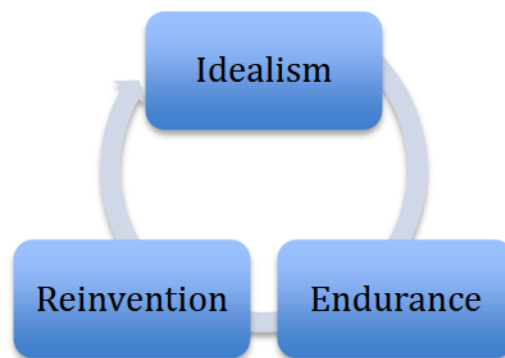
Figure 6.2 – Career Development Phases (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005)

O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) initial phase of 'idealism' proposes a focus on the instrumentality of the women's career growth, which is similar to the women's value of the mentor's role to facilitate career opportunities, organisational 'fit' and social capital. The second phase of 'endurance' relates to their growth 'in role', and in this research the participants' use of coaching to support their career challenges and to develop skills, their identity and their authentic selves accords with this. The later phase of 'reinvention' proposes a contributory aspect to the women's career and is comparable in this research to the advocacy and legacy of coaching and mentoring others.

O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) research is similarly set against the contextual career challenges that impact on a women's career advancement. The current research differs, however, in relation to the age range of its participants and how the women move through the phases. This is an area that could be explored further in future research and is discussed in Chapter 7.

The three findings chapters have essentially captured how these twelve executive women steered their careers to achieve individual success, through their employment of development support. The final chapter now discusses the conclusions that can be drawn from this study.

Chapter 7 **Conclusion**

This concluding chapter presents the research findings alongside the extant literature to address the original aim of the research: to explore the experiences of executive women who have been coached and mentored, in order to gain insights into the role of coaching and mentoring as development and support interventions in their career progression. The contribution to coaching and mentoring research and practice, the adoption of an IPA methodology and the implications and limitations of the research are also discussed.

The research aim was met by fulfilling four underpinning objectives. Firstly, Chapter 2 critically reviewed the literature and relevant concepts and theories. Secondly, Chapter 3 examined and justified the methodology used to explore the coaching and mentoring experiences of executive women. Thirdly, Chapter 3 critically analysed the women's experiences and the emergence of themes through data analysis. The main findings were presented and discussed in the respective empirical chapters: Career Challenges (Chapter 4), Early Career Journey Support (Chapter 5) and Later Career Development and Legacy (Chapter 6). Finally, this chapter meets the fourth objective by using the themes and insights from the research to inform the interventions used by organisations, professionals and individuals to enhance women's career development and progression.

An IPA methodology was chosen for this research, as it draws upon the fundamental tenets of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography and was therefore able to provide insights into the participants' personal experiences of coaching and mentoring (Smith *et al*., 2009). An IPA

methodology also supported the research aim, theme emergence and ultimate presentation of the findings, facilitating both idiographic insight and shared patterns across the participant group. The research study involved semi-structured interviews with twelve senior executive women, who shared their situational context, career challenges, and coaching and mentoring experiences. All twelve participants worked in UK organisations and had successfully reached a senior level in their careers, in different organisations, sectors and industries. This study covered new ground in its focus on understanding the coaching and mentoring experiences of executive women in a UK organisational context, and in its adoption of an IPA methodology to do so.

The study's main insight is into the varied nature and the timing of the support provided by both coaching and mentoring, and how these interventions related to and impacted on the participants' career challenges, cultural and work context, and journey to career success. The majority of the women understood that the relational support they received through coaching, mentoring and networking was important and helped them to grow in their roles and careers, and consequently to expand their social capital and develop their identity. It allowed them to make the crucial transition towards taking responsibility for their own career advancement (Mavin *et al.*, 2014). The presence of a mentor or coach to support and encourage the participants was therefore important but notably in different ways and at different times in their careers.

In the women's early career development, mentoring helped them to gain access to career opportunities and understand the organisation, and showed them how to fit into its culture and how to develop social capital

through networking. While this finding supports Tharenou's (2005) research into the benefits of early career mentoring and the benefits of mentoring to women (Singh *et al.*, 2006; Hopkins *et al.*, 2008; Maxwell, 2009; Hoigaard and Mathisen, 2009; Beeson and Valerio, 2012; Leck and Orser, 2013), I conclude that mentoring has more of a complex and dynamic impact on an individual's professional development.

The women's mentors had experience of the organisation and its culture, and most importantly had already succeeded in an environment where the women were just starting out in their careers. On the one hand, the mentor's instrumental and facilitative role through offering job opportunities and networking support assisted the women to build structural and relational social capital, which was important to their career development (Stead and Elliott, 2012). On the other hand, however, mentoring appears to support a parental, dependent relationship that reinforces the cultural status quo and inequity of a gendered organisational environment (Billing, 2011). So although the women valued and personally gained a lot from the 'insider' support of a mentor, it could be the case that mentoring women in the early stages of their career may ultimately be perpetuating the gender inequality that it seeks to address.

This dichotomy highlights the complexity of resolving the issue as to how best to support women's career advancement (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000; Syed and Murray, 2008; Ibarra *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, group development interventions, although beneficial for some, either replicated the women's gendered work environments or failed to recognise and address the inherent imbalance in the workplace (Ely *et al.*, 2011; Ibarra *et al.* 2013). This again raises questions for women's leadership development

programmes, which are currently regarded as an established method for supporting women's professional advancement (Hopkins *et al.*, 2008; Valerio, 2009; Ely *et al.*, 2011; Clarke, 2011; Debebe, 2011).

As the women's careers progressed, they had a greater need to develop specialised skills and to seek personal support during particular career and life challenges. The increasing isolation of their roles and the impact of their work context led the executive women to employ coaches, who assisted them with their identity development and search for authenticity in an environment to which they had to adapt if they wanted to overcome the barriers to their career progression (CCL, 2011; Sinclair, 2013; Ibarra *et al.*, 2013). The majority of the women felt that coaching had supported their role and skill development, and also their ability to manage their working lives given the context of their organisational environment. For some women, coaching had also given them the support to manage their work–life balance, to help them deal with their feelings of vulnerability and loneliness, and to enhance their longer-term career development (Mavin *et al.*, 2014).

The later use of coaching, the external nature of the coaching relationship, and the coach's challenge to encourage transformational learning and change, all highlight its difference to mentoring as a support method in terms of career phase, external perspective and level of challenge (Passmore, 2007; Feldman and Lankau, 2005). The participants' relationships with their mentors and coaches did share some similarities, since the psychosocial support and encouragement of the mentor and coach were both needed to fill a perceived gap in relational support from the organisation. Mentoring and coaching were, however, used for different

phases of the women's careers (Klofsten and Oberg, 2008; Feldman and Lankau, 2005) and for a wide variety of reasons. It can be concluded therefore that coaching and mentoring both supported the women's professional development, but did so in different ways.

In their later careers the participants advocated and used coaching and mentoring to assist the advancement of team members and others both within and outside the organisation, and in some cases specifically female junior colleagues. One of the conclusions of this research is therefore that coaching has the potential to become an organisational legacy and to encourage relational leadership. The transition of the coachee from receiving support from the organisation through mentoring and coaching to giving support to the organisation through developing others supports O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) career development lifecycle model (6.4). This idea can also be linked to the concept of relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Cunliffe and Erikson, 2011), which holds that leaders encourage support and shared values in their team and broader organisation through interacting and developing relationships with others. In relation to this there was also evidence of 'sisterhood' (Mavin, 2006), whereby women advocated passing on positive advice to other women in order to support their gender as a whole to develop and progress in the workplace.

This study identified gendered organisation bias and second-generation bias, associated with the work and organisation features of gender theory (Chapters 1 and 2). The participants highlighted the pervading influence and multi-faceted nature of the barriers in their career development by sharing the obstacles they faced and the meaning they gave to instances in which they had encountered disparity. The participants' accounts further

suggest the gender embeddedness of Wharton's (2012) interactional perspective and the complex multi-layered barriers to their career advancement (Calas and Smircich, 2006; Kelan, 2009; Corlett and Mavin, 2014) (Chapter 2). These research findings therefore contribute to the debate on gendered organisations by highlighting how the women's heightened challenge of having to work in a gendered environment while also adapting their personality and/or working style, had a consequent impact on their identity and authenticity (Kelan, 2009; Sinclair, 2011; Corlett and Mavin, 2014; Mavin *et al.*, 2014). These were twelve successful women, who had all achieved significant roles in their careers through a complex combination of relational support and personal persistence and spirit. They were not ignorant of internal politics, networking or organisational culture and they had each compromised a great deal to succeed professionally. The women's stories relate their resilience and determination to succeed and to develop their careers in a context that is supportive of the male majority (Billing, 2011). It is clear that the women's need to compromise and adapt in order to 'fit' into the working environment was the responsibility of the women themselves, not the organisation. This research therefore concludes that for these women adaptation, personal sacrifice and compromise were necessary for them to work successfully within their organisations and to develop their careers. In most cases this involved not only adapting their style, which impacted on their identity and authentic selves, but also making sacrifices and compromises in their family and personal lives (Sinclair, 2011). These women had to devise ways of coping with all this to ensure that they remained part of their organisations and continued their careers, and therefore used interventions such as coaching and mentoring to support themselves (Mavin *et al.*, 2014).

An unexpected outcome of this research came from my assumption at the outset that the participants might use the terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' interchangeably and would understand them differently to me. Following the data collection and analysis I was personally surprised at the differences the participants described between their coaching and mentoring experiences and the transitionary nature of the participants' development from early career mentoring to later career coaching. This provides an insight into an under-researched area in coaching and mentoring research in two main ways: firstly, by examining the two support methods of coaching and mentoring for executive women; and secondly, by examining these methods from the female executives' perspective in terms of how they differ and support them (Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al.*, 2011; Worth, 2012).

The key contributions made by this study relate to the understanding of three key areas: the coaching context of executive women; the meaning and comparison of coaching, mentoring and other leadership development interventions; and the experience of coaching and mentoring for the individual coachee. This broad approach has focused on executive women, as this is a limited area of research both within gender literature and coaching and mentoring literature. The study findings have identified (1) the value of coaching and mentoring at specific phases in the careers of women who have reached leadership positions; (2) why the women found value in these interventions, especially in relation to coaching's support of their skills, transformation and adaptation; and (3) the aspects of organisational legacy and sisterhood that can benefit other women and the broader organisation.

This research has therefore enabled a broader, more in-depth understanding of how, why and in which ways coaching and mentoring contribute to the development and support of executive women. As a result, the study has expanded knowledge of the challenges of senior-level career progression for women by providing first-hand empirical accounts of the impact and meaning of career barriers, including identifying some of these barriers and the coping strategies and development support used to overcome them. Since discussions of career barriers tend to be dominated by debates over gender, the important issue of how to address these barriers is often overlooked. This study has shown how coaching and mentoring have impacted and supported the careers and lives of the women in this research in varied and sometimes similar ways: mentoring by facilitating social capital and the development of networks to support their career development, and coaching by supporting self-identity and authenticity development through a trusting and challenging relationship with the coach.

Important insights into the roles of coaching and mentoring have been revealed by the women in this study, which can directly aid professional coaching practice in supporting female leaders. Additionally those aspiring to leadership roles may recognise the gendered nature of their workplaces and can learn of the support that coaching and mentoring can provide to help them rise to the highest ranks of their organisations. Focusing on the role of coaching as challenging existing behaviours and thinking, developing authenticity and identity, and creating transformational learning through an alternative 'external' perspective, provides an opportunity for organisations and women to think and behave in different ways that might be more conducive to women's success in the workplace. Additionally, the

potential effect that coaching and mentoring has on an organisation as a whole, in addition to the career development of the coachees and mentees themselves, has been demonstrated by their enthusiasm to encourage the professional development of workplace colleagues.

7.1 Recommendations for Future Research

This research has shown the importance of understanding the client's experience of coaching and mentoring in a contemporary organisational context. Further research into the client's subjective experiences would enhance this understanding of the coaching process, and similar research with a group of younger professional women would be beneficial to discover whether and how current workplace environments have changed in terms of the experiences of ambitious, high-achieving women at the start of their careers.

Another useful research study would be to discover whether having previous experience of being mentored and/or coached makes a subsequent coaching experience more effective for executive women. During my research I noticed that participants with early experience of mentoring and more experience of coaching appeared to have a preference for a coaching style that would stimulate and challenge their thinking. This perspective of coaching as an ongoing learning experience is currently under-researched (Kauffman and Bush, 2008).

The evolution of the coachee through her experience of coaching, the value she attaches to coaching, and the impact this has on her professional life is similarly limited in research. Subsequent research would be required to assess whether multiple coaching programmes, mentee experience or

improved coachee readiness is necessary for coaching to have a greater impact. Although the progressive features of self-examination, introspection and openness to experience within the coaching experience have been proposed within literature concerning the client's readiness for coaching (Kretzschmar, 2010; Hernez-Broome and Boyce, 2011), the progressive development of the coachee through her use of coaching and mentoring is less well researched. The proposal that coachable individuals are committed to change, have a strong motivation to improve, and take responsibility for outcomes (Goldsmith, 2009) is similarly focused more on the entry state of the coachee rather than the impact of the support interventions on the coachee's knowledge and experience of coaching.

Another valuable area for future study would be to explore the aspects of vulnerability and loneliness that were noted by some of the participants. This is a limited area in broader gender research and even more so in coaching and mentoring research (Cox, 2012). Additionally, the findings from this study could be further developed by conducting research on the advocacy and legacy impact of coaching, and the form of this impact on both individuals and organisations.

7.2 Limitations of the Research

The limitations of the research relate to the nature of qualitative research in general and an interpretivist paradigm in particular, where the focus of the research is on contextual findings. Considering the relatively small sample size of twelve executive women, their ages, the consequent timing of their career stages and their different organisational backgrounds and experiences of coaching practice, the research findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. The limitations and vagaries of sense-

making also apply, given the multiplicity and complexity of people's experience and the fact that the women were looking back on their career with retrospective interpretation, relying on recall and reconstruction (Evers, Brouwers and Tomic, 2006). The findings could also relate to the timing of the appearance of the various development methods or the women's maturity in their role and life stage. I am therefore fully aware that interviewing and interpreting a woman's experience does not mean that all women will think that way.

My formulation of the research question, my philosophical stance and the methodology employed may also have limited the findings of this research. My question could have been investigated differently by, for example, using a heuristic approach, rather than the coachee's perspective. However, my initial literature review uncovered a gap in the literature from the female coachee's perspective. I also believe that the paradigm chosen would nevertheless have been qualitative and phenomenological because of the research focus and my identity with these paradigms. While it is not possible, however, to further understand all women who have been coached and mentored, I believe that the study has demonstrated that in sharing the participants' accounts we can learn from their rich and informative stories. I also believe that the study will have relevance for people experiencing the same phenomenon and that they will empathise with elements of the participants' accounts. A great deal can therefore be learned simply from the women's experiences of barriers to career progression and the development support that has assisted them.

7.3 Methodological Contribution

The use of an IPA methodology, a relatively new interpretative approach for coaching and mentoring research, offers a unique perspective on an area previously dominated by qualitative research composed of accounts of the coach's perspective or written by coaches in their coaching practice. An IPA methodology has facilitated and provided detailed idiographic insight into participants' experiences of coaching and mentoring. This study therefore contributes to a new body of work with a limited but growing number of research studies (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007; Buckle, 2012; Passmore and Townsend, 2012). As far as I am aware, this is also the first IPA study exploring the coaching and mentoring experiences of executive women.

From a reflexive viewpoint, having knowledge of phenomenology but undertaking IPA for the first time, I found the guidance of Smith *et al*. (2009) helpful. The documentation of my experiential learning through the reflexive accounts of data collection and analysis (Chapter 3) also provides a further methodological contribution by adding to accounts of practice outside of health psychology (Wagstaff *et al*., 2014). Due to the enormity of the data generated and the nature of the cross-case theme analysis, I would recommend a smaller sample size for future IPA studies. The difficulty of interpreting and organising twelve sets of participants' themes into superordinate themes cannot be underestimated. Smith *et al*.'s (2009) recommendation for managing this large corpus is 'retaining an idiographic focus on the individual voice at the same time as making claims for the larger group' through abstraction and subsumption (Smith *et al*., 2009, p. 107), and this was both a compelling and difficult process. My interpretive account of the participants' shared and individual accounts enhanced my

understanding and supported Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's (2012) iterative process of researcher sense making. The presentation of my findings in interweaving tables and more detailed participant accounts also offers a methodological contribution to assist future IPA researchers in managing the idiographic and shared themes of their research participants.

7.4 Implications of the Research

A notable caveat of this study is that it offers an insight into the world of the participants rather than executive women in general. Nevertheless, the study has both theoretical and practical implications for coaching and mentoring theory due to its findings on the role of mentoring in building social capital; the role of coaching in developing authenticity and identity, and in supporting vulnerability and loneliness; and coaching's support of transformational learning (Mezirow, 1978). The observations on networking and intentional mentoring assist understanding through first-hand empirical accounts of relational social capital, and contribute to the application of social capital theory in women's development (Broadbridge, 2010; Stead and Elliott, 2012; Valenti and Homer, 2013). The findings regarding the intersection between work context and executive coaching support also build on the relatively recent systems psychodynamics theory in coaching (Brunning, 2006), providing an understanding of the career challenges and the dynamic interplay between the support interventions, situational work context and learning. This study also provides further observations on the complex issues of mixed gender group development and women-only group development, and the contrasting value of one-to-one coaching and mentoring relationships for skills and career development (Mavin *et al*., 2014).

For coaching practice this research provides an insight into the contextual setting of a coaching assignment involving female executives, not only in terms of the reasons that the women seek coaching support, but also in terms of the way this coaching is enlisted. The study found that the majority of these coaching interventions were not arranged by the women's organisations and did not involve any 'chemistry' sessions (in which coaches and coachees are matched according to compatibility), highlighting that the coaching process is not as clear-cut as coaching practitioners would expect. What is clear is that the female executives in this study highly valued their coaching support. This greater understanding of the impact of work context and career challenges on women supplements the work of Peltier (2001) and Passmore (2009) and provides an alternative perspective on coaching executive women to the one generally available from the coach's point of view. This research therefore expands the existing body of knowledge of the coachee's perspective of coaching and mentoring, and also, more specifically, executive women's perspective of coaching and mentoring in the UK, both of which are areas that until now have been limited as experiential, qualitative research (Broughton and Miller, 2009; Leimon *et al*., 2011; Worth, 2012). This builds on the work of Leimon *et al*. (2011) and Broughton and Miller (2009) to demonstrate how coaching can support executive women's professional development and career advancement.

Although the positive impact of both coaching and mentoring on women's career advancement is clear, the study draws an important conclusion that mentoring may reinforce an organisation's cultural status quo while coaching may support self-development and authenticity, and also possible change in gendered workplace cultures. A major implication of this for

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coaching practice is that women may potentially benefit from coaching earlier on in their career development, or from their early mentors using coaching techniques. This would provide women with the value of insider support while also being challenged and encouraged to develop their self-concept earlier, thus building a stronger foundation for possible future career progression – and not only for the coachees themselves, but also potentially for other women following in their footsteps, due to the legacy effect of coaching. This supports alternative examples regarding women's instrumentality in their career development, which recognise both the need for women to take responsibility for their development and the need for them to do so as early as possible in their careers (Mavin *et al*., 2014). The coach should also consider the coachee's work context, developmental history and the timing of any previous mentoring or coaching as relevant factors when coaching women.

An implication for organisations relates to the study's insight into the impact of the work culture on women's development needs (Billing, 2011). This may instigate debate and support understanding in areas such as group development, women-only leadership development interventions and diversity practices. In addition, the legacy impact of coaching and mentoring others may offer potential value to organisations in more ways than pure economic return on investment for developmental interventions. Organisations are complex, relational and systemic and there is an opportunity to reconsider current practices by understanding what female executives gain and value from coaching and mentoring so they can find strategies to thrive and succeed in their working environment.

At the individual employee level, through the rich and informative accounts of the participants, the study has increased awareness of the impact that a male-dominated environment can have on female employees (Billing, 2011). It has also explored the ways that coaching and mentoring have been engaged to support career development in this challenging environment. The value to the women of coaching and mentoring at various points in their career and the importance of their relationship with the mentor and coach was also highlighted. Fundamentally the individual's personal ownership of their development is important for their career (Mavin *et al.,* 2014). For women who recognise similarities between the participants' stories and their own experiences, the career journeys these women described and how they used coaching and mentoring may also support their own career advancement. This is an area that is limited in current coaching literature on female executives.

In summary, the contribution of this research to coaching practice is captured in Figure 7.1 below.

At the outset of this research I had a relatively simplistic view of a research and gender binary, with an aim to explore the coaching and mentoring experiences of executive women. This emanated from my personal and professional interest and experience and a perceived gap in the literature in coaching and mentoring practice. As I explored the literature, related concepts and theories and carried out the research with a group of engaging, successful women, the research broadened to encompass different theories and related concepts.

Figure 7.1 – Contribution to coaching practice

CONTRIBUTION TO COACHING PRACTICE

Context
- Gendered organisations
- The gender binary/ intersectionality debate
- Barriers to development
- Coping strategies
- Adaptation
- Compromise/sacrifice

Practice
- Coaching executive women
  - Transformation
  - Authenticity
  - Identity
  - Vulnerability and loneliness
- The coach–coachee relationship and importance of the coach
- Mentoring for career and social capital

Application of Learning
- Transition from being coached to coaching others
- Impact on organisational learning
- Legacy impact
- Relational leadership
- Sisterhood

The reflexive process of capturing my thoughts and interpretations in a research journal throughout the research process helped me greatly to develop my interpretive approach. This reflexivity in turn developed my thinking, with the result that I now believe that coaching and mentoring have contextual meaning: that is, they mean different things to different people dependent on context, experience and the particular time in a career they are used. I have learned all manner of things along the way about myself and my research subject, and finally, I have fully identified with Smith *et al.*'s (2009) description of IPA methodology: you should 'engage with the messy chaos of the lived world … [and] not be entirely in control of the process which follows and occasionally you are likely to feel out of your depth' (2009, p. 55).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Participant Information Sheet

<div align="right">
C/O
Research Administration Office
Faculty of Business
Oxford Brookes University
Wheatley Campus
OXFORD
OX33 1HX
</div>

Dear X

PROJECT TITLE – EXPLORING EXECUTIVE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF COACHING AND MENTORING

Further to our recent conversation, I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Business at Oxford Brookes University and I am currently conducting research into the coaching and mentoring experiences of executive women in senior positions in organisations in the UK.

As you are a person identified as reaching a senior position in your organisation and having experienced coaching and mentoring I would like to invite you to participate in this research. Taking part in the study is voluntary and it is your decision whether or not you wish to participate. However, before you decide this, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please, therefore, take time to read the attached information sheet carefully.

If having read this information you decide to take part please contact me on XXX so that we can arrange a convenient time and place for the interview. You will still be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet. If you require any further information or have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Paula De-Valle
February 2013

IMPORTANT PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE – EXPLORING EXECUTIVE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF COACHING AND MENTORING
Researcher - Paula De-Valle

What is the purpose of the study?
This research aims to explore the role coaching and mentoring might play in supporting executive women in their progression and to offer insights from the coachees' perspective to contribute to knowledge and ultimately improve coaching practice. This qualitative research study will be conducted with a participant group of twelve executive women who have been coached and mentored by more than one coach and have reached a senior position within a UK organisation. The data collection and analysis of this research will take place during January to October 2013, with the write up and dissemination of the results being available during the second half of 2014.

Why have I been invited to participate?
You have been invited to participate in this research as you have been identified as having met the following criteria:
- Female
- Senior executive in a UK-based organisation (i.e. employed in a role at or just below board level)
- Have experienced coaching and mentoring as a stand-alone development intervention or as part of a leadership development programme
- Have been coached and mentored by more than one coach/mentor

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What is involved?
I will be interviewing individually twelve executive women with experience of being coached and mentored.

When and where will the interviews take place?
The interviews will take place between February 2013 and May 2013. I anticipate that the interviews will take place at your office and potentially during working hours. If this is the case please can I request that you confirm this is acceptable with your employer prior to the interviews taking place.

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you agree to participate I will interview you for approximately one to one and a half hours. The interview will be audio recorded and your consent will be sought for this at the time of the interview. You will also be asked to take part in a follow-up interview, either face to face or over the telephone, to clarify any aspects of the original interview.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
The possible disadvantage is the time commitment from you.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
The study will be focused on exploring the experiences of executive level women of coaching and mentoring. This will potentially benefit other women and coaching practice for the future. This gives you the opportunity to share your valuable experience to help and assist others and provide further understanding of coaching practice. You may benefit from increasing your self-knowledge, through reflection and generation of new understanding.

Confidentiality?
All information collected about you and the organisation that you work for will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with Oxford Brookes University's policy on Academic Integrity.

The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
Following the interview you will be given the opportunity to read through the transcript of the interview. The transcript will be returned to you within a reasonable time following the interview. You will also be asked to take part in a follow-up interview, either face to face or over the telephone, to clarify any aspects of the original interview. The results of the research will be used in my thesis for a professional doctorate in coaching and mentoring. This will be published and held as a public document in the library at Oxford Brookes University. You will be provided with a copy of the summary of the findings on request.

Who is organising and funding the research?
I am conducting the research as a student of the Coaching and Mentoring Department within the Business School at Oxford Brookes University. I am funding the research myself.

Who has reviewed the study?
The Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee has approved the research.

A supervisory team is monitoring the research and consists of the following people: xxx

What should I do if I want to take part?
If after reading all the information you wish to participate please contact me on XXX.

Contact for further information
If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted you should contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at <u>ethics@brookes.ac.uk</u>.

Thank you for reading this.

February 2013

Appendix B – Consent Form

Project Title: An exploration of womens' experience of executive coaching and mentoring.

Researcher:-   Paula De-Valle

Contact Address:
C/O
Research Administration Office
Faculty of Business
Oxford Brookes University
Wheatley Campus
OXFORD
OX33 1HX

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Please tick box

	Yes	No
I agree to the interview being audio recorded	☐	☐
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications	☐	☐

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant   **Date**   **Signature**

_____ _____ _____

Name of Researcher   **Date**   **Signature**

Appendix C – Interview Format/Schedule

B.   INTERVIEW FORMAT

INTRODUCTION/RAPPORT BUILDING

Researcher to cover the following areas for clarity:
- Thanks for participating in the research
- Confirmation of understanding – consent form/participant information sheet
- Reminder that interview will last apx one to one and a half hours and will be broadly structured
- Anonymity, confidentiality
- Audio recorded/breaks
- Any participant questions

Researcher to cover the following areas for building rapport, e.g.:
- Tell me about yourself – e.g. occupation, length of time in post
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you describe your situation?

The aim is to elicit stories, metaphors and a more narrative style of interview. Questions will therefore be around the broad topic areas of executive coaching and mentoring, leadership development and the challenges the participant may have faced in her career progression.

Questions such as:
- Can you tell me about your executive coaching and mentoring experience?
- Can you describe your experience, behaviour, actions, activities, etc.?
- Background questions that aim to understand the respondents' previous experiences (e.g. Will you briefly explain how?)
- Questions about feelings in order to obtain an understanding of emotional responses (e.g. How did you feel when?)
- Opinion or value questions (e.g. Which critical events define your career and in what ways did these affect you?)
- Descriptive questions (e.g. What was it like? Tell me about a time when? Can you tell a story? Can you describe with a metaphor? Can you give an example of?)
- Probing questions (as necessary)

Questions:
Can you tell me about your experience of career progression as a woman?
Can you tell me about your experience of leadership development?
Can you describe your experience of executive coaching and mentoring?
(See sample of questions by theme)

CLOSE OF INTERVIEW

Thank the participant for her time. Confirm her participation in a follow-up interview (face to face or over the telephone) to explore any items/issues reflected on in the interpretation of this interview.
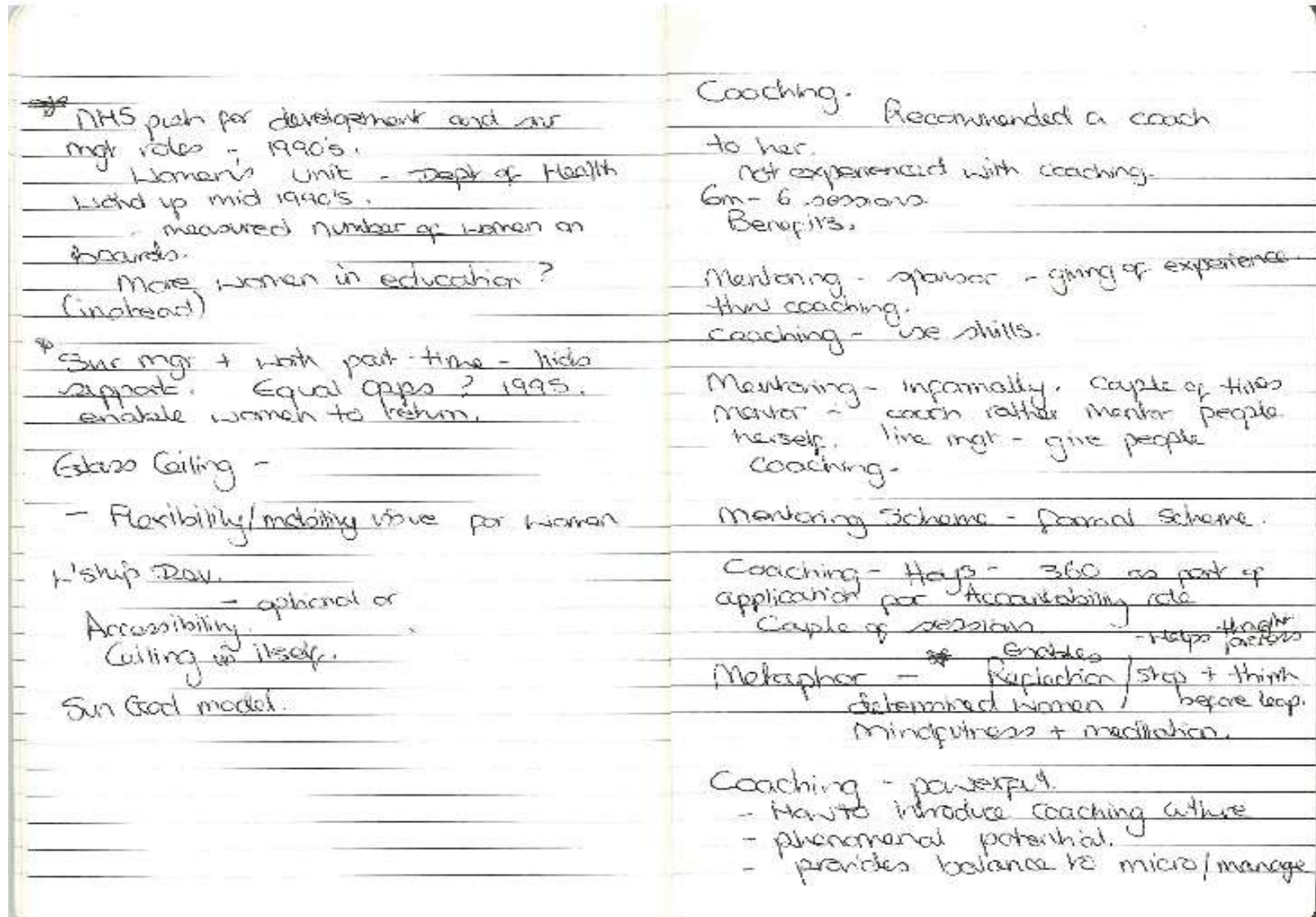
Appendix C – Sample of questions by theme

Theme	Sample Question
Career Experience	You said you worked in male–dominated organisations. Can you give something about your experiences as a senior leader within those organisations? (Emily)
	If you want to start with your career overview, or your experiences of your career to date. (Helen)
	Could you give an overview of your career to date and your experiences? (Virginia)
	I've started off most interviews, just to try and get an understanding of how you got to where you are now, just really an overview of your career experience to date. (Susan)
Glass Ceiling/Barriers	Can you describe now your experience as a woman within those industries or those various roles? (Athena) And have you experienced, are you familiar with the term 'glass ceiling'? (Athena). Are you able to describe any experiences you've had of that concept? (Athena)
	You are aware of the 'glass ceiling' concept. Could you describe it in your own words, what that means to you? (Jane)
	The glass ceiling concept, are you aware of it? How would you describe it and have you experienced it? (Maggie)
	You're aware of the glass ceiling concept. How would you describe it, the glass ceiling? (Emily)
	You're aware of the glass ceiling concept. Can you describe it? What would it mean to you, the glass ceiling? (Marie)
	And are you aware of the glass ceiling as a concept? How would you define 'glass ceiling'? What would it mean to you? (Susan)
	You know you mentioned that you felt excluded and that was in an all–male environment? How did you deal with that? And how would you describe the culture then in that kind of organisation? (Susan)
Leadership Development Support	What are your views, or did you experience women only leadership programmes? (Eleanor)
	Have you ever been on a women–only development programme? (Athena)
	Have you ever been on a women–only development programme or on any kind of women–only networks? (Elizabeth)
	What kind of leadership development support have you had through various points in your career? (Elizabeth)
	Can you go through the type of leadership and development that you've had in your career? What kind of support have you had from organisations or other places? (Emily)
	Leadership development that you've had through your career, what type of leadership development have you had? (Erica)
	Throughout your career, what kind of leadership development support have you had? (Virginia)
Mentoring Experience	Can you describe first the mentoring experience that you've had? (Athena)
	When did you first get a mentor, or seek a mentor, and can you think of the type of things that maybe you were mentored on or you sought help on? (Athena)
	If we go first with the mentoring experience, can you give some examples of the mentoring you've experienced? (Elizabeth)
	In which situations have you actually sought out that kind of mentoring or coaching experience? (Elizabeth)

Appendix C – Sample of questions by theme (Continued)

Theme	Sample Question
Mentoring experience (continued)	From what you've described it sounds like you've experienced both coaching and mentoring. How would you describe the differences or similarities between them? (Helen)
	Typically, in the future or in the past, if you were looking to get a mentor, what types of issues or maybe times in your career would you do that? (Maggie).
	When did you first come across coaching and mentoring? (Marie)
Coaching Experience	What were your experiences of coaching either as a programme or being coached? (Athena)
	I suppose what I'm trying to understand is, you've gone through those coaching sessions, how did you experience it? (Athena)
	Are you able to describe the types of techniques that they used with you? (Athena)
	So would you use coaching again in the future? (Athena)
	Can you describe how you came to coaching and your experience of coaches that you've had personally? (Eleanor)
	If you go back to your experience of being coached, when did you first get coached, and can you talk me through the experiences you've had? (Elizabeth)
	Would you use a coach again in the future? (Elizabeth)
	If you can give me some examples of your coaching experiences, maybe what you were coached on, or the type of coaches? (Emily)
	Are you aware, or can you describe any kind of techniques they've used with you? (Emily)
	What made you choose the coach that you chose? (Erica)
	Can you remember any techniques or approaches that they used with you (Maggie)
	Would you just recap on the benefits of really good coaching that you just mentioned? (Susan)
	Can you give me some examples of your coaching experiences, maybe what you were coached on, or the type of coaches? (Emily)
Metaphor	If you had to give a metaphor for what coaching and mentoring means to you personally what would that be? (Eleanor)
	Can you describe or give a metaphor for the experience of coaching and mentoring for you? (Helen)
Additional Points	Can you just give a bit more expansion on your experiences of that? (Athena)
	Is there anything else that you'd like to add about coaching and mentoring as an experience or from your own perspective? (Athena)
	Is there anything else you'd like to add about the value of coaching and mentoring to you personally? (Eleanor)
	Is there anything else you want to add about coaching and mentoring that we've not talked about? (Emily)
	Is there anything else you'd like to add on the subject? Or anything that we might not have covered? (Susan)
	Can you just elaborate a bit on those experiences? (Jane)

Appendix D – Example of Post Interview Note

NHS push for development and snr
mgr roles - 1990's.
    Women's unit - Dept of Health
Used up mid 1990's.
    - measured number of women on
boards.
    More women in education?
(instead)

Snr mgr + with part-time - kids
support.   Equal opps? 1995.
enable women to return.

Glass Ceiling -

- Flexibility/mobility issue for women

L'ship Dev.
        - optional or
Accessibility
Ceiling in itself.

Sun God model.

Coaching.
        Recommended a coach
to her.
    not experienced with coaching.
6m - 6 sessions.
    Benefits.

Mentoring - sponsor - giving of experience
thru coaching.
Coaching - use skills.

Mentoring - informally. Couple of times
mentor - coach rather mentor people.
herself.   line mgr - give people
    coaching.

Mentoring Scheme - formal scheme.

Coaching - Hays - 360 as part of
application for Accountability role
Couple of sessions   - Helps think
            Enables
Metaphor -   Replication / stop + think
        determined women / before leap.
    Mindfulness + meditation.

Coaching - powerful.
    - How to introduce coaching culture
    - phenomenal potential.
    - provides balance to micro/manage

Appendix E – Example of Data Analysis Note

Appendix F – Example of Transcript Note

308 mentioned about glass ceiling, but the other one, obviously, with the
309 research that I'm looking at, you mentioned quite a few times about
310 the use of a coach and your personal experiences, and also you said
311 there about they seemed to be key on decisions that you've made, so
312 can you describe how you came to coaching and your experience of
313 coaches that you've had personally?

314 Yeah, sure. My first mentor was a really, really good boss, absolutely
315 fabulous boss, when I was in X, before I'd moved, really before I'd moved to
316 a particularly senior role and I was working at a regional office. I was the
317 only woman, and he was just one of the most enlightened bosses I have
318 ever come across. He was fantastic, and he had a promotion up to the
319 regional office and he brought me with him, he asked me if I'd go with him,
320 and he was the one that kind of put me through the fast-track career and,
321 you know, got me on to specialist status and all the rest of it. So my first
322 experience of mentoring was just a first class boss.

323 As my career developed and moved on, and I still speak to X sometimes
324 about stuff, he's now retired, he still regards me as kind of one of his golden
325 triumphs, he calls me, and I suppose it was a point about eight years ago,
326 he said, I can't help you any more. You've gone past me, which was
327 incredible humble of him and very sweet, but, no, I still do talk to him. But I
328 can remember when I left him as my line manager and I moved to head
329 office in London, and I asked my line manager if they would be my mentor,
330 and they said, no, I can't be your mentor because I'm your boss. And that
331 really made me think, why can't my mentor be my boss? And I suppose it
332 was my ignorance, but also my, you know, very successful experience that
333 I'd had with my boss, and I think it's probably true, actually, that a mentor
334 shouldn't be your boss, but I do think that the role of mentor is very, very
335 important, but within academia, the role of a mentor is much, much more
336 widely accepted where the mentor is trusted, wise counsel, probably

First experience of mentoring -
a first class boss. Described him
as enlightened. Encouraged +
supported her thru dev'iprogs +
moving roles.

↳ mentor/sponsorship

Still maintains relationship even
though boss moved on. Speaks
with pride + fondness that she
was regarded as one of his
golden triumphs.

- reached a natural conclusion
when he said he couldn't help
her any more - gone past him.

She accepted this - thought he
was humble.

Next experience her line mgr
wouldn't be her mentor. Rationalises
that this probably true.

Appendix G – Example of Participant Themes

PARTICI-PANT	NO. OF CODES	1ST CODING (DESCRIPTIVE) & 2nd CODING (LINGUISTIC)	3rd CODING (CONCEPTUAL/THEMES)
Virginia	68	- Rebellious, non-conformity - Recognition of consequences - Personal life impacting on career choice - Wake-up call – change of direction - Loss of natural role to be a mother - Early career support – mentor - Overcome adversity – illness – drive to succeed - Lack of confidence v high self-confidence - Impact of personal life on career - Humour/irony - Drama of her life impacting on her career - Resilience - Career progression after personal crisis - Sex impact of sponsorship – connotation - Hard work to overcome male domination - Boredom – led to change - Created her own career opportunities - Small v large company mentality to diversity - Sexism - Coaching benefits - Took up golf to try to fit in - Loss of voice because of her position on the team - Pressure to produce results – no one to share pressure with - Pride in developing her team - Exclusion aspect of the Glass Ceiling - Use of femininity to overcome exclusion - How fit in - Impact of words hurtful – time of month - Self-awareness – strong impact as a woman - GC – different for scale of businesses and how to handle - Mentoring process – encouragement, demonstration, support for qualifications - Mentoring her own team - Little leadership development support - Coaching most formal development - Toxic environment - Feels like she has blagged it – imposter syndrome? - Avoiding development because of insecurity? - Coaching to handle confrontation/difficult situations - Coaching overlap into personal life	Impact of personal life on career – lines 17, 35, 45, 90 Gender – lines 47, 123, 146 GC – exclusion – lines 105, 11, 158 Change & adaptation – making own opportunities – lines 78, 133 (femininity), 279 Imposter syndrome – line 243 (overlap with GC in smaller orgs), 469 GC as reason for coaching – lines 253-261 Value of coaching – lines 269, 420 Coachee experience – lines 329*, 370 Overlap with personal life – lines 341, 343* Coach relationship – line 430 Mentoring Differences with coaching/mentoring – line 415 Early mentor – lines 21, 187, 195 Sponsorship – sex overlap – line 57 Mentoring others – line 200 Leadership dev. – insecurity – lines 215, 235 Women Only Dev. – line 444 - Feminity - Confidence - Sexual power - Resilience Blue – Emotions to cope Green – Mentoring and development Yellow – Coaching Red – Context org.

Appendix H – Example of Participant Theme Notes

- Started to do conceptual themes. Because of the gap in doing this while I refocused on the three chapters, I had read through again to make more notes on the transcripts. This led to a deeper level of interpretation and I captured the key descriptors on the table. There were additional notes/codes on the transcript but some of them, for example, just related to career changes, which were not as applicable to the question.
- Having read the transcript and made notes I had also underlined key linguistic phrases and comments that stood out for me – e.g. emotions, strong words, feelings, etc. The codes capture some of these and I will use the key ones in the quotes used to demonstrate the participant's voice.
- The clustering was done as a process of reading the transcript, so my overall sense of the participant and the individual codes was captured.
- Have clustered into four main groups: Red – the environment/challenges that women face, some negative and some positive. Green – mentoring and development experiences that support them. Yellow – coaching experiences. Blue – yet to be fully defined but just the general qualities and issues that have helped them cope with their past/current environment. Some relate to what they have got from coaching/mentoring so some overlap.
- Will now focus on individual themes around these key areas from each transcript and the clustering – look at the nuances per individual on these themes, e.g. some less GC experience than others. Some, e.g. Susan? Adversity was a key to her success?
- Keep coming back to game playing (negative connotation) and how coaching is freer play. Also how you are growing up – mentoring, sponsorship and then coaching and then you are in control – is this simplistic?
- Then compare the overall themes into master table

Appendix I – Example of Summary Themes per Participant

DATA ANALYSIS THEMES	
PARTICIPANT	**SUMMARY THEMES**
Virginia	
Context	Glass ceiling v sexism – line 146 Fitting in – line 157 Impact on personal life – line 12 inverse aspect Sexual challenge Managing combat	Impact of personal life on career – lines 17, 35, 45, 90 GC – sexism – lines 47, 123, 146, GC – exclusion – lines 105, 11, 158 Adaptation – making own opportunities – lines 78, 133 (femininity), 279 Imposter syndrome – line 243 (overlap with leadership dev.) GC in smaller orgs – 469
Coaching	Coaching for non-confrontation – line 254 Power of coaching for person – line 262 Enabling freedom & airing frailties – line 329	GC as reason for coaching – lines 253-261 Value of coaching – lines 269, 420 Coaching experience – lines 329*, 370 Overlap with personal life – lines 341, 343* Coach – line 430
Career Support?	Tangible early mentor support – line 23 Sexual connotation to mentoring – line 57 Fear of exposure through leadership development – line 235 Women-only development supporter – line 437 Mentor–mentee relations	Differences with coaching/mentoring – line 415 Early mentor – lines 21, 187, 195 Sponsorship – sex overlap – line 57 Mentoring others – line 200 Leadership dev. – insecurity – lines 215, 235 WOD – line 444 Femininity Confidence Sexual power

Appendix J – Initial Cross-case Themes

APPENDIX J – Cross Case Themes

Theme Development – Initial Thoughts:-

- Women as Survivors - energy
- Language of Leadership - ref. being able to speak in language that men would hear, accept and influence. This was mentioned by a few of the women and some had been coached or accepted informal coaching for it.
- Power relations
- Coaching and Mentoring – Women's Experiences,
- Women as Coaches/Mentors
- Work life barriers – competing priorities
- Resilience - Overall Resilience to survive overt sexism or indirect or male dominated environments and life in general to progress in their careers.
  - The barriers they have faced in their roles/lives
    - How overcame family, personal issues
    - Maternity return??
  - Has coaching and or mentoring helped here?
  - Downsides or not – loss of feminity or becoming men or having to be better than men??
  - How retain authenticity?? – is this here or under self esteem???
  - Pragmatism
  - Unwritten rules and power games example…
- Self esteem/confidence – different examples where strong sense of self concept v self esteem
  - Self concept – need to get away if don't agree with decisions, personalities.
  - Authenticity?
  - Lack of confidence to progress.
  - Has coaching and or mentoring helped here?
- Coaching or mentoring
  - Descriptions of both and differences regarded by the women themselves
  - How each has helped/supported women in their progression
  - Both have a role to play
  - Informal v formal
- Language of leadership (is this enough or could consolidate)?
  - Female v male differences in language style and issues that arise
  - Coaching to help??
  - Mentoring to help??
- Lessons learned and reflections of the women on what has helped them succeed and the future for other women?
  - The role of the significant other – partners ??
  - The role of the significant sponsor – key person early in their careers
  - Recommend coaching and/or mentoring or not – their future use and the usefulness to others??
  - Coachee as coach to others – impact of coaching not just personal but across the organization.

Theme Development

Updated Themes based on feedback from J/J at meeting on 10/10/13.
(sent by email on 17/10/13)

Gender Games, unwritten rules and Men in Skirts - the experiences of women climbing up, through and over the barriers to career progression.

Women's experiences of:-
- Glass Ceiling or no Glass ceiling - experiences
- Life happens - family, personal circumstances
- Unwritten rules and power games
- The language barrier - gendered language.
- cultural matters - male dominated, macho environments.
- Sub plots and gender games - not so much out and out sexism any more but subverse sexism to exclude women - men's clubs etc

Getting Lucky - experiences of making it to the top and staying there

- I was just lucky - women's tendency to underplay success and discount achievements
- Resilience - women as survivors
- Self-esteem/confidence
- Authenticity
- Use of femininity or loss of femininity
- Conformity - not happy but not enough to challenge status quo. Don't feel that selling their soul though.
- Role of Leadership development - views on women only development - dirty secret
- Has coaching helped? - leads on to

Coaching - expensive conversations or inspirational moments? - the experiences of women at the top
- Informal v formal experiences
- How they came to coaching
- What they experienced
- The impact on them and benefits - personal and work related.
- What happened next
- Role of significant other - husband as coach
- Coaching their team and others - the impact of coaching on others - majority of coaches have gone on to be trained as coaches.

My first mentor - the impact of early support and the experience of mentoring
- Impact and experience of first mentor on their career - significant sponsor
- how they managed mentors
- What they experienced
- Impact on them
- what happened next

Appendix K – Example of Cross-case Themes

PARTICIPANT	THEME	LINE NUMBER
Athena	Career challenges Experience of being a woman/Glass Ceiling Leadership Development/networking Mentoring Coaching	1-89 90-183 184-249 & 510 to 550 250-343 344-509 and 552 to 643
Eleanor	Career challenges Glass Ceiling/Coaching Coaching Mentoring Leadership/support Coaching Metaphor	1-305 306-459 1-186 187-286 287-399 401 - 461
Elizabeth	Career challenges Woman experience/glass ceiling Leadership Dev/Support Mentoring Coaching	1-82 85-180 181-253 256-332 334-759
Emily	Career challenges Woman experience/glass ceiling Leadership Dev/Support Coaching – overlap with maternity coaching thru l'ship dev Mentoring	1-65 66-119 120-214 215-520 521-585
Erica	Career challenges Woman experience/glass ceiling Leadership Dev Mentoring Coaching	1-90 92-282 also 340 – 387 and 495-541 and 617 -672 and 696 - 762 283 – 340 and 673-695 386-426 427- 494 and 542 - 617

Appendix L – Recurrent Themes

Recurrent themes were present in the total sample group for all of the three superordinate themes. At the subordinate theme level there is a presence of recurrent themes in over half of the sample, which is captured according to individual participants in the table below.

	CAREER CHALLENGES			EARLY CAREER JOURNEY SUPPORT			LATER CAREER DEVELOPMENT & LEGACY		
SUBORDINATE THEMES	BARRIERS	COPING STRATEGIES		MULTIPLE SUPPORT OF MENTORING	NETWORKING/ RELATIONAL SUPPORT	GROUP DEVELOPMENT	COACHING BELIEFS	COACHING/ RELATION-SHIP	LEGACY – COACHING & MENTORING OTHERS
PARTICIPANT	BARRIERS	ADAPTATION	SACRIFICE & COMPROMISE						
Athena	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eleanor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elizabeth	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Emily	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Erica	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Helen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jane	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Maggie	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marie	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Simone	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Susan	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Virginia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes