Male executives' experiences of mentoring Black African women in South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explored the motives, relationship dynamics and outcomes of male executives in mentoring Black African women within the context of South Africa. The authors investigated the experiences of White, Black African, coloured, and Indian male mentors conducting cross-gender and cross-race mentoring in South Africa.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative study was conducted with 21 male executives within South Africa's male-dominated financial services industry. Data were collected via semi-structured, one-on-one virtual video interviews. The study endeavoured to deeper understand the mentors' experiences during their interactions with the intersecting marginalised identities of Black African women as protégés.

Findings – The authors found that the mentoring relationship is central to mentoring Black African women. This relationship is often influenced by the mentors' parental approach to mentoring, with resultant negative consequences, including the protégé not taking accountability for driving the relationship. Mentors' stereotypical expectations of women as homemakers and carers also influenced mentoring experiences. Mentors' motives included growing next generation leaders, which led to mentors' job satisfaction.

Originality/value – This study contributes an account of male executives' motivations for mentoring Black African women, the relationship dynamics as well as negative mentoring experiences, and the mentoring outcomes for protégés and mentors. Intersectionality theory was used to highlight the mentors' lack of insight into the intersecting marginalised identities of Black African women in the unique South African context, where inequalities in terms of class, race, and gender are amplified.

Keywords Black African women, Mentoring relationship, Intersectionality, Apartheid, Unconscious bias, Stereotyping

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Mentoring is a widely recognised way to promote gender equality. It is a powerful tool to develop potential leaders' skills, help them build networks, increase career satisfaction, and expose them to opportunities (Ivey and Dupré, 2022; Scandura, 1992). Mentoring has great potential to contribute to social inclusion (Colley, 2003). This study aims to contribute an account of male executives' experiences of mentoring Black African women. These women previously had the fewest rights of all groups in South Africa and suffered the greatest oppression (Donald and Mahlatji, 2006) because of the country's historical context, which includes colonialism, slavery and the atrocities of the apartheid system.

The mentor role theory of Kram (1985) offers a classic definition of mentoring as a relationship between a senior, more experienced person and a junior, less experienced person.

Most existing studies focus on the perspective of the protégé (Burk and Eby, 2010; Eby *et al.*, 2013; Eby and McManus, 2004), while limited research emphasises the mentor's experience (Allen, 2007; Allen and Eby, 2003). Therefore, the current study contributes to the conversation in academic literature on the role of the mentor in an effective mentoring process. Moreover, this study addresses a relevant business issue, as the current demographic composition of mostly White males in executive positions (Eby *et al.*, 2013) results in White males frequently being assigned as mentors. South African legislation requires companies to adhere to the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act 53 of 2003 (Republic of South Africa, 2003) and the Employment Equity (EE) Act 55 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998), as well as to appoint and develop under-represented groups, of which Black African females are the least represented. Despite the legislation, South African women accounted for only 22% of the executives in the Top 40 Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed companies in 2018, and there were no women chief executive officers (CEOs; PwC, 2019). It is important to address this business issue, as the top 100 South African companies with significant women representation on their boards of directors showed a 5.4% higher growth on market returns than other listed companies with lower women representation (Scholtz and Kieviet, 2018).

Several organisations in South Africa initiated formal mentoring programmes in service of B-BBEE and EE (Abbott *et al.*, 2010). Thus, formal mentorship programmes in this context regularly involve cross-race and cross-gender mentoring, offering a unique opportunity to conduct research on mentoring under these conditions. The current study refers to Black African males and females to differentiate them from the broader previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa during apartheid, which include Indian and coloured males and females.

Extant mentoring studies pay ample attention to gender issues in mentoring (Noe, 1988; Ragins and Cotton, 1999), less to race dynamics (Allen, 2007; Colley, 2003; Thomas, 1990), and even less to gender and race issues simultaneously (Cox and Nkomo, 1990; Nickerson, 2020). Consequently, another contribution of our study is that it aims to fill that gap by exploring male mentors' experiences when the gender and race of the protégé intersect (Bell and Nkomo, 2001). Men remain at the helm of power and authority (McKinsey and Company, 2018) and have a significant influence on gender equality. Valerio and Sawyer (2016) noted that men use their authority to promote gender equality when they genuinely believe in fairness and the development of talent, whether male or female. Unfortunately, male leaders are less likely than their female counterparts to act as active conduits to advance gender equality (Szymanska and Rubin, 2018). Hence, a deeper understanding of the motives and deterrents to mentoring from the male mentor perspective is imperative.

According to Bell and Nkomo (2001), Black women experience racist sexism, namely sexism intertwined with racism. In their later work, Smith and Nkomo (2021) confirmed that systemic racism and bias still exist in organisations. Liu *et al.* (2021, p. 105) observed that:

> People who were once bystanders to the ways in which White supremacy manifests increasingly felt compelled to challenge the racial injustice they saw in their neighbourhoods, their governments, and their everyday lives.

Therefore, this study focuses on the motives, relationship dynamics, and mentoring outcomes of Black African women with their unique needs at the intersection of race and gender. As a result, the research question is:

RQ1. What are the motives, relationship dynamics, and outcomes of the mentoring experiences of male executive mentors while mentoring Black African women within the context of South Africa?

The next section describes the theoretical foundation for the study and reviews the current literature on mentoring, paying special attention to the experiences of mentors. Against this background, the rationale for the chosen methodology is explained, followed by the findings and a discussion on how these findings relate to academic literature. The paper concludes with implications for theory and practice as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

This literature review focuses on intersectionality theory, role congruity theory and a critical review of mentoring.

Intersectionality theory

The intersectionality perspective emphasises the effects of race and gender not as independent of each another, but as intertwined and multiplicative (Crenshaw, 1991). Various matrices of oppression, such as gender, race and class, intersect in the experiences of women (Lorde, 1984). Rosette *et al.* (2018, p. 1) defined intersectionality as:

> Overlapping social categories, such as race and gender, that are relevant to a specified individual or group's identity and create a unique experience that is separate and apart from its originating categories.

Smith *et al.* (2019) emphasised that Black women are physically visible in that they are different from most of their colleagues, while the intersectional invisibility theory explains that Black women are simultaneously invisible, implying that they are easily overlooked or disregarded. The reason for this invisibility is that Black women are non-prototypical members of their gender and racial identity groups. Therefore, Black women have unique, complex experiences and challenges linked to their intersecting marginalised identities (Smith *et al.*, 2019). Intersectionality theory is an important lens to apply in the current study, which focuses on mentoring Black African women. Unterhalter *et al.* (2004) noted that class, race, and gender are complex concepts in any context, but that these have been intensified by the specific history of segregation, apartheid, political repression and emergent democracy in South Africa. This amplified situation makes South Africa a particularly interesting context in which to study intersectionality theory, where existing studies refer mostly to Black African-American women (Hooks, 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2019), this study in South Africa endeavours to offer evidence from this unique context on Black African women.

While the feminism perspective encourages us to explore patriarchal social formations, such as hegemonic masculinities (Bell *et al.*, 2019), Western feminism has come under criticism and is incomplete in understanding the intersectional dilemmas of Black African women. For example, in her critique of feminism, Hooks (2015) asked, "Ain't I a woman?" She lamented:

> Feminists remain imprisoned in the very structures that they hope to change . . .. It did not serve the interests of upper and middle class white feminists to discuss race and class. (p. 190)

Consequently, this paper focuses on the struggles of intersectional feminism (Contu, 2020), which also relates to Black feminist thought, a domain that explores the intersection of social identities and how Black African women examine their lived experiences while eliminating stereotypes and bias that create barriers associated with oppression (Nickerson, 2020). Collins (2000, p. 14) affirmed, "Black feminist thought is a critical social theory." In the United States, the derogatory term "mammy" was:

> A historical stereotype and negative image created by whites during slavery to justify the economic abuse of black women, which continued post-slavery, thus promoting a racist and dehumanizing belief that black women are only fit to be domestic servants. (Nickerson, 2020, p. 8)

Furthermore, Rosette *et al.* (2018, p. 8) noted that, "Black women are more likely to be segregated into less desirable, lower-paying jobs, such as domestic helpers, agricultural employees and factory workers." Similarly, domestic workers in South Africa, the majority of who are Black African women, have historically been marginalised because of their race, gender, low socio-economic status, and poor education. In her 2020 judgement in the case of Sylvia Bongi Mahlangu and Another vs Minister of Labour and Others (CCT306/19), Judge Margaret Victor of the South African Constitutional Court said that domestic workers "are survivors of a system that contains remnants of [South Africa's] colonial and apartheid past" and that domestic work is "a form of slavery, servitude and subordination and oppression" (pp. 73, 78). Altogether and given the slow progress of economic empowerment of Black African women in South Africa, the question remains: How might this influence the stereotypical association between Black African women and lower class in the hearts and minds of senior leaders in corporate South Africa?

This study explores male mentors' perceptions about the role of Black African women in society and the workplace, and as senior leaders in the boardroom. Thus, intersectionality theory assists in creating awareness of stereotypes or unconscious bias – that is, unintentional beliefs or attitudes that inform unconscious actions and decisions (Mo, 2015). While intersectionality theory raises awareness of race and gender stereotypes, role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) focuses explicitly on the role expectations of leaders in business organisations.

Role congruity theory

Eagly and Wood (2012, p. 465) described "the marital system of a good provider paired with a domestic worker", which highlights the homemaker-provider division of labour. This division of labour confirms that societal norms confer roles based on gender – namely men are expected to easily assume leadership roles because of their natural masculine nature, while women are expected to nurture families (Acar and Sümer, 2018; Rudman and Glick, 1999). Moreover, Eagly and Sczesny (2019) showed that gender indeed makes a difference for leadership, given that leadership is primarily defined in culturally masculine terms that disadvantage women. Communal traits appear to be inessential add-ons for leaders. While gender equality may be increasing, this may not reflect actual changes in stereotypical content over time. Research by Eagly (2021) and Eagly *et al.* (2020) conducted in the United States shows that most people now report that women and men are equal in overall competence, but women are still perceived as more communal and men as more agentic, thus confirming these stereotypes.

Rosette *et al.* (2018) emphasised the pitfalls of studying women as a monolithic category and encouraged an intersectional perspective. As our study focuses on mentoring Black African women towards leadership positions in organisations, we draw on both intersectionality theory (covering the intersection between gender and race; Crenshaw, 1991) and role congruity theory (relating to the gendered leadership prototype in business organisations; Eagly and Karau, 2002). Drawing on these theories about the role expectations of Black African women, the following discussion revolves around the implications for mentoring Black African women.

Mentoring

There is a considerable body of knowledge on mentoring that centres on the functions of mentoring and the dynamics of mentoring in same-gender, same-race, cross-gender or cross-race relationships.

Mentor's perspective. Allen (2007) and Ragins and Scandura (1997) offered insights from the focal point of the mentor about the benefits of mentoring, especially for the mentor. These

benefits include a rewarding mentoring experience, developing a loyal base of support in the organisation and leaving a legacy for future generations. While not conducted in the business environment, an intergenerational mentoring programme found that mentoring increased mentors' generativity and well-being (Mahoney *et al.*, 2020). However, in some instances, the relationship might be dysfunctional and incompetent protégés might reflect badly on the mentor. Therefore, the focus on negative mentoring is a crucial development in literature (Eby and McManus, 2004), and the current study focuses on some of these elements.

Mentoring functions. The original research of Kram (1985) included career and psychosocial support as mentoring functions. More recent studies have confirmed these functions, as well as Kram's later contribution of including role modelling as a mentoring function (Aquil, 2020). An aspect relevant to this study is the Byrne (1971) theory surrounding similarity-attraction, where both mentors and protégés are attracted to those similar to them. In this regard, Thomas (1990) investigated both mentoring and sponsorship developmental relationships and found that same-race relationships offered more psychosocial support than cross-race relationships. Additionally, Kram (1985) found that cross-gender mentoring relationships provided limited role models to protégés. The findings of Bell (1990) concerning preference for same-race developmental relationships were similar to those of Thomas (1990). However, Lankau *et al.* (2005) found no differences across the psychosocial, career and role-modelling functions regarding the mentor's race.

Relationship dynamics. Alvarez and Lutterman (1970) prompted researchers to consider the relative position of the mentor or sponsor within the organisational hierarchy. Consequently, our study involved executive-level mentors who were higher up in the organisation than their protégés. Colley (2003) emphasised that the power dynamics of mentor relationships are commonly overlooked and are important with regard to this study. Some men in positions of power are afraid to participate in mentoring relationships with women. Allen (2007) differentiated between mentors who believe that protégés learn best through a "sink-or-swim" strategy and those who take a parental approach to the relationship, offering advice and instruction and expecting their protégés to follow obediently. Nevertheless, Welsh and Diehn (2018) noted that women protégés should take responsibility and be proactive in the mentoring relationship.

According to O'Neill and Blake-Beard (2002), people are attracted to those who are similar to them, which influences relational demography, or who are likely to interact regularly and form a dyad. The implication for mentoring is that informal mentoring might be less likely in an environment like South Africa with limited numbers of Black African women mentors in leadership positions. Ragins and Cotton (1999) found that female protégés have the least to gain from entering formal mentoring relationships and that informal mentoring, where protégés are not assigned mentors, is more beneficial for women. However, a distinction is not made between the experiences of Black and White women. Ragins and Cotton (1999) wrote about women as if the same applies for both. It seems mentoring scholars do not realise that they are stereotyping "women" as White middle-class Western women and neglecting the aspect of race, especially the unique mentoring needs that arise when race and gender intersect. Hence, we argue that the current mentoring literature is limited in understanding the relationship dynamics in simultaneous cross-gender and cross-race mentoring.

In some cases, mentoring involves sponsorship, where mentors bring their political capital into play to support the advancement and growth of individuals (Kubu, 2018; Nkomo, 2016; Scheepers *et al.*, 2018). Ibarra *et al.* (2010) indicated that sponsorship entails mentors who go beyond merely giving feedback and advice to their protégés; they use their influence and power with senior executives to advocate for their mentees. Female mentees are described by these scholars as over-mentored and under-sponsored.

Mentoring outcomes. Women who are mentored by men are said to earn 10% more than their peers without male mentors (Helms *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, women who undergo

mentoring tend to show improved accountability and achieve their career goals (Ivey and Dupré, 2022). Men who mentor women are often found to have access to information and broader networks in their own organisations, especially if they mentor women outside their functional business units (Johnson and Smith, 2018).

Darwin (2000, p. 197) challenged traditional mentoring: "Traditionally, the mentoring relationship has been framed in a language of paternalism and dependence and stems from a power-dependent hierarchical relationship, aimed at maintaining the status quo." This functionalist mentoring approach involves mentors who assume a parental role and mentoring that fulfils the need to teach and altruistic yearnings (Darwin, 2000). Some dangers associated with these programmes include overdependence, jealousy and the possibility of unwanted romantic or sexual involvement, especially in cases of cross-gender mentoring. Therefore, Erskine and Bilimoria (2019) advised mentors, especially in cross-race mentoring relationships, to practise reflexivity to increase their self-awareness about their own possible prejudices or implicit bias – that is, their unconscious negative feelings and beliefs towards marginalised groups, despite their own explicit endorsement of egalitarian values. Negative mentoring experiences for mentors include the drain on their time and the potential of protégés to misuse the relationship (Allen, 2007), being hurt by toxic protégés, protégé submissiveness, harassment and protégé performance that falls below expectations (Eby and McManus, 2004).

Men who are more collaborative and power-sharing have been reported to be less competent leaders by both men and women (Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2018). These men might also suffer a "wimp penalty", where they are perceived as too weak and may be stigmatised for publicly supporting gender equality efforts. In sum, there is a considerable body of knowledge about mentors' motives and mentoring relationship dynamics.

Research methodology
The study embraced the interpretivism philosophy, which advocates that the social world can be interpreted in a subjective manner (Ryan, 2018). The research followed a phenomenological approach to the interpretation (Bevir and Kedar, 2008) and description of the mentors' experiences (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Given that the participants' experiences were embedded in the culturally and historically significant environment of post-apartheid South Africa, a phenomenological approach was most relevant.

Sample
This study applied purposive sampling. The researchers purposefully selected participants (Saunders and Lewis, 2018) based on their knowledge, at least three years of experience in management, and level of seniority as well as their influence on the policies, structures and strategies of their respective organisations. These criteria ensured that the participants could share their experiences and were able to answer the interview protocol questions. The participants were not necessarily informal mentors or participants in formal mentoring programmes. Instead, seniority and gender were used as the main selection criteria.

The financial services industry in South Africa was chosen for the current study as it is known to be male-dominated with masculine norms, and women – especially Black African women – have little representation at senior management levels (Booysen and Nkomo, 2014). The respondents represented the various sectors of the financial services industry, with majority being in banking, some in insurance, and some in asset management. The banking respondents represented the top three of South Africa's so-called "big five banks". The 21 male executive participants were also spread across various areas of expertise, namely, marketing (2), operations (5), risk management (4), finance (2), payments (2), information

technology (2), investment banking (2), supply chain management (1) and CEO (1). The pseudonyms of the 21 participants are displayed in Table 1.

Data collection
Participants were assured ahead of time that all the information shared would be kept confidential, with non-disclosure of any identities of people or organisations mentioned in the interviews. Participation was voluntary so that participants felt comfortable to offer their own authentic opinions on the topic under study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams (a videoconferencing interface), because in-person interviews were impossible due to the lockdown restrictions associated with COVID-19. The audio files were used to transcribe the interviews.

Given the main research question – What are the motives, relationship dynamics, and outcomes of the mentoring experiences of male executive mentors while mentoring Black African women within the context of South Africa? – the interview questions explored the experiences of the male executives. The questions revolved around the topic of mentoring Black African women, such as "Give specific examples, if you have, of where you mentored Black African women" and "Give examples of barriers that you might have experienced in mentoring Black African women." The interview duration varied from approximately half an hour to nearly one hour.

Analysis approach
The interview transcripts were analysed using Atlas.ti software to enhance coding. Five hundred and thirteen codes were initially identified and these were reduced as duplications, informed by words of similar meaning, which were eliminated. Saturation point was reached at the fifteenth transcript and the final number of codes was 213. Our approach to capturing the data structure was to continue with additional codes when the respondents' experiences differed. This initial coding process delivered eight themes concerning the benefits of

Respondents' pseudonyms	Industry	Age	Race	Position
Ajesh	Banking	38	Indian	Chief financial officer
James	Banking	53	White	Chief risk officer
Ed	Banking	55	White	Executive head: operations
Gert	Banking	49	White	Executive head: cash management
Gordon	Asset management	35	African	Executive: asset management
Jay	Banking	53	White	Head: risk management
Keanu	Banking	37	White	Chief financial officer
Keegan	Insurance	45	Coloured	Chief information officer
Lesiba	Banking	55	African	Head operations
Lester	Banking	49	Coloured	Managing director operations
Lin	Banking	52	African	Group executive: payments
Lwazi	Banking	50	African	Chief executive office
Mandla	Banking	33	African	Head regulatory functions
Nkateko	Asset management	36	African	Chief procurement officer
Peter	Banking	44	White	Chief architecture engineer
Phenyo	Insurance	45	African	Group marketing executive
Sipho	Banking	47	African	Chief information officer
Tafadzwa	Asset management	37	African	Chief investment officer
Themba	Banking	35	African	Chief risk officer
Muzi	Banking	55	African	Chief marketing officer
Tshepo	Banking	39	African	Group executive card

Table 1.
Description of male
executives' sample

mentoring, challenges of mentoring, and how Black African women might progress in organisations. The subsequent rounds of analysis offered more complexity and revealed more hidden themes.

Our approach to the data structure was inspired by Gioia and Thomas (1996) and the application of their method by Ladge *et al.* (2012). We derived the main thematic categories presented in our final analysis by linking related sub-themes. The seminal work of Blake-Beard *et al.* (2006) offered a helpful structure to organise the codes according to a mentoring process of motivation for mentoring, mentoring relationship dynamics and outcomes of mentoring.

Findings

This section reports on our analyses of the transcripts and separates the primary data of interview quotes from our interpretation of these male mentors' experiences. As discussed under the analysis section, our interpretation included the creation of second-order themes based on the first-order concepts, which are based on the participants' actual experiences. The data structure in Figure 1 illustrates how we moved from key themes to more conceptual categories – for example, it shows our first-order concepts, our second-order themes and then the aggregated dimensions. We elaborated on the original mentoring process flow of Blake-Beard *et al.* (2006) by adding a fourth aggregate dimension, which influences the other dimensions, depicted by the arrows in Figure 1. The first aggregated dimension is aligned with the Blake-Beard *et al.* (2006) motivations and deterrents to mentoring. The second aggregated dimension is the mentoring relationship dynamics, referring to the mentors' approach to the mentoring relationship. The third dimension also refers to the Blake-Beard *et al.* (2006) dimension of mentoring outcomes. We added the fourth dimension of mentors' stereotypes of Black African women.

Aggregate dimension 1: motivations and deterrents to mentoring
This aggregate dimension consists of three second-order themes. These themes are mentors' generativity motive, their expected satisfaction with the results of mentoring, and mentors being deterred from mentoring because of the danger of being accused of sexual harassment.
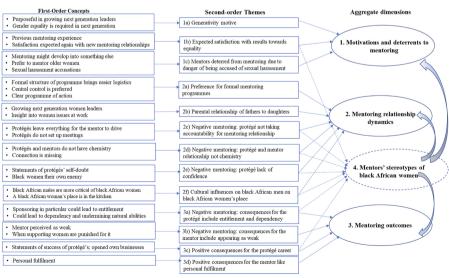

Figure 1.
Data structure

Source(s): Authors' own compilation, adapted from Gioia and Thomas (1996)

(1a) Second-order theme: generativity motive. The first-order concepts in terms of the coding included motives to engage in mentoring, such as growing the next generation of leaders, as the quote below demonstrates:

My father taught me that leadership is also about growing others, so I am obsessed with growing the next generation of leaders, so that they can be where I am or beyond. (Lin; Black African male mentor)

We also included the motive of mentoring the next generation of leaders to achieve gender equality under this theme. The participants observed, for example, a lack of female mentors, as the following quote illustrates:

Actually, gender equality is important, especially when you want to bring up young girls to take up leadership roles in the corporate environment, because they struggle finding female mentors, because women that are there as leaders, they are very arrogant, and not bringing the others with. (Lwazi; Black African male mentor)

(1b) Second-order theme: expected satisfaction with results. We created a second-order theme around the respondents' previous experience of mentoring and the satisfaction expected from seeing the result of their mentoring, which motivated mentors to be involved in mentoring. The following quote indicates the sense of satisfaction this mentor experienced from the achievements of his protégés who had previously been perceived as underdogs, or people with less potential and who, through mentoring, were now achievers:

I have picked people who were underdogs, when people did not think it was the right time, all of them but two exceptions are flying now throughout the world in their personal lives, and in their professional lives. (Lin; Black African male mentor)

(1c) Second-order theme: mentors deterred from mentoring because of danger of being accused of sexual harassment. Participants mentioned the problem of mentoring relationships potentially developing into sexual relationships and that mentors fear being accused of sexual harassment:

The young women, when they seek mentorship, I decline. I prefer older women because I trust the maturity that I won't have to be walking on eggshells to avoid being misunderstood. (Thulani; Black African male mentor)

The above does not differentiate between informal mentoring and formal mentoring programmes initiated by the organisation. However, the next aggregate dimension deals with mentoring relationship dynamics and delves deeper into the difference between informal and formal mentoring.
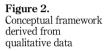
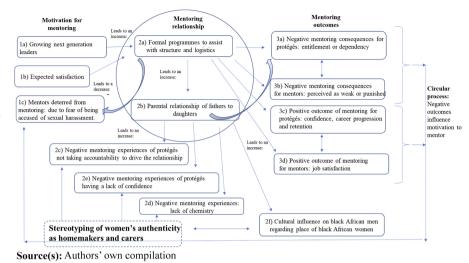*Aggregate dimension 2: mentoring relationship dynamics*
Mentoring relationship dynamics is a broad aggregate dimension that includes six second-order themes and illustrates the importance and centrality of the mentoring relationship. Figure 2 explains this centrality, with mentoring relationship depicted as the circle in the middle from which most of the arrows pan out or point towards. Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework we built based on our data structure in Figure 1 and our interpretation of the interrelationships between the second-order themes and the four aggregate dimensions.

(2a) Second-order theme: preference for formal mentoring programmes. Participants frequently noted that formal mentorship programmes tend to yield better results by virtue

Source(s): Authors' own compilation

of the structures in place and that relationships are easier to maintain when programmes are centrally run. Jay, a White male mentor, stated, "I've had graduates that I've mentored. I think the structured mentorship programmes helps to keep track and logistics involved." It seems that formal mentoring programmes offer a clear programme of action.

(2b) Second-order theme: parental relationship of fathers to daughters. More than half of the respondents were parents of girls and expressed that their actions to promote gender equality were inspired by their desire to build a brighter future in which equal access to opportunities for all becomes a reality. Consequently, these mentors became actively involved in mentoring and supporting women to succeed in leadership roles.

Before I had daughters, I struggled even to understand the issues that women go through. And that created a lot of challenges, especially in trying to identify with the circumstances of women in my team. (Tafadzwa; Black African male mentor)

Table 2 lists which of the male mentors had daughters, whether they were mentoring women and/or other males, and whether they were mentoring cross-race (i.e. mentoring protégés of a different race). The next three second-order themes are examples of negative mentoring experiences relating to the mentoring relationship.

(2c) Second-order theme: negative mentoring experiences of protégés not taking accountability for driving the relationship. Some mentors found that their protégés tended to leave the mentoring relationship to them to drive. Simple tasks, such as setting up regular sessions, were not done without nudging:

I'm mentoring four African women, as mentees, they sometimes fail to understand that they need to drive this and not me. In setting up the meetings. And they tend to expect me to follow up with them. (Gordon; Black African male mentor)

(2d) Second-order theme: negative mentoring experiences of a lack of chemistry. The lack of a connection, or chemistry, was key in negative experiences. One respondent elucidated, "I have

Male respondents	Respondents' race	Mentoring others of same race	Mentoring others of same gender	Mentoring cross-gender	Mentoring cross-race	Spouse homemaker	Has daughter(s)
Ajesh	Indian	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
James	White	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Ed	White	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Gert	White	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Gordon	African	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Jay	White	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Keanu	White	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
Keegan	Coloured	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Lesiba	African	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Lester	Coloured	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lin	African	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lwazi	African	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Mandla	African	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Nkateko	African	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Peter	African	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Phenyo	African	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Sipho	African	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
Tafadzwa	African	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Themba	African	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Muzi	African	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Tshepo	African	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N

Note(s): Y = yes; N = no

Table 2.
Male executives: same
gender or same race
mentoring, and cross-
race, cross-gender
mentoring and
mentoring Black
African women

worked within the mentorship programmes . . .. There are instances, where unfortunately, you would try, and the chemistry is not right." (Muzi; Black African male mentor).

(2e) Second-order theme: negative mentoring experiences of Black African female protégés lacking confidence. One of the main reasons for negative mentoring experiences was the lack of confidence of Black African female protégés. Participants alluded to women who create their own glass ceilings.

A lot of women, actually place their own glass ceiling . . .. When the role for the manager came up, there were two really good African female team leaders, none of them applied for the job. (Ed; White male mentor)

The participants clearly observed that Black women allowed themselves to be consumed by self-doubt. Sipho, a Black African male mentor shares:

African women, they generally start off on a position of self-doubt. They could want to achieve more in life, but when you lend it to them, then they start pushing it back to you.

Another Black African male mentor referred to Black African women as being their own worst enemies:

Black women are their own worst enemy . . . lacking confidence. Many were socialised by their mothers to have the mindset, we are not good enough, do not move too fast, just get a man and get married. (Lin)

This observation about the cultural stereotypes of Black African women from the perspective of a Black African male executive also links to and illustrates the last sub-theme of the aggregate dimension on the mentoring relationship.

(2f) Second-order theme: cultural influence on Black African men regarding place of Black African women. Most participants mentioned the unconscious and conscious bias of some African men in positions of power. These participants perceived this cultural influence as continuing to be a stumbling block in the advancement of Black African women.

There's Black men that believed that the place for a woman is in the kitchen; they don't want the female to be at the table. They believe that because of I'm an African male, I'm born to be superior. (Nkateko; Black African male mentor)

An Indian male mentor, Ajesh, expressed his concern about the cultural bias of Black African male executives:

I have four African women in my team . . . qualified chartered accountants and very knowledgeable, but they struggle with managing African men. The cultural patriarchy plays out in our workplace. That's the sad truth.

Furthermore, Jay (White male mentor) observed that Black African females struggle with Black African male executives:

I have noticed that African men tend to be harder on African women. One of my Black women managers mentioned that they can't look their Black brothers into the eyes culturally as a sign of respect, but at work you are expected to make eye contact.

Therefore, the findings show that not only may White male leaders be critical of Black African women leaders, but that Black African males may be even more critical of them. This implies that same-race mentoring relationships could also have unconscious bias issues to deal with. Phenyo, a Black African male mentor, in his own language (i.e. Sesotho), explained how Black African women are treated in his organisation:

When it's an African sister presenting, men question the credibility of the data or just trying to find fault. It's this idea that, a male is right. The race equivalent is White is right. You talk about how, *setlhare sa motho o montsho ke lekgowa* … it plays out in our boardroom.

This Sesotho saying means: "A White man is the best medicine to cure a Black person's inadequacies." In this respondent's mind, this saying holds true in his organisation as there is a cultural belief that White men are more knowledgeable and thus are less criticised, while Black African women are often sent to White men to ratify their own work and contributions before they can officially be accepted, even when the Black African women are the experts.

The researchers further observed the interesting revelation that more than half of the 21 males interviewed had spouses who were homemakers and not career-focused. These men were the breadwinners. This begs the question about the impact their lifestyle choices have on their perceived social identity of women and their views about women's ability or place at leadership levels in corporate settings. Mentoring outcomes is the third aggregate dimension.

Aggregate dimension 3: mentoring outcomes
Mentoring outcomes include positive and negative mentoring consequences for both the protégé and the mentor. These are explored in the subsections that follow.

(3a) Second-order theme: negative mentoring consequences for the protégé, such as entitlement or dependency. Under this second-order theme are concerns around the possible negative consequences of sponsorship for the protégé, including entitlement or dependency. As James, a White male mentor, expressed during the interview, "We must just be careful that we don't confuse sponsorship with automatic promotion and advancement. That's an important thing." There could also be negative consequences of mentoring for the mentor.

(3b) Second-order theme: negative mentoring consequences for mentors, such as being perceived as weak or punished. Some participants shared that when men are more collaborative and power-sharing, they are perceived to be lesser leaders by both men and women. "There might be this perception that if I showed too much leniency, then I'm going to get walked over and people are going to see me as weak" (Gert; White male mentor). There are also repercussions for these mentors when they publicly support gender equality efforts:

The vast majority of men, do not believe that women are their equals. When they see you accelerate women to the top, they begin to send punishment your way too. (Lester; coloured male mentor)

(3c) Second-order theme: positive outcome of mentoring for Black women protégés: confidence, career progression, and retention. Most respondents indicated that individuals they have mentored have flourished in terms of career growth. The following statement shows how mentoring, which involves sponsorship, could enable a Black African female CEO to be appointed:

We went to every board member and then I presented [name left out] as the CEO, they endorsed and she was appointed. Then I went to the management team, I explained everything, they accepted her. (Lwazi; Black African male mentor)

Some protégés even created their own successful ventures. "Those that survived my mentorship had opportunities to grow inside the bank and I have one mentee that started a business following our mentorship." (Lesiba; Black African male mentor). The theme of Black

African women lacking confidence mentioned earlier was confirmed by Ajesh, an Indian male mentor, who asserted how he supported women to increase their confidence:

> I have four South African Black females in my current team. They have very strong dignity, very strong principles. The only thing is ability to speak up, the confidence thing, that is what I have worked with.

(3d) Second-order theme: positive outcome of mentoring for mentors. The mentors shared the personal fulfilment gained from knowing they were able to set someone up for success. "The ladies that I have mentored, they are like sponges for knowledge and wisdom and that is what makes it so special because it does not get wasted," said Ed, a White male mentor. The final aggregate dimension identified by the data structure was the mentors' stereotyping of Black African women, which influenced their approach to mentoring. This stereotyping influenced the previous three aggregate dimensions of motivation, the mentoring relationship and the outcomes of mentoring.

Aggregate dimension 4: mentors' stereotyping of Black African women underlies their approach to mentoring
The mentors in the current sample perceived women who are authentically feminine and care for their teams as more successful leaders and those who are too aggressive as less valued. The mentors reflected the existing societal norms and stereotypes of women as described in extant literature. The mentors commented that women need to be authentic as leaders and embrace their femininity:

> I think women have to own that femininity, just as we, as Black people, over the years we have learnt to own our blackness, like Black people who feel they have to put on a different persona when they're going to work, because otherwise they won't pass as leaders. I think with women, they feel the same way, they put on the maleness and get aggressive at work and, actually [it] does everybody a disservice. (Phenyo; Black African male mentor)

The following statement shows how even the Black male mentor perceives Black African female leaders as females and does not recognise the "blackness" (as he describes it) of Black African female leaders: "Women excel when they are their authentic selves. They treat their teams like their own children, and they bring a human touch into the leadership" (Lesiba, Black African male mentor). This quote illustrates the stereotypical approach to women's roles as being caring and communal leaders. This stereotyping of Black African women as having to be communal and caring informed our deeper analysis of the codes and second-order themes. Consequently, the iterative analysis process revealed the mentors' stereotyping and sometimes unconscious bias towards Black African women.

Therefore, we created the fourth aggregate dimension to emphasise this finding. In each of the previous three aggregate dimensions, this stereotyping of Black African women influenced the mentors' approach to mentoring, as the blue arrows in Figure 1 demonstrate. Figure 1 illustrates, by means of dotted lines, the relationship between some of the second-order themes and the stereotyping of Black African women. For example, we interpreted mentors' satisfaction with the achievements of Black African women as the "underdog", or people from whom achievement are not expected, to be related to this stereotyping of Black African women. Another dotted line shows that the mentoring relationship dynamic around the protégé not taking accountability also relates to the stereotyping as well as the negative mentoring aspect of there being no chemistry between the mentor and the protégé. In addition, the cultural influences on Black African men about Black African women's place in society relates to this stereotyping. Both the negative consequences of mentoring for the

protégé (i.e. entitlement and dependency) as well as the positive consequences for the protégé's career relate to stereotyping of Black African women, as we highlight in the discussion section.

Figure 2 illustrates that the four aggregate dimensions create a mentoring process, from the motivation and deterrents to mentoring, to the mentoring relationship dynamics from the mentor's perspective, to the outcomes of mentoring.

The thick blue arrow in Figure 2 illustrates a possible link between formal mentoring programmes and mentors' fear of being accused of sexual harassment. It seems that mentors might feel more protected against accusations of sexual harassment within the structure of the formal mentoring programme. Another important link is between the parental approach to mentoring and the negative consequence of dependency and even the lack of confidence of Black African women. Moreover, we illustrate the circular process in which the negative outcomes of mentoring impact the motivation to mentor or deter mentors from mentoring Black African women.

Discussion

Drawing on the O'Neill and Blake-Beard (2002) framework of the flow of the mentoring process, we discuss the three aggregate dimensions, including the motivation to mentor, the mentoring relationship, and the mentoring outcomes. As the main contribution of this study is the creation of the fourth aggregate dimension, which extends the work of O'Neill and Blake-Beard (2002), we start with this dimension. The discussion revolves specifically around the links between the dimensions and current literature.

Mentors' stereotyping of Black African women underlies their approach to mentoring

Black African women's multiple minority identities – as Crenshaw (1991) posited in the intersectionality theory – have important implications for power relations (Nickerson, 2020) and insight into these dynamics is imperative for mentoring relationships. However, the intersectional invisibility theory explains that Black African women could be invisible, implying that they are easily overlooked or disregarded (Smith *et al.*, 2019). Unfortunately, the male executive participants in our sample stereotyped Black African women in terms of their gender, expecting them to care about their teams and be communal leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002). While Crenshaw (1991) and Lorde (1984) reminded us that various matrices of oppression, such as gender, race and class, intersect in the experiences of Black women, our participants made limited references to the implications of Black African women's intersection of race and class diversity dimensions. Rosette *et al.* (2018) brought attention to the pitfalls of perceiving women as a monolithic category and the male executive participants did not show an understanding of the delicate and unique challenges of Black African women protégés. We interpret this finding as showing a lack of insight into intersectionality. We conclude that the male executive mentors in our sample perceived Black African women as "females" and, aligned with Western feminist literature and role congruity theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012), considered Black African and White women as having the same challenges.

The original work of Byrne (1971) around similarity-attraction is relevant for the current study, as both the mentors and protégés are attracted to those similar to themselves. In cases where male mentors might perceive women through their lens of stereotyping and unconscious bias (Mo, 2015), as in this study, the mentors might not feel that they have anything in common with these Black African women who are perceived as having communal leadership styles. Due to South Africa's history of racial divide, in cases of cross-race mentoring, the impact of the similarity-attraction is amplified and mentors as well as

protégés might not feel that they can identify with one another. We expect cross-gender and simultaneous cross-race mentoring relationships would have the least similarity-attraction. Interestingly, our study revealed same-race, cross-gender mentoring relationships to be the most difficult, because of the cultural influence on Black African male mentors to perceive Black African females as dependent and subordinate to Black African males in terms of position in society (see the 2f second-order theme).

Throughout the interview data, it was evident that mentors preferred women leaders to be authentic and caring, and to show their femininity, confirming the role congruity theory of Eagly and Karau (2002). Inauthentic women were criticised as being aggressive and imitating males, which is referred to in literature as the agentic penalty (Lammers and Gast, 2017). Furthermore, it was interesting that most of the male respondents' spouses were homemakers, which might have influenced their perceptions about women being more suited to homemakers than corporate leaders. This finding decreases the likelihood of a more equal power relationship forming between mentors and protégés. An aspect that might decrease the likelihood of equal power relationships (Colley, 2003) even further, and which might be overlooked, is the positioning of Black African women in South Africa society as the most oppressed group, representing the lowest socio-economic class (Donald and Mahlatji, 2006).

Motivations and deterrents to mentoring
The finding of generativity as a motive for mentors to be involved in mentoring confirms prior research (Allen, 2007; Ragins and Scandura, 1997). The expected satisfaction of progress towards gender equality as a motive for mentors to undertake mentoring confirms the work of researchers like Eby and McManus (2004). As described in the findings, we interpreted mentors' satisfaction with the achievements of their Black African women protégés as relating to their stereotyping of Black African women not fitting the prototype of leadership (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and thus being surprised, perceiving these achievements as great accomplishments. The finding of mentors being deterred from mentoring because of their fear of being accused of sexual harassment also aligns with prior studies on negative mentoring (e.g. Eby and McManus, 2004).

Mentoring relationship dynamics
The preference of mentors for formal mentoring programmes was an interesting finding. Turner-Moffatt (2019) found that formal mentoring programmes were more effective than informal mentoring. While Allen (2007) discovered that there is inconclusive evidence on which type of mentoring programmes is most effective, other studies showed that protégés actually prefer informal mentoring relationships (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). The mentors in this study indicated that they prefer the coordinated structure and logistics of formal mentoring programmes. The formal structure might provide more protection against the accusation of sexual harassment, as it offers legitimacy for the regular interactions between a mentor and a protégé.

The theme of parental relationship between fathers and daughters revealed in our study has far-reaching implications and might contribute to negative mentoring. Darwin (2000) challenged traditional mentoring relationships, which are framed in a language of paternalism and dependence. The current study supports this challenge to traditional mentoring. Alvarez and Lutterman (1970) highlighted that the vertical location in the hierarchy is an important element to consider and, in this study, the male mentors were at executive level, relative to junior Black African women protégés. This hierarchical context could reinforce the parental relationship. Scholars like Eby and McManus (2004) also highlight the negative consequences of the parental approach in mentoring relationships.

Colley's (2003) contentions on power dynamics in the mentoring relationship relate to this finding. Within a parental relationship, the hierarchy is reinforced and it might be connected with Black African female protégés lacking the confidence to take accountability and initiate meetings. While previous studies (e.g. Welsh and Diehn, 2018) also noted that women protégés should take accountability for the mentoring relationship, the submissive role of Black African women could be reinforced by being seen as the "daughter" or protégé with less power than the mentor. Hence, these Black African female protégés will not be empowered to take responsibility for the mentoring relationship as expected by the mentors. Consequently, literature calls for self-awareness and reflexivity around personal bias (Mo, 2015), as mentors might unwittingly reinforce stereotypes (Erskine and Bilimoria, 2019).

The finding of a lack of chemistry between mentors and protégés could stem from the formal assignment of mentors and protégés in a structured programme, which results in a lack of the natural connection that occurs when people choose one another to mentor and be mentored. Negative mentoring literature confirms these dilemmas in formal mentoring relationships (Burk and Eby, 2010; Eby *et al.*, 2013). In terms of the mentoring functions, originally named by Kram (1985), the formal mentoring programme might also not be conducive to forming personal relationships in which mentors offer psychosocial support (Allen and Eby, 2003). The mentoring function of psychosocial support did not receive much attention in our study, as mentors focused mainly on career support. This finding relates to the fact that previous research on formal mentoring programmes was more focused on a transactional relationship of agreed goals around career support (Allen and Eby, 2003).

Mentoring outcomes
The second-order themes under this aggregate dimension revolved around the possible negative mentoring outcomes for mentors and protégés, as well as the positive outcomes of mentoring for both from the mentors' viewpoints. Ibarra *et al.* (2010), Kubu (2018) and Nkomo (2016) emphasised the powerful role of a sponsor as an advocate for the protégé. However, it seems in the current study that the sponsorship aspect of mentoring could be to the protégé's detriment, as the Black African female gets the message that she has to be sponsored to be promoted and, as one of the mentors indicated, her natural abilities might be undermined.

The theme of appearing weak when mentoring Black African women as a possible negative mentoring consequence for mentors – confirming the study of Athanasopoulou *et al.* (2018) – reflects current norms in society around masculinity and the prototype of leadership being agentic. Role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002), which emphasises the masculine prototype of leadership, assists us to understand this finding. Thus, male executives who mentor women are perceived as "too soft" and are seen as being like women, which Athanasopoulou *et al.* (2018) referred to as the "wimp penalty".

The second-order theme of career progression and retention for Black women protégés as a positive outcome of mentoring confirms previous research (Ivey and Dupré, 2022). For the mentors in our sample, a positive outcome of mentoring is their personal satisfaction. In literature, mentors' job satisfaction is mentioned (Allen and Eby, 2003) as a benefit of mentoring, whereas personal satisfaction implies more than being satisfied with one's job and relates to an altruistic private benefit of mentoring.

Implications of the findings
The findings of our research have major implications for theory development. The current study shows that while role congruity theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012) is helpful in understanding the masculine prototype of leadership in organisations, it is inadequate to fully explain the race dynamics in mentoring relationships and the unique experiences of Black African women. The South African context, which includes a history of colonialism and

apartheid, as well as continued socio-economic class differences between races, amplifies this reality. Therefore, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) has to be used in conjunction with role congruity theory to obtain a deeper understanding of the intersecting minority dimensions of Black African women in South Africa. Moreover, our contribution includes an extension of the three dimensions of the Blake-Beard *et al.* (2006) mentoring process by adding the perspective of mentors and their stereotyping of Black African women as a fourth dimension.

Our findings have practical implications for mentors, protégé and organisations. The most important finding for mentors to note is stereotyping and their possible unconscious bias (Mo, 2015) about the role of Black African women in society and not being capable to be senior leaders in organisations (Eagly and Wood, 2012). Mentors must increase their self-awareness and reflexivity around their bias and the danger of reinforcing stereotypes around Black African women protégés, aligned with the findings of Erskine and Bilimoria (2019). Mentors must be aware that they may lack insight into Black women's intersection of multiple minority identities (Nickerson, 2020), such as gender, race and class as diversity dimensions.

The implications for Black African women as protégés include an awareness of how the contextual embeddedness of the stereotyping of Black African women might influence their mentoring relationships. Black African women need to take note of the cultural norms that influence their mentoring relationships and address these norms. In some instances, protégés even need to challenge the mentors' parental approach to mentoring (Allen, 2007) and endeavour to create more equal power relationships with their mentors, where both mentors and themselves can learn from one another.

While the emphasis in mentoring programmes has been on the benefits to the protégés, the mentors' needs are as important to enable sustainable mentoring programmes (Allen, 2007) and ensure return on investment for the organisations. Abbott *et al.* (2010) reported that there is little formal training in South Africa for the mentoring programme coordinator role. The implications for organisations that promote mentoring programmes include the necessity to assess mentors' unconscious bias and stereotyping of Black African women (Erskine and Bilimoria, 2019). Training programmes for mentors must include the impact of intersectionality of multiple minority identities on Black African women to increase mentors' sensitivity towards the unique challenges of their protégés. These programmes would increase psychosocial mentoring in addition to career mentoring (Lankau *et al.*, 2005).

Limitations and future research

This study included a relatively small sample of male mentors, thus conclusive assertions could not be made about the complex phenomena investigated (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). The respondents shared their own experiences and perspectives, which amounts to self-reporting (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This presents its own weaknesses, as the respondents may have displayed response bias by giving socially acceptable answers or amplifying perspectives to support their strong positions. Nevertheless, the impact of response bias was minimised by asking open-ended questions and ensuring that respondents knew their responses were anonymous and that they could withdraw without any penalty. To ensure credibility, the coding of the transcripts was checked by other researchers (Saunders and Lewis, 2018).

More than half of the male leaders who participated in this study were the main breadwinners in their homes, with their spouses taking on the supportive role of homemakers. There is a need to research the impact of male leaders' home structures and lifestyle choices on their ability to make decisions that support gender parity. The intersection between race, gender and class deserves more research, especially in the South African environment with its apartheid history and the effect of the socio-economic positioning of Black African women (Donald and Mahlatji, 2006) on the stereotyping and unconscious bias around Black African women.

Conclusion

This study explored the motives, relationship dynamics and outcomes of male executive mentors' experiences of mentoring Black African women within the context of South Africa. The experiences of White, Black African, coloured and Indian male mentors showed that the mentoring relationship is central when mentoring Black African women. Mentors' motives include growing next generation leaders, resulting in personal satisfaction for the mentors. This relationship can be influenced by the mentors' parental approach to mentoring, with the resultant negative mentoring experiences of protégés not taking accountability for driving the relationship and lacking confidence, as well as a lack of chemistry between mentors and mentees. Mentors' stereotypical expectations of women as homemakers and carers influenced mentoring experiences during formal mentoring programmes.

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