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**“She’s me, the whole of me”:  
Constructing mentoring as a feminine gendered  
connection for women’s professional identity**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

Master of Science

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Manawatū,

New Zealand.

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2016

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## **Abstract**

Despite the increased numbers of women in the New Zealand labour market, gendered segregation of the workforce, pay inequality and a lack of women in leadership roles are still gendered issues facing women in employment today.

Mentoring is a widely accepted strategy to improve women's employment issues and career opportunities. While the promise of mentoring seems to offer women many rewards at work, this study reveals mentoring for women is complex, with gender implicated in the complexities.

This study is informed by feminist poststructuralist theory. The basis for analysis is a Foucauldian Discourse framework. Unstructured, conversational interviews with nine New Zealand, mid-career, professional women were used to gather mentoring narratives at work. The women discursively drew on various constructions of a 'connection'. Connectedness talk with mentors was constrained and/or enabled through two key elements of mentoring: institutionalised relationships and positioning.

Institutional mentoring with managers and partners as mentors and the resulting power relations, constrain the women's ability to make meaningful connections with mentors. Importantly, women actively position themselves and their women mentors through feminine discourse. This takes into account the psycho-social and emotional qualities of women at work and their various work-mothering responsibilities. A 'feminine gendered connection' enables the women to positively transform how they view themselves and their professional identity at work.

## **Dedication**

To my mother, friend and mentor -

Words cannot express my gratitude, love and admiration I have for you. I am eternally grateful for everything you have sacrificed in order to get me here. You have tirelessly supported me and given me strength to keep persevering throughout this journey, and I wouldn't know where I would be in this world without you. You are courageous, loyal and a role model. I aspire to be like you.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to sincerely express my gratitude and warm wishes to several important people who have significantly contributed to the completion of this thesis, as without them I wouldn't have developed the same sense of purpose and sense of being a woman.

To my supervisor, Professor Mandy Morgan, Massey University – Manawatū, your endless wisdom and knowledge has been an invaluable asset for me. I am warmly grateful for your continuous support and guidance in nurturing my skills as a feminist researcher.

To the nine women participants, I warmly thank you for giving up your time to be interviewed for this study. You have all been completely honest and shown integrity in our discussions and I appreciate such interesting and insightful mentoring narratives that you have provided for me. You have been a crucial resource to the complexity of mentoring.

To Rohini Subbian, Head of Lending and Document Supply, from the Albany Campus Library, who gave up her time to help me put together the appendices.

My research project was deemed 'Low Risk' from the Massey University Ethics Committee.

To my loving and generous parents, Linda and Enrico, thank you for keeping me sane throughout this emotional rollercoaster. You have allowed me to flourish in more ways than I can imagine. You have taught me to never give up on my dreams, be myself and most importantly be happy.

To my sister Corina, a strong and beautiful woman, I am extremely thankful for you always believing in me and being a continual source of encouragement. You have taught me to be resilient and independent. I am proud to be your sister.

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# Chapter I Introduction

Women's employment rights, paid and unpaid work and the gendering of women in masculine and feminine work environments have been a central focus for feminism and feminist research for several decades (Lahiri-Dutt, 2012; Ramos, 2012; Vyas, Mbwambo, & Heise, 2015). Women's issues in employment continue today and the relevance of gendering as women is a key feminist issue explored in the present study.

The purpose of this introduction is to set the scene of specific gendered issues that New Zealand women face at work, in organisations and within specific professional sectors. These issues include gender segregation within the workforce, pay inequity and the lack of women as leaders. Mentoring is discussed as a fruitful way to address these gendered issues. At the end of this introduction, I engage in reflections about my interest in mentoring with women at work through the conversations I had within an early career woman.

## **Gendered issues of women at work**

### **Gender segregation at work**

Despite more than 40 years of women's legislated equality in the workforce, there is contemporary evidence that New Zealand does not achieve proportional representation of women in employment or in particular professions that women occupy in comparison to men (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). The New Zealand government has acknowledged a phenomena termed 'occupational gender segregation', which describes the historical status of gendered work environments in New Zealand and women's issues that are relevant to this present study. It is a particular gendered problem that women face in the employment sector and the labour market. In reporting the findings of the 2013 census in relation to women at work, occupational gender segregation referred to the gendered representation of workers and professionals in particular sectors, workplaces or industries. For instance, women are overrepresented in service and sales, clerical and administrative roles, while they are significantly underrepresented in trades (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). Analysis of the top 5 occupations from the 20 most common for women and men, shows that women are

more likely to work in stereotypically feminine roles in service, caring and nurturing occupations, while men are more likely to work in stereotypically masculine roles in management, manual and technical occupations (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). Women are also disproportionately underrepresented in occupations typically dominated by men, such as law enforcement. Women police officers contribute to less than half of the current New Zealand police force and are severely underrepresented in senior roles such as constables, sergeants, inspectors and superintendents (Butler, Winfree, & Newbold, 2003; New Zealand Police, 2016).

The issue of pay and leadership are gendered problems for women in employment that arise from gender segregation and are discussed in the following sections.

### **Pay inequality between genders**

Despite the enactment of the Equal Pay Act over 40 years ago, which legislated the policy of fair and equal distribution of pay, gender segregation in the workforce still prevents women from attaining the same or higher pay to men, overall. Pay inequity is still a contentious issue nationally and internationally and is a sticking point for many feminist scholars (Dobele, Rundle-Thiele, & Kopanidis, 2014; Gutek, 2001; Parker & Arrowsmith, 2012). Women are earning comparatively less than men across the board in the New Zealand labour market. This is the case even within some gender segregated fields: for example, in nursing, which is a profession dominated by women, men are still earning comparatively more (Statistics New Zealand, 2015).

A specific example of pay inequity and the gendering of an employment sector as a whole are aged care workers. It is a service role that is highly gendered, where the majority of the workers in the New Zealand and Australian context are women aged 45 years and above (Kaine & Ravenswood, 2014; Parker & Arrowsmith, 2012). In most instances a carer is seen as someone in a typically feminine role. It is connected to the idea of women's unpaid role within the home environment as mothers, wives and carers for family members. The role of a carer is interpreted as a selfless act done for the good of others rather than for pay (Palmer & Eveline, 2012). Age care work is undervalued and underappreciated as a profession (Ravenswood & Harris, 2016). In the New Zealand and Australian context, age care workers only receive the minimum wage and women employees earn less than men (Kaine & Ravenswood, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2015).

## **Women in leadership**

While more women are graduating with University degrees, entering the workforce and participating in the labour market, women are still underrepresented as leaders in the workplace. The progression of women into more senior roles is relatively slower than for men (Statistics New Zealand, 2015; Still, 2006). For instance, a significant gendered gap exists in the legal profession in New Zealand, where 60 percent of law graduates admitted to the bar are women. However, less than a quarter of the total proportion of partners and directors in New Zealand firms are women (New Zealand Law Society, 2016).

When looking at the representation of women as leaders, there appears to be a particular gendering effect in certain sectors and workplaces. For instance, the majority of women as managers are found in the education, health and service sectors. These occupations are predominately clustered by women workers and are sectors which are characteristic of caring and nurturing roles, which is typical of feminine work (Statistics New Zealand, 2015).

The scarcity of women as leaders and the progression for women in senior roles is due to particular gendered issues facing women in employment. Motherhood is a critical contributor to women's career progression in the workplace (McIntosh, McQuaid, Munro, & Dabir-Alai, 2012; Socratous, Galloway, & Kamenou-Aigbekaen, 2016). Women's careers are in direct conflict with the intermediary stage of becoming mothers, raising children and looking after dependent children. Women are more likely to take a break in their career to go on maternity leave for a set period of time or for an unspecified time frame; to look after and care for their children. The issue then becomes that while women have been away on maternity leave, men are able to further advance their careers more quickly than women because they have not taken a significant amount of time away from work to fulfil their roles as fathers (McIntosh et al., 2012).

The decision to return back to work depends on whether there are suitable working arrangements, like flexible working hours and working from home for mothers (Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016). Even if women make the decision to return to work, the readjustment period back into the work environment can be a tumultuous time for women. Women have to re-negotiate how to manage the work environment and responsibilities at work with their role as mothers. Some working mothers may feel

guilty about being away from their children and missing out on time with their family (Alstveit, Severinsson, & Karlsen, 2011; Parcsi & Curtin, 2013).

The issue of working mothers is further complicated by the conflict between women's personal values and needs as mothers and work responsibilities to the organisation. For instance, there is an inherent professional expectation for nurses and lawyers progressing to leadership roles/partnership to work full-time, be available to clients, be on call and in reach in case of emergencies, and working additional hours to meet deadlines (McIntosh, McQuaid, & Munro, 2015; Pinnington & Sandberg, 2013). Women's roles as mothers and the decision to start a family are not harmonious with the perception and taken for granted view of professionalism (Pinnington & Sandberg, 2013).

For these reasons women's career progress and rate of upward mobility is significantly slower than for men, and overall women are less likely to achieve leadership positions in the workplace.

### **Promise for a brighter future**

The New Zealand Ministry for Women advocates mentoring as a workplace strategy and tool for women to address some of the gendered issues facing women in employment (Ministry for Women, 2016). Advocates of mentoring claim that it is especially important for women to feel like they have a supportive and encouraging work environment with people, who believe in their abilities as professional women. Mentoring assists women to become more confident in the workplace and to believe in their competencies, discuss career related topics with another person and develop strategies that help them succeed in the workplace as women leaders (BarHava-Monteith, 2016; Marsh, 2016).

Mentoring can help more women in the workforce to be exposed to career opportunities that they otherwise might not have been able to access; to be visible to others, show off work competencies and have the confidence to go for a work promotion (Bhatta & Washington, 2003; Tharanou, 2005; Wilen-Daugenti, Vien, & Molina-Ray, 2013). Mentoring enables women to achieve higher status in the workplace and to attain

leadership positions. For instance, mentoring has been shown to help women of colour with career advancement in academia (Tran, 2014).

Mentoring is useful for women leaders who are also working mothers, because it helps women to negotiate the demands of work with family responsibilities, and to understand how to become more effective with their time in the workplace. Mentors who are mothers themselves are more suitable for women leaders, as they are receptive to the time demands and challenges placed on women (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Strong et al., 2013).

Overall, the usefulness of mentoring and the promise to address gendered problems for women at work looks bright. It would therefore be worthwhile to investigate the promise of mentoring for New Zealand professional women and whether or not it holds any value for constructing a professional identity at work.

### **My interest with mentoring and women**

While the promise of mentoring attempts to solve some of the gendered issues discussed above, the conversations I have had with an early career woman whom I know well<sup>1</sup>, reveals some of the more intricate and delicate issues of mentoring for women at work. More specifically, issues surrounding the mentoring context, the gendering of mentoring and the satisfaction with the mentor.

The woman spoke with me about two mentoring scenarios she had experienced at work: a formal mentoring relationship with a woman mentor and an informal mentoring relationship with a man. The two mentoring scenarios are discussed below.

#### **Mentoring scenario one: Formal mentoring**

The mentoring arrangement was during her first year of full-time paid employment. The organisation arranged a formal mentoring scheme with a woman mentor to acclimatise her as a young professional into the work environment. The woman mentor was on the senior management team and had extensive knowledge about the inner workings of the organisation. The woman reported to her mentor on a monthly basis during work lunch breaks. The conversations would start with the mentor asking about the work day, how

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<sup>1</sup> I am being vague about the nature of our close relationship for the purpose of maintaining anonymity

everything was going, asking about any challenging work cases the woman came across and giving advice on how to get ahead in the profession as a woman. The conversations and formal structure of the mentoring felt like an obligatory task that her mentor needed to complete, in order to fulfil her role as someone on the senior executives' board within the organisation.

Discussions about forming a professional identity as a woman were tied up with the current work context and duties associated with work. It was impossible to discuss any other topic areas outside of work or that did not fit within the prescribed nature of work. The woman chose not to disclose other areas of her life to her mentor.

The woman couldn't relate to her mentor in the way her mentor professed her professional identity. The mentor performed her identity in a masculine and domineering way. She articulated herself as strong and independent; a woman who had fought to move up the career ladder and had to keep fighting to stay on top.

The mentor was also from an older generation, whose identity of becoming a senior executive was tied up with *either* having children and being a full time mother *or* working full-time. In order to get ahead in the profession, she had to choose between the two. The differences between the women in terms of how they saw themselves as professionals and the dynamic in the relationship, overall created a dysfunctional mentoring relationship that did not continue past the yearlong requirement of the formal arrangement.

### **Mentoring scenario two: Informal mentoring**

The woman was also informally mentored by a man, whom she met at a work social function. The mentor was not directly employed with the company but was brought in as an external consultant. The two gradually formed a friendship, as their work interests and perspectives were aligned with each other. Their shared connection, values and understanding for one another as professional people, meant that the woman could relate her professional identity in line with her mentor. Consequently, it developed into a high trust/high quality mentoring relationship.

Unlike the formal mentoring which felt like it was a compulsory role for the mentor to fulfil, the woman never felt like she was a 'burden' on her mentor's time. He was genuinely interested in wanting to help her further her career in any way possible. The

conversations were not strictly tied to work and evolved around topics that naturally came up in conversations with a friend. Mentoring was more a matter of connecting with another person.

The mentor respected how the woman articulated her professional identity and gender as a woman. The two were able to have honest and frank discussions about femininity and being a woman in the profession, challenging the status quo of women in leadership and endeavouring to try new things. Through this, the woman was enabled to really develop her own unique professional identity, her competence, and sense of being successful in her career as a woman.

What I realised after my discussions with this woman and the stories she told me, was that the meaning of mentoring for women at work is complex and multifaceted. The contextual elements that surround mentoring (formal/informal mentoring, the work context, issues of gender and mentee/mentor dynamics) are all contributing factors for understanding how women develop their professional identity and should therefore be further explored. The promise of mentoring for enhancing women's career progression is not straightforward.

The present study explores the concept of mentoring for women at work as a widely used and accepted workplace strategy for women. I address mentoring in the way it promises to influence women's professional development and the way women negotiate themselves as professional women. I also address the surrounding context in which to view mentoring, and whether it has an effect on the interpretation of mentoring and women's mentoring relationships. A poststructuralist discursive analysis is used to gather the accounts of women's mentoring experiences and how mentoring has influenced their professional identity. In the following two chapters I review the mainstream and feminist literature on mentoring, and then explain the research methodology that I engaged in for this project. The analysis is then presented in chapters IV and V, and the final chapter draws the project to a conclusion.

## Chapter II Literature review

This chapter explores the historical development of feminist epistemologies and the progression and evolution of ideas about gendered research and women's experiences in the context of research on mentoring at work.

During the 1960's and 1970's, women were fighting for equal employment rights and the same access to work opportunities as men, arguing that women were marginalised as a minority in employment (Maroney, 1986). The feminist movement argues that women as a minority, have largely been ignored from conventional research agendas, which favour knowledge from an androcentric view (Eagly & Riger, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2007). Women's rights and gendered research are a central focus for feminism and contemporary feminist epistemologies. The general consensus among feminists is that women have a particular way of experiencing the world and generating meaning. Therefore, women's research is justified (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Feminist epistemologies, including feminist empiricism, standpoint and poststructuralism, each offers an alternative approach to gendered research and the different meanings associated with women's experience.

The chapter begins with a discussion of mainstream approaches to mentoring, to set the scene for considering feminist research in the field. The principles within each feminist epistemology are then discussed and examples from feminist empirical, standpoint and poststructuralist approaches to mentoring research are provided. By using the mentoring literature as examples, I attempt to showcase the practical and added value of feminist epistemologies for gendered research.

In the final section of this chapter, I present a paper by Devos (2004), as a key article to provide a focused approach and background for the present study. The article is guided by feminist poststructuralism and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. It offers up a critical argument for the importance of mentoring context, and its implications for the process of identity formation for women at work: more specifically, the shifting and contradictory nature of mentoring in the process of forming a woman's academic identity. I therefore use the article to lay the groundwork and justification for the present study.

## **Mentoring as we know it**

Kathy Kram is a leading author in the field of workplace mentoring. She is instrumental to the history of mentoring and is frequently cited by many authors in today's mentoring literature. For this reason I am including her work as part of an introduction to mentoring and mainstream mentoring research.

Kram (1988) advocates a more inclusive concept to the traditional definition of 'mentor', viewed as an intense one-on-one relationship with a sponsor during adult life, to instead refer to 'developmental relationships'. 'Developmental relationships' is a broader interpretation of mentoring, as an array of meaningful relationships with others in modern work settings and organisations and includes relationships with collegial peers as alternative mentors and work supporters (Kram, 1988; Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Kram's mentoring research is critical for understanding workplace relationships, especially how meaningful relationships with mentors and managers impact individuals' employment and career decisions; their psychosocial benefits; and how mentoring occurs at early, mid and late career stages (Kram, 1988). Kram's insights into workplace relationships reveal that mentoring dyads progress along a continuum of four stages: initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition, showing that a mentoring relationship is defined by distinct turning points and evolves over time (Kram, 1983).

Mentoring is now widely implemented in many contemporary work settings and institutional environments as workplace strategies for staff development, professional learning, employment decisions and staff engagement. For example, mentoring has been implemented at an institutional level in the rail industry and in the health care profession (Mills, Francis, & Bonner, 2008; Naweed & Ambrosetti, 2015).

Formal and informal mentoring are two distinct approaches to mentoring at work in their characteristics, nature and structure. The two mentoring arrangements are now common in contemporary workplaces and are researched in mainstream literature.

Formal mentoring is an institutionalised mentoring arrangement implemented by the organisation or workplace, where a more senior individual is assigned to mentor and guide a less experienced junior individual for a specific length of time (Allen & Eby, 2007). For example, a 12 month formal mentorship program assigned newly qualified

nurses with nurse mentors. The formal mentoring was to aid nurse students' transition into the profession and to enhance their work based knowledge. Each member had a specific role in the mentoring dyad and understands their role in the context of the institution (McCloughen & O'Brien, 2005).

Formal mentoring relationships are established by a contractual obligation where individuals recognise the need to be involved in mentoring, for the good of developing work based competencies and learning (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005). The transfer of knowledge operates in a top-down hierarchical fashion between members of a mentoring dyad, and is usually bound to a work domain and linked with work and career based development. The mentee learns what is expected of them in their work role and how to behave within institutional norms and standards set by the workplace (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005).

Informal mentoring is a more organically formed mentoring relationship, where a relationship is initiated on the basis of mutual liking or sharing common interests between members of a mentoring dyad (Allen & Eby, 2007). Informal mentoring is more subtle than formalised mentoring arrangements with a designated mentor. Individuals may identify the everyday interactions and conversations with work colleagues and peers as informal mentoring, which is less agreed upon than formalised mentoring (Chao, 2009; Welsh, Bhave, & Kim, 2012). It is less structured than formal mentoring and there are no specific timelines for ending the mentoring relationship (Tourigny & Pulich, 2005).

Mainstream research agendas compare the differences between the two mentoring contexts in terms of mentoring outcomes, such as career development and psychosocial functions. Informal mentoring with mentoring dyads is shown to facilitate more career related functions and psychosocial benefits than formalised mentoring arrangements (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Viator, 2001).

The spontaneous nature in which informal mentoring relationships are established, the level of intensity and reciprocity, means that a mentoring dyad is more akin to a high quality relationship. Informal mentoring more effectively serves as a transfer of knowledge and learning for the individual (Lewis & Fagenson, 1995; Tourigny & Pulich, 2005). Informal mentoring arrangements are more likely than formal relationships to expand and evolve across more than one domain – such as work,

personal and social spheres, as individuals are mutually committed to each other and the relationship, rather than the expected length of time involved (Chao, 2009).

## **In theory**

Three theoretical approaches to mentoring have been influential in the mainstream literature: *Social Learning Theory*; *Social Exchange Theory*; and the *Theory of Transformational Leadership*. Each of these is briefly introduced, below.

*Social Learning Theory* considers mentoring as a component of workplace learning (Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001). Individuals involved in a mentoring dyad learn from each other and role model each other's behaviour through the process of sharing work knowledge and information. Experience gained and information acquired from mentoring can be directly applied to the work environment (Emelo, 2011; Swap et al., 2001). Mentoring as a learning device also assists the socialisation process of new employees entering into an organisation and work environment (Son, 2016). The role of the mentor as a guide, allows an individual to become acclimatised to the work environment and to understand how the organisation operates. For instance, mentoring has supported new police officers to successfully transition into the work force and become familiar with the institutional setting and their work role (Farnese, Bellò, Livi, Barbieri, & Gubbiotti, 2016).

*Social Exchange Theory* considers mentoring interactions as social transactions and the exchanges of ideas, professional expertise and social networks between mentoring dyads (Rutti, Helms, & Rose, 2013). In the case of the mentoring dyad, each member barter mentoring commodities, in order to optimise the level of social and career resources gained. For instance, trying to balance the support received and access to work opportunities/work experience with the level of costs invested in the relationship such as time (Rutti et al., 2013). The anticipated type of mentoring and level of support received, impact the quality and outcome of mentoring (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). For example, successful mentoring relationships between supervisors and counselors exist, when each member perceives mentoring benefits outweighing any potential costs or risks associated with the relationship (Laschober, Eby, & Kinkade, 2013). Mentoring becomes dysfunctional and detrimental, when individuals act on the basis of different value sets or disagree on what are appropriate mentoring exchanges to

share and trade as resources (Rutti et al., 2013). *Social Exchange Theory* is valuable in mainstream mentoring studies. It provides a framework for assessing the mentoring process in terms of how it is established and maintained.

The *Theory of Transformational Leadership* differs from the more traditional reward focused transactional leadership model. In relation to transformational leadership, mentoring moves away from the concept of social exchange for mutual benefit, towards a theoretical approach, involving the mentor's ability to persuade and empower the mentees' actions through inspirational leadership (Scandura & Williams, 2004). Transformation leadership involves a style of mentoring, where the mentor's shared vision and inspirational guidance with the mentee, helps the mentee believe in their current knowledge set (Huang, Weng, & Chen, 2016). In addition, individuals who are supported at work by transformational mentors, are less affected by stress and work related pressures (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000).

Transformational leadership research looks at addressing differences in leadership styles between women and men leaders. For example, women leaders display more transformational qualities, while men's approach to leadership is more transactional and laissez-faire (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003).

While each of these theories has contributed significantly to the mainstream literature on mentoring over several decades, they don't specifically deal with gender or gendered experiences between women and men as mentees and mentors (Ehrich & Kimber, 2016). Where they consider sex differences, they assume that there is an essential difference between women and men based on biological differences. In feminist terms, the mainstream literature has reproduced androcentric approaches to mentoring, that devalue women's experience and knowledge and fail to take into account the specific issues facing women in employment and their career development. In the following sections, feminist approaches to mentoring are discussed. The feminist approaches have significantly contributed to gendered perspectives in the literature on mentoring.

## **Feminist empiricism**

The purpose of feminist empiricism is to explain and describe existing ‘real-life’ experiences and behaviour from groups of people and the realities of social phenomena (Letherby, 2003). Feminist empiricism argues that deductive reasoning and methods used from traditional research methods, are credible ways of exploring the experience of people (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The approach makes no attempt to change the process of long standing empirical research or to challenge hegemonic and normalised assumptions that underpin this type of research (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Feminist empiricism fundamentally aligns itself with traditional and mainstream research, which looks to investigate hypotheses, using the processes of experimentation and standardisation, in order to quantify statistical findings. The end result of feminist empirical research are general statements about the ‘real’ world that people inhabit (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

### **A woman’s place**

While feminist empiricism does not make any attempt to change the scientific research process, it does make minor alterations and deviates slightly from traditional research. Feminist empiricism attends to the theme of gender, by taking account of the way traditional research benefits masculine and androcentric forms of understanding (Eagly & Riger, 2014).

Feminist empiricism attempts to safeguard the legitimacy of women’s experiences, by focusing on making science and the publication of studies less sexist (Eagly & Riger, 2014). Feminist empiricism aims to eliminate sexist and gendered assumptions about women and their experiences in science. For example, feminist empiricism attends to how the majority of participants within research studies are men and boys and the publication of findings, which report men and boys first and women and girls second (Eagly & Riger, 2014). All such practices bias men and masculine knowledge, while knowledge pertaining to women’s feminine experiences and knowledge about being a woman are ignored (Stone, 2007).

### **Contribution of feminist empiricism to mentoring**

Feminist empiricist research looks at gender as a contributing factor to mentoring outcomes. For instance, women mentors assist mentees, by providing a supportive and encouraging environment. Conversely, men traditionally provide career and work related outcomes, such as work promotions, job opportunities and access to career resources (Allen & Eby, 2004). In this example, the effectiveness of mentoring is compared with the gender of the mentors. It makes a gendered assumption that feminine mentoring is not related to career progression and it only provides emotional and social support, while men as mentors directly influence an employee's career development and assist with developing workplace competencies. It suggests that men are more suitable as workplace mentors than women, as men offer the types of advice and guidance needed in the institutional work context. Therefore, creating a biased impression of the types of support women and men can provide for others at work.

This gendered impression and stereotype of mentoring that privileges masculine career related outcomes, influences how women employees should behave at work. For example, the gendering of masculinity influenced the level of mentoring that women police officers received from their mentors in an American police organisation (Barratt, Bergman, & Thompson, 2014). Women police officers, who behaved in more masculine ways at work and identified themselves as heterosexual, received more career related mentoring and support at work, than women officers who exhibited feminine features in the workplace (Barratt et al., 2014). While the study reports masculine women receive more workplace mentoring, it doesn't go far enough to explain how women police officers 'do' masculinity within the police force, how masculinity is understood as a taken for granted dominant position and the ways in which masculinity is interpreted in its subtle and explicit forms in a profession dominated by men.

Feminist empiricism aims to remove gender bias in mainstream research yet doesn't go further than identifying gender and the importance of gender as a fact of workforce realities. While the mentoring literature thus attends to gender, women's experiences of gendered workplaces and gendered performances at work are not closely investigated.

## **Feminist standpoint**

Feminist standpoint disrupts the claims argued by feminist empiricism about objectivity and gender as a fact of reality (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Feminist standpoint argues that feminist empiricists attempt to mitigate gendered assumptions about women, and that the publication and presentation of empirical studies adds little value to feminist epistemologies (Harding, 1993). Feminist standpoint offers an alternative approach, and instead investigates women's 'lived' experiences as a way of bringing together gendered knowledge about women (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Letherby, 2003).

Feminist standpoint theory asserts that women have a distinctive and unique viewpoint of the social world they inhabit, that is different from men, and therefore the experiences of women should be studied independently to those of men (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Saul, 2003). It argues that the formation of gendered identities and the understanding of gender are social experiences, that all women as an oppressed minority group, share in common (Elliott, 2011).

A critique of feminist standpoint is that it assumes that the categorisation of gender and the experiences associated with it, will be understood universally by all women (Hesse-Biber, 2007). It does not take into account contextual surroundings on the construction of forming a gendered identity, or the multiple and contrasting interpretations of gender. However, feminist work on intersectionality has gone some way to disrupt a unified gendered identity for women. Intersectionality is fruitful for feminist research and the psychological research field, as it takes into account the differences among women and the intricacies of human life on the experiences of women (Cole, 2009; Rosenthal, 2016).

Intersectionality is a term that signifies multiple social dimensions of an individual (such as gender, identity, sexuality, age, ethnicity and race), which intersect at various levels (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). The term suggests that the categories to which an individual belongs, are so intertwined with one another that they cannot be entirely separate or made to be distinct. The social relations of women can provide a rich textual background, in which the understanding of being a woman and the differences between women can be explored (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). The influence of power as a mediating force on social categories, also complicates the discussion of intersectionality

and how it is applied to feminist research (Davis, 2008). Intersectionality should be an inclusive principle throughout feminist research (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). For example, while feminist epistemological positions appear to be different in their aims, principles and approaches, the idea of intersectionality should be a central theme throughout.

### **Through the looking glass**

Harding (1991) argues that the gendering of identity and the experiences of women are “socially situated” (p. 119). The social context of the world which individuals, groups and communities inhabit, influences, moulds, creates and reinforces the experiences of human life (McLaughlin, 2003; Naples, 2003). The social hierarchy and strata women are located within, varies across groups/communities, geographical locations, cultures and ethnicities. It positions women’s gendered experiences of their identities in specific ways. The reality of experience is not legitimised from only one perspective, but can be justified from the array of social, political and economic locations that people inhabit (Harding, 1991).

The social position of people will determine the types of knowledge about gender, experience and identity that can be produced (Harding, 1993). Each person is knowledgeable of their own lived experiences; however, their social position influences what kinds of knowledge are legitimised over others, and who has access to legitimate knowledge. Some positions in social hierarchies do not have access to processes for legitimating knowledge.

Women in a significantly lower strata and social location gain an alternative epistemological position from other women located in a higher strata (Harding, 1991). Arguably, women in lower social, economic and political standings, have to be consciously aware of, not only their subordinate position and the experiences they have in the world, but also to engage with the experiences and opinions of people in the ‘masters’ position. Women in these positions are subjected to multiple life experiences of the social world around them and therefore gain a more comprehensive view (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

Overall, feminist standpoint aims to provide a platform for *all* the ‘missing voices’ of women to be heard. Therefore, the main aim of analysis is to recognise gendered issues

and the ‘lived’ experiences of women in oppressed groups, women who are disadvantaged and women from minority groups (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

### **Contribution of feminist standpoint to mentoring**

Intense, formal, one-on-one mentoring pathways may not be ideal for minority women and groups of underrepresented women. The transfer of knowledge and context of mentoring situates workplace mentoring around work, but doesn’t allow for other realms of women’s lives to be addressed. The social contexts that diverse women inhabit, will inform their experiences with mentoring and the formation of identity as professional women (San Miguel & Kim, 2015).

For instance, women managers from Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom conceptualise mentoring differently from each other (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015). The geographical position and cultural influences of the women’s lives, informed how they interpreted mentoring, and how it made sense for them in their professional lives as managers. For Saudi Arabian women, the cultural and customary traditions determined by gender, influenced the women’s experience with mentoring and how it was interpreted in their social position. Cultural practices surrounding work and life privileged masculine authority. Here, men in the family home were guides and supporters for the women’s career. On the other hand, women from the United Kingdom interpreted mentoring as a common workplace practice, that was connected with work and professional development (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015).

In Western contexts, where second wave feminism has been influential in promoting gender equality at work, feminist co-mentoring is one alternative mentoring model for women (McGuire & Reger, 2003). Rather than having a distinct hierarchical power difference between the mentee and mentor, *feminist co-mentoring* enables women to mentor and be mentored by other women. Women in similar occupations can form informal peer-like relationships with each other, so that the transfer of knowledge is uni-directional (Kram & Isabella, 1985; McGuire & Reger, 2003). It also enables an expansive network of mentoring relationships for women, which can occur at different points throughout their career (Maack & Passet, 1993). For instance, informal mentoring between nurses aided the learning process among nursing peers. Nurses modeled the actions of their peers, and the knowledge sharing process between nurses

helped women to develop professional competencies in the workplace (Kensington, 2006; Ryan, Goldberg, & Evans, 2010).

The *feminist co-mentoring* model is premised on values of collaboration, mutual exchange and the sharing of common professional goals between women. Feminist co-mentoring enables women to form gendered relationships with each other, where discussions of work, life, spiritual and personal dimensions of their lives can overlap in the mentoring conversations (McGuire & Reger, 2003).

For women of colour and from diverse ethnicities, traditional mentors may be difficult to find in the workplace. The dominance of Western ideologies and organisational practices around mentoring exacerbates the issue. A *multicultural feminist model of mentoring* for women, which incorporates an understanding of power dynamics between individuals, enables marginalised women to form mentoring relationships, out of respect and equality in acknowledging all experiences as worthy (Benishek, Bieschke, Park, & Slattery, 2004).

These two mentoring models empower marginalised groups of women, enabling them to see that they do not need to align their professional identities with Westernised ideologies and norms of traditional mentoring (Chesney-Lind, Okamoto, & Irwin, 2006). For example, informal peer mentoring helps to reposition women's academic identity, from being 'outsiders', who occupy minimal space within the academic landscape, to being 'insiders'. The informal interactions with women helped the women to broaden their support networks, gain confidence around publication and have other women who understood the experience in academia (De Four-Babb, Pegg, & Beck, 2015). It appears that the quality of informal mentoring and mentoring networks for women can help address the lack of women in leadership positions, by increasing appropriate gendered mentoring.

Feminist standpoint is useful for identifying the social worlds and environments, in which marginalised and diverse women live. It provides a textual background to understand how context guides and shapes women's 'lived' experiences and interpretations of gender. However, it still does not delve deep enough into the power relations that exist within the social environment, and how power intersects with gender to produce certain kinds of knowledge and understanding about professional identity.

## **Feminist poststructuralism**

Feminist poststructuralism offers an alternative view of gender and the production of gendered knowledge (Weedon, 1997). Feminist poststructuralism seeks to disrupt fundamental and pervasive assumptions about gendered identity and women's experience offered by feminist standpoint epistemology. Feminist poststructuralism challenges the construction of masculine/feminine and men/women binaries as an experience, but rather instead asserts that gendered identity is a societal effect of discursive power relations (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Weedon, 1997, 1999).

### **Key principles**

Weedon (1997) articulates a need to study language and the associated power structures of knowledge production. The question of power is crucial for understanding the relationship between language, subjectivity and the production of discourse (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1999). Poststructuralism construes language as being active in creating ways of understanding social reality, generating social meanings and legitimating different kinds of knowledge produced in society (Weedon, 1997). Language is productive, in so far as saying that when labels and categories are assigned to people, such as 'mother/father' and 'lesbian/straight', specific meanings are attached to how people orientate themselves in society through the categories to which they belong.

Feminist poststructuralism considers language as never being separate from context, and is constantly embedded in various space and time dimensions (Weedon, 1997). It is important to take into account the influence of context on the production of language and knowledge, as it has some bearing on the multiplicity of meaning (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Each person understands a version of reality differently from the next person. The different versions of events present alternative, contradictory and competing ideas of gendered phenomena (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1997). Feminist poststructuralism does not look for accurate accounts, but explores divergent ways of producing knowledge and understanding the world around us (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

An association can be made between the threads of language and concepts of subjectivity. Weedon (1997) stresses that like language, subjectivity is continuously shaped by the historical and contextual surroundings of the world that people inhabit.

Subjectivity is a social process, whereby the understanding and sense of the identity, individual thought, personal experience and belief are sculpted through situational factors (Weedon, 1997, 1999). The concept of subjectivity is further extended to suggest that variance exists within and between individuals (Weedon, 1997). For example, at a particular time point or in a specific context, an individual can occupy a particular subject position such as ‘friend’, whilst simultaneously rejecting and/or contradicting this subject position in favour of another subject position such as ‘colleague’.

Additionally, subjectivity suggests that, in order for the significance of language within contextual settings to have an effect on the production of knowledge, it is important to consider the ‘process of subjectification’ (Weedon, 1997). The interest of feminist poststructuralism is not to suggest that an individual is a unified subject that is viewed as stable and coherent, but rather to contextualise how the individual becomes an active subject within social, historical and political landscapes (Gavey, 1989).

The interest of feminist poststructuralism is then to realise how power is interlaced in the making of an individual. Namely, to what extent power influences the construction of an active subject and how the actions and behaviours of an individual are constrained/enabled, reinforced and manipulated by power in some way (O’Farrell, 2005). More importantly, feminist poststructuralism is concerned with whether an individual actively resists or takes up the actions and behaviours offered to them and what subject positions become available for them (O’Farrell, 2005).

Language, subjectivity and issues of power are realised in discourse. Weedon (1997) uses the Foucauldian approach to discourse, as a principle for addressing the ways in which knowledge and the underlying assumptions about gender, social roles and work roles are constituted through discourse. Discourse plays close attention to the functionality of a group of statements, assembled to form a meaningful object and the surrounding context in which to imply meaning. Discourse influences the social conduct of people, their thoughts, their environment and the way in which people work (Weedon, 1997).

## **The question of power and the gendered subject**

Feminist poststructuralism argues that *power* operates as an invisible and overarching force, contributing to the maintenance of hegemonic gendered language and knowledge (Weedon, 1997). Power is always operating within spaces of society, to re-establish old meanings and to generate new meanings about gendered knowledge and individual subjectivity (Stone, 2007). As a mechanism, power relations act to simultaneously establish and discredit what can be taken to be legitimate forms of gendered truth within society. Individuals are simultaneously enabled and constrained by power, and as agents can take up alternative subject positions within hegemonic, masculine discourse (Stone, 2007). As a result, individuals are constantly moving through different constructions and redefining the meaning of gender in relation to themselves.

Additionally, intersectionality is taken into account through multiple social, personal and cultural positioning of women in the production of a gendered 'identity' through various spatial and temporal contexts. The formation of a gendered subject is never finalised, therefore making it possible for individuals to construct diverse interpretations of the 'self' (Davies et al., 2006; Elliott, 2011; McLaren, 2002).

Feminist poststructuralism opens up a space for women to enquire into the limits and boundaries of agency. Analysis of agency offers women the opportunity to view how different discourses and the underlying assumptions of society construct gendered identities (Davies, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2007). In attending to agency, feminist poststructuralism reveals inconsistencies in the construction of discourse and women's accounts of gender (Davies, 1991).

Overall, feminist poststructuralist epistemology is valuable, as it does not assume that all women have the same experiences, but rather takes into account that plurality, shifting and contradictory experiences of women are constituted through discourse. In doing so, it tackles the complexities and intricacies of power, that are interlaced through and between the folds of producing a gendered subject and the formation of identity.

### **Contribution of feminist poststructuralism to mentoring**

Feminist poststructuralism provides insights into identity construction for women at work (Peters, 2010). The importance of understanding context, in regards to the formation of identity, is crucial for a poststructuralist lens. The socio-political context of mentoring, mentoring relationships and the surrounding workplace, contribute significantly to the formation of a gendered identity for women. More so, women's identity is inconsistent when competing and alternative work settings and mentoring contexts disrupt how women see themselves at work. For instance, a student teacher encountered two contrasting mentoring contexts and competing teacher discourses within her teaching environments. The woman was conflicted by which teacher discourse to take up and how to perform her role as a teacher within two mentoring relationships and with women mentors (Jackson, 2001).

The first mentoring context was conducive to learning and getting to know what worked and what didn't work for the mentee, rather than following in the footsteps of the supervisor/mentor. The supervisor was open to different teaching styles, which meant that the woman had the freedom to individually teach classes without scrutiny or pressure from her supervisor. In this mentoring context, a 'what you want to be' teacher discourse granted the woman the opportunity to develop her own unique style and flair for teaching (Jackson, 2001). In the second mentoring context, the teaching style and learning environment were very different. The supervising teacher/mentor followed a prescribed educational book for teachers, and micromanaged every aspect of the student teacher's involvement in the class (Jackson, 2001). A 'follow me' teacher discourse conflicted with the discourse of the first mentoring context and constrained how the woman should behave and teach within the classroom (Jackson, 2001).

The woman's experience with the instability in the two discourses was implicated in the way she understood her teacher identity. The first context enabled her to weave and construct multiple interpretations of being a teacher identity and what it meant to her, throughout the school day depending on the kinds of discursive resources available to her at the time (Jackson, 2001). This meant that her professional identity was always in a state of flux, that was dynamic and changing to the socio-political teaching environment. While in the second mentoring context, she felt disciplined and governed to occupy one particular teacher identity that was in line with her mentor. She felt rigid

in her attempts to occupy multiple and diverse teacher identities in this context, for fear of punishment for disobeying a normative and institutionalised teacher discourse (Jackson, 2001). From a feminist poststructuralist lens, the experience in forming an identity and how women perform a professional identity at work is less uniform and stable, because of the conflicting discourses immediately available to the context.

In another example of feminist poststructuralist interest in socio-political context influencing identity formation, it addresses how women's identity is formed in and around highly institutional contexts and gendered professions. For instance, women of colour, who have experienced mentoring and working in a highly masculine and gendered profession, engage in two competing and contradictory subject positions, to construct their identity within academia (Buzzanell, Long, Anderson, Kokini, & Batra, 2015). The women engage in institutionalised subject positions, governed by formal workplace relationships and a work context. It privileges a grand narrative of being focused at work, publishing papers and lecturing. The women align their academic identity with what is normalised as 'successful' within the work context (Buzzanell et al., 2015). However, the women simultaneously resist institutional norms and engage in a cultural and religious mentoring discourse. The women consider alternative forms of activities outside of work such as church and informal mentoring arrangements with work colleagues.

From a feminist poststructuralist framework, while the context may be an influencing factor, it depends on the kinds of discourses that are available to women, which are situated in context and what subject positions they occupy (Buzzanell et al., 2015). Women of colour may have alternative discourses to reflect on, such as cultural and religious resources, which mean that they can disrupt the traditional view of mentoring and escape formalised mentoring.

A further example illustrating the appropriateness of feminist poststructuralism for the mentoring literature, addresses the question of power. For example, university students involved in a mentoring dyad with mentors, and supervisory-supervisee relationships, illustrate the issue of power operating within hierarchical mentoring arrangements (Christie, 2014; Markham & Chiu, 2011). The boundaries as mentor-mentee and supervisor-supervisee create an imbalance in power, where the individual in the more senior role has control and authority over the individual in the lesser position, and this

affects how the mentoring relationship is structured. The dynamics of power mean that the mentee does not feel like they can overstep their role as someone in a less senior and experienced position. The mentee questions whether their knowledge is appropriate to the context such as discussing professional issues with a mentor (Markham & Chiu, 2011).

The articles offer a worthwhile discussion on the importance of addressing context, in relation to poststructuralism and identity. This is especially in regard to asking the question of how power is exercised within different socio-political, economic and cultural contexts in relation to mentoring and identity formation.

## **Summary**

In summary, feminist poststructuralism asks different questions of gender to empiricist and standpoint approaches. The main question in poststructuralism addresses the societal influence of discourse and power in the construction of gender. By understanding the contextual surroundings of discourse, the important question of how women 'do' gender can be explored. For example, how a discourse of femininity is constructed in different workplaces and institutional contexts and how these surroundings position and shape how femininity is understood by women. In this regard, feminist poststructuralism addresses the subtle and intricate forms of accounting of gender, whilst at the same time considering the taken-for-granted dominant assumptions of gender.

## **Setting the scene**

Devos (2004), reports a qualitative study that I reflexively found interesting and has ultimately influenced the design and formulation of the research questions in the present study. The article focused on analysis of one particular woman – Karen – and how mentoring experiences with others in an Australian University workplace constructed an academic 'self'. Devos (2004), reflects on the 'self', by arguing that workplace mentoring operates to control and discipline the actions of individuals by exercising power relations. Karen's construction of her 'self' was reformulated by direct observation and monitoring from mentors, internalising the mentor's advice and

disciplining her own actions at work. Mentoring positioned Karen in different ways and the very nature of being involved in workplace mentoring relationships with a woman mentor and her partner informed how she saw herself within academia.

In the present study, I am drawing on the key message of this concept of mentoring and how it influences women's actions and how they see themselves at work. I am interpreting Devos (2004) concept of 'selves' in a poststructuralist sense as *identities*. Viewed from a humanist perspective, the self is associated with a more stable, ongoing sense of who we are as persons, while identity is a term with more flexibility and fragmentation in regard to different contexts (Davies, 1991). In regard to this study, I am interested in how New Zealand women negotiate their professional identity within different mentoring landscapes and how identity is constructed within different workplaces.

Devos (2004) uses mentoring as a concept in its broadest sense, to include any experiences with mentors and instances with workplace mentoring. She mentions that Karen has been formally involved in an institutional mentoring scheme with a woman mentor, along with an informal mentoring at the University. In the analysis, the author does not identify different socio-political mentoring contexts as key determinants to how Karen's 'self' is disciplined and constructed at work. The author is not really interested in how different mentoring contexts may exercise power relations to influence the construction of the 'self'. The topic of mentoring per se as a disciplinary force is the focus of the article.

For this reason I am focusing on formal and informal mentoring as two different workplace mentoring approaches. I am interested in how New Zealand professional women make sense of these two mentoring contexts, and how the different mentoring arrangements with mentors operate to constrain and/or enable women's professional identity. More specifically, as argued by feminist poststructuralism and Foucault, I am interested in addressing the question of power as a key reference to mentoring and mentoring arrangements for women within the workplace.

Most of the construction of the 'self' in Devos (2004) is based on the mentoring experiences with a woman mentor. Halfway through the analysis, the author introduces mentoring experiences with an informal mentor, who is Karen's husband and work supervisor. She mentions this particular mentoring relationship is complex, by asserting

that the dual role as mentor and partner complicate the relationship. But to a large extent, the fact that the mentor is also the husband is glossed over and does not explain how the exercise of power complicates the mentoring relationship. This particular type of mentoring has some implications for the gendering of the relationship, as Karen prioritises her personal relationship as husband and wife and that of wanting to impress her husband. It also seriously affects how Karen experiences informal mentoring and overall, affects her judgment of the construction of her 'self' at work. For this reason, I am addressing the significance of socio-political contexts surrounding formal and informal mentoring and how this is implicated in gender relations for professional women at work.

### *Reflexivity*

When I came across this article, I was really intrigued by the complexity of mentoring in the way Karen positioned her professional identity. I have worked part time on and off, mostly as a member of the weekend staff, but wouldn't consider that I have experienced mentoring in the workplace to understand the depth and complexity involved, especially for women. The interactions and conversations with managers were mostly around achieving performance targets, set by the organization, or when work duties needed to be completed for the day. For me, I felt like the conversations were more to do with making sure everyone was on target, and was limited to times when we needed to perform as an organisation. So I considered the interactions with others to be performance based, rather than managers trying to figure out who I was and really care about my development as an individual in the organization.

So for me, this article helped to fill in some gaps about workplace mentoring for women. Karen seemingly took on the advice of her mentor, without questioning her mentor's intentions and sought to perform her professional identity and take account of her actions at work differently. I was really drawn to the unexpected intricacies of mentoring that complicated the woman's narrative of how she made sense of herself at work. For example, the contrast of a mothering discourse with an institutional norm of success, performing an academic identity that fits in with the institution, gender issues and being mentored by her partner. It revealed to me, that mentoring isn't as straightforward as previously thought. There are several factors happening

simultaneously that constrain and/or enable how mentoring is understood at work and its implication of professional identity.

### **Aims of the study**

The aim of this study is to identify how New Zealand professional women make sense of mentoring in relation to different mentoring landscapes, and how the issue of power is implicated in the construction of a professional identity. The main research question I will be addressing is: how do professional women understand mentoring in the context of work and how do they use discourse to narrate their mentoring experiences? Amongst the women recounting a mentoring story and their experiences with mentors, I wish to identify the discursive resources the women engaged with, to position themselves and their mentors in a particular way. As a result, I address the question: how do social power relations influence the actions of the women and their mentors and consequently influence how women make sense of their professional identity?

## Chapter III Research Methodology

This chapter focuses on the theory, processes and procedures I used, to carry out a feminist poststructuralist project. The aim was to identify how mentoring is discursively constructed in the narratives of nine New Zealand professional women from various employment areas, and its implication on professional development. The meaning of mentoring through the use of discourse, guided my interpretative stance in relation to how the discourses emerged for me and my responses to them. In order for the reader to evaluate my interpretations, I have endeavoured to remain reflexive regarding the processes involved in being a researcher, an interviewer and a tertiary student. I have illustrated my thoughts, assumptions, personal insights, and any problems that may have arisen throughout the project with reflexive commentary.

The previous chapter introduces feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1997) as a particular lens, that informs the research questions and the contextual setting of the study. A discussion of the key principles is extended in this chapter, to fully explain the concepts that I engaged with theoretically to inform my project. Michel Foucault has contributed significantly to feminist research, in the way people interpret and draw meaning of the world around them through discourse (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). More importantly, he addressed power relations and its influence on social meaning (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). I will address his contribution involving the key principles in relation to the present study.

### **Power/knowledge**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) describes a noticeable shift over the previous 200 years, in the way punishment is understood within the penal system in England and France. The sentencing of punishment was previously understood as a form of torture, where people from the community were invited to watch human body parts being dismembered (Smart, 2002). From here, the interpretation shifted to the appearance of criminals and the understanding of particular institutions housing individuals (Foucault, 1977). Today, the meaning of punishment is constructed by the sentencing of

individuals to time in prison. By looking at the transition of the concept of punishment, Foucault suggests that power is intertwined in the generation of meaning:

*power produces knowledge ... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.* (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

The complexity of power informs the types of knowledge that can be generated, by whom and what forms of meaning are legitimised over others (McHoul & Grace, 1997; Smart, 2002). The significance of power is addressed below.

### **Significance of power**

Foucault acknowledged the need to address the context of power in relation to various historical and socio-political environments. More importantly, Foucault revolutionised the concept of power, by understanding the significance of power as a relational force on the actions of individuals, communities and institutions (Taylor & Vintges, 2004). Foucault conceptualised power, by addressing the question of “*How,*” *not in the sense of “How does it manifest itself?” but “By what means it is exercised?” and “What happens when individuals exert ... power over others”* (Foucault, 1983, p. 217). In articulating power and following on from the discussions of Devos (2004), I conceptualise mentoring as a practical device of power. Power has a direct implication on the construction of women’s professional identity. It forms a particular type of knowledge for women at work, including an understanding of success, professional development, how to be a successful woman and the importance of workplace relationships (Devos, 2004).

The question of power is also important when taking into account the theme of the subject in Foucault’s work:

*This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge* (Foucault, 1983, p. 212).

The 'subject' is relevant for this study, as individuals in a mentoring dyad, are influenced by the actions of its members and are controlled to behave in a normative way, within workplace environments. It is a way to classify individuals and to designate a way of being and identifying at work, which has been fashioned between the mentee and mentor. There may be a level of dependence and reliance attributed to being involved in a mentoring relationship, which becomes intertwined with a mentee's understanding of their own identity.

## **Disciplinary power**

Disciplinary power is a mode of observation and surveillance, that operates within various institutional settings, workplaces and organisations. It has a direct implication on the actions of an individual, where, for instance, soldiers become 'docile bodies', giving the impression of control on the actions and behaviours of an individual (Foucault, 1977; Rabinow, 1991). Soldiers are monitored and observed in their daily actions by others, such as performing routine drills and the use of hand movements (Rabinow, 1991). Over time, these rehearsed movements are reinforced by others, that they become so automatic and natural to the soldier (Rabinow, 1991).

Foucault does not account for gender, in the way that the body is disciplined between women and men. Bartky (1988) takes up Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies', to offer three ways that disciplinary power can be seen to effect the interpretation of a feminine body, and what it means for women to be feminine in the context of others. Bartky (1988) argues that women are performing femininity and doing femininity in certain ways, because women perceive men to be looking at and 'gazing' at them. Therefore, in order to appear desirable and attractive to men, women attempt to portray feminine characteristics and traits.

In the first instance, women are disciplined by healthy eating and lifestyle magazines, newspapers and media advertisements, which endorse dieting and the maintenance of an 'ideal' feminine figure. Media calls women to take action and be scrupulous with exercise and to constantly watch what they eat, in order to remain slender and desirable to men at all times (Bartky, 1988). Women are also disciplined by what are appropriate physical spaces and boundaries that women should occupy (Bartky, 1988). For example, a wide stance when walking and having your legs apart when sitting, are

inappropriate for women and should only be taken up by men (Bartky, 1988). Additionally, women are disciplined through the use of cosmetics, skincare products, clothing and appropriate hairstyles. These are daily routines which are coordinated and timely activities imposed on the women's schedules, to remain desirable to men (Bartky, 1988).

While the Bartky (1988) article is useful, to suggest that women and men are disciplined differently from each other and the experiences of performing femininity are different between women, the modes of disciplinary power in this article are outdated. In today's context, the advancement of technology, the proliferation of internet, social media and the cosmetic industry are constantly changing and adapting the meaning of femininity. For instance, the marketing of 'girly' clothing fashion trends with child-star celebrities impacts pre-teen girls understanding of femininity and the decision to wear a particular dress and or style (Jackson, Vares, & Gill, 2012).

From a postfeminist lens, this means that women and girls are more than ever exposed to various avenues of disciplining power, and is not just through media, as suggested in Bartky (1988). Various technologies of power constantly remind women and girls on a day-to-day basis how to 'do' femininity and what are appropriate forms of femininity within the current market of what is seen as trendy and cool forms of doing femininity. The technologies of discipline have proliferated to such an extent, that the information on femininity and the imaginary 'gaze' of doing femininity correctly, isn't just associated with men. Women are disciplining themselves as well as each other.

For instance, women are consciously and socially aware of how they are judged and 'looked' at in the presence of other women (Riley, Evans, & Mackiewicz, 2016). Women pass judgement and critical 'looks' on the appearance of other women and how they are doing femininity, questioning whether women are doing it well enough, comparing each other's femininity in social circumstances, and whether it is appropriate to the context (Riley et al., 2016). The 'looking' from other women is a constant reminder to women, to monitor and exercise surveillance over their own actions, behaviours and bodies in a feminine way.

In relation to this study, mentoring can also be thought of as a technique of disciplinary power for women at work. Following on from Devos (2004), the mentoring sessions, conversations with the mentor and constant questioning can be argued as discrete ways

in which the mentor observes and monitors the actions and thought processes of the mentee. Through these disciplining actions, the mentee is repeatedly reminded of the correct method of going about things, and how to be a 'good' employee in the context of work. The mentee sets about to change their actions to role model the actions of the mentor. In the long term, the mentee's actions are affirmed and reinforced by the mentor and gradually become ingrained as normalised behaviours.

In considering mentoring as a device of disciplinary power, it is important to recognise the contextual parameters and boundaries in which mentoring operates, and the ways in which power governs women's actions and the actions of others within the mentoring relationship. In this sense, mentoring is seen to operate within the public domain of work, as an institutionalised and formalised environment. Mentoring at work is therefore visible for all of its members. Individuals respond to this by self-disciplining their actions and behaviours, in accordance to what is expected of them within the domain of work.

The idea of governmentality is therefore relevant for this study as it would consider how women are governed within institutional work spaces, sectors and professions. Importantly, it would consider the context of mentoring as a technique to control the actions, attitudes and behaviours of women at work.

## **Governmentality**

Foucault drew attention to the problems that arise when defining "*how to be governed, by whom, to what extent, to what ends, and by what methods*" (Senellart, 2007, p. 89) as an 'art of government'. For Foucault, this definition relied too heavily on the specific political nature and influence of the government on individual behaviour (Senellart, 2007). Foucault realised that power can occur within any context, including the home environment, among peer groups and across various institutions. In recognising the problems of conceptualising government, Foucault used the term 'governmentality' to convey the broadest possible way power relations within a domain operate on individual behavior (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002; McNay, 1994). Foucault used the example of psychiatric institution as a physical space where power relations operate, which govern individual behaviour (Senellart, 2007). Governmentality conveys the need to consider the exercise of power that operates at different levels and to consider the function that

power has on the actions of individuals. In doing so, governmentality takes into account the contextual limitations and restrictions of power.

## **Discourse**

In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argued that discourse is a way to draw relevance and meaning from language (Foucault, 1989; McHoul & Grace, 1997). Discourse, as a group of statements, allows sentences and phrases to hold a complex set of information about the social environment and everyday activities within society (Foucault, 1989; Parker, 1990). Discourse takes place in different spatial and contextual environments, so that no two discourses mean the same thing, allowing for multiple and contrasting discourses. Over time, discourses become normalised and so ingrained as part of everyday practice, that particular discourses are privileged and made to be legitimate forms of truth. In doing so, the legitimacy of other discourses is marginalised and negated (Foucault, 1989).

A feature of discourse is that what is explicitly said in written and spoken material can be addressed, while at the same time silences or the instances when things are implied can be explored (Gill, 1997) In this context, understanding the details in which individuals remain oppressed, subordinated as a minority, or when individuals resist hegemonic discourse to take up alternative interpretations, can be identified (Burman, 1991).

The concept of discourse is useful for this study. It takes into account the multiplicity in the meaning and interpretation of mentoring, and the alternative discourses available to women in the context of work and constructing a professional identity. Analysis of discourse provides a contextually sensitive practice to identify mentoring discourses.

## **Summary**

The theoretical framework of Foucault grounded by feminist poststructuralism, offers a unique point of view on the interrelationship between power/knowledge and discourse, in the way mentoring and identity are studied. It grants the women participants and I the opportunity to explore multiple and conflicting interpretations of mentoring, as a way of constructing identity. More specifically, the theoretical perspective enables me to delve

deeper into the complexity of mentoring and mentoring relationships through power relations. It also suggests that women are simultaneously constrained and/or enabled by the subject positions available to them in discourse. Overall, it does not just investigate the concept of mentoring, but realises the interweaving social-political and historical contexts in the way mentoring and identity are understood.

## **Research design and method**

A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis is an appropriate theory to address the principles of Foucault. The purpose of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis is to highlight excerpts in textual material where discourse is used, and to explore its material effect on individuals actions and behaviours (Gill, 1997). In addressing the connections with power, knowledge and language, I am able to understand how particular discourses become available to women within various institutional settings and professions. In these contexts, I am able to explore how power reaffirms what is considered legitimate knowledge.

Mentoring is the focus of this study. It provides a link between the conceptual work and the key principles of Foucault, discussed above, with a practical application for addressing discourse/knowledge and power relations. The concept of mentoring allows me to identify all the possible ways mentoring discourses are conveyed by women participants, including diverse experiences with formal and informal mentoring, understandings of being a mentee/mentor and alternative definitions of mentoring for women.

The understanding of mentoring discourses is best captured through the narratives of professional women – as a homogenous group of New Zealand women. Professional women, with a minimum of at least two years working experience, are more likely to have experienced mentoring within their career and/or to have come across mentoring within the work domain. Professional women are also more likely to have a clear understanding and sense of who they are at work. Therefore, the accounts from professional women would generate multiple understandings of mentoring for women at work and its implication on professional identity.

I am interested in identifying the discursive strategies the women engage in, to account for their mentoring experiences and the various positions women take up to situate themselves in relation to mentoring. To address my research questions, I conducted individual face-to-face interviews with professional women to serve the basis for analysis. In the following sections, I describe how participants were recruited, the interviews, the transcription process, and analysis.

### **Participant recruitment**

A screening questionnaire was completed to determine which approval processes the study required (see Appendix A). Following discussions with my supervisor and a peer review of the project's ethics protocol by a senior researcher in the School of Psychology at Massey University, the study was determined to be low risk. I received a low risk notification from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix B).

Women participants were recruited using a technique called 'snowballing', with the assistance of contact people. It was a purposeful and convenient technique to locate a homogenous subset of women - professional women - who had experienced mentoring at work. I approached three contact people, including mutual acquaintances, family members and friends, who acted as the first point of contact for the study. The contact people approached women, who they thought would be ideal to participate in the study, and provided them with information about participating.

Potential participants were invited to be interviewed if they were professional women, with at least two years working experience in their profession, 18 years and above, proficient in English, had experienced formal/informal mentoring at work and had an understanding of their professional identity.

I left it up to the contact people's discretion as to how they would approach and communicate with interested women: email, phone, private social media messages and work forums. To maintain confidentiality of the women, the contact people did not inform me of the women they had approached, and I did not inform them of the women who agreed to participate in the study. This protected the privacy of the women being interviewed. At the same time, it ensured that they had direct contact with me, and invitations from contact people did not coerce the women to participate in any way.

Through snowballing, nine women were recruited to the study. Each of them personally contacted me via email and confirmed their interest and willingness to participate in the study. I asked the women to briefly explain their professional careers, the length of time the women had been working within the profession, their educational background and their experience with mentoring (formal/informal or both). Through these initial conversations, I established whether or not the participants would be appropriate for the study. No women were declined to participate from the study.

The women were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix C), containing the details of the study and my contact details, and they were advised that if they wished to be part of the study they should get in touch with me directly. The women signed a consent form (see Appendix D), agreeing to be interviewed and part of the study.

### *Reflexivity*

Snowballing was a particularly useful strategy for me for the research, because I have been a tertiary student for the past six years, and during this time have occasionally worked part time in retail as a sales assistant. Given my limited professional experience, snowballing was a way for me to locate women through suitable contact people, who had more experience in the corporate world, among professional women, than me.

Even so, snowballing was actually a challenge, as I had to reflect and question myself and my current position as a student: who would I personally know, who had been working for a period of time themselves, and would be able connect with a wide scope of people or would be able to put me in touch with suitable participants? Simultaneously, the contact people needed to be individuals who I could trust, and who would have the time available to fulfil this role.

The 'snowballing' effect didn't arise from the women directly connecting with other women whom they knew, but was rather an influence of the contact people connecting with a wide audience of women in the first place. The contact people did an initial selection process, firstly of the women whom they thought would have experienced mentoring at work and would be interested, before approaching and inviting them to be part of the study. The contact people acknowledged that they had approached potential women in stages, where two to three women were initially contacted and then a further

group of women were approached and so on. Overall, the initial recruitment took place in a stop-go-sequence which was beyond my control. Trust was vital in this sense.

The women who were approached, depended on being the kinds of women who would be comfortable enough in the first place to ask. Potentially, the process was also limited, resulting in recruiting women who were more socially comfortable in being interviewed, to discuss their personal experiences at work with another person.

Overall, the recruitment stage was challenging as it required patience, trust in the contact people, reassurance to the women, and accepting the limitations.

### **Participants**

The conversations I had with the women were crucial to my thesis. I cannot over-emphasise the value of the women's participation, through allowing me to interview them, and enabling me to analyse the multiple understandings of mentoring and professional identity that their accounts provided. The following introductions to the participants provide some very brief contextual information about them and their mentoring experiences. More extensive introductions, while they would provide more detailed context, would not allow me the same confidence about safeguarding their confidentiality.

Clara is an English woman in her early thirties. She is a lawyer, who has been formally mentored for a year through a professional association, organised by the law firm which employs her. She is informally mentored by her employer at work. Clara mentors the junior lawyers in the firm. She is also a mother.

Fiona is a woman in her mid-forties. She was born in the South Island. Fiona is a school manager and has been informally mentored by the head of school. She also was involved in a formal, paid mentoring arrangement with someone.

Megan is originally from China and is in her early forties. She has had industry experience in China and currently works in academia. She is informally mentored by a woman. Megan is also a mother and wife.

Erica is a New Zealand woman in her late forties. She has had twenty years professional experience in Human Resources. She asked for mentoring, which resulted

in her employer paying for mentoring with an external consultant. She also considers her husband and a woman work colleague to be informal mentors.

Joanne is in her mid-forties and originally from the United Kingdom. She is an academic but also has had industry experience as a chartered quantity surveyor. She had a woman mentor whilst completing her PhD. She is an informal mentor for a woman colleague. Joanne is also a mother.

Olivia is in her fifties and originally from England. Olivia has had more than twenty years professional experience. She is an academic member. She has been informally mentored by two women managers and is formally mentored by a woman coach who is also a member of staff.

Ana is in her mid-thirties and was born in a regional centre in New Zealand. She is a registered psychologist. She has been informally mentored by women and men throughout her career, including from her managers and peer mentoring from a group of women friends, as part of her registration process.

Kelly is in her mid-fifties and was born in a rural town in New Zealand. She is employed in event management. She has experienced mentoring from women and men at various times throughout her career. She considers her husband and mother as informal mentors.

Heather is in her early fifties and is Japanese and Pākehā. She works in leadership development. She has been informally mentored by men, who were her managers, and currently has a network of women peers, who she seeks out for specific advice.

In summary, nine professional women volunteered to participate in a 60-90 minute unstructured conversational interview. The group of women had a minimum of eight years working experience, both in New Zealand and overseas, and are considered to be mid-career. A few of the women had more than one professional career. The women worked in various professions from small, medium and large scale work environments. The professions include law, education, management, engineering, human resources, quantity surveying, psychology, event management, and leadership development.

The women were formally/informally mentored by both women and men mentors. A few of the women considered themselves to be a mentor, or provided mentorship for their work colleagues.

### **Interviews**

I conducted in-depth, unstructured conversational interviews with the women. The unstructured nature of the interviews allowed me to further delve into topic areas that interested the women. I was able to more fully grasp how the women discursively constructed mentoring through their personal narratives and retrospective accounts of being mentored at work (Seidman, 2013).

Structured interviews were inappropriate for this kind of study, because I didn't want the women to rigidly adhere to an interview schedule, where they had to follow a pre-arranged set of questions or be overly concerned with presenting an accurate version of their mentoring experience and professional identity (Parker, 2005).

I acknowledged the need to respect Māori cultural practices and consulted with Pa Nephi Skipwith, the Kaumātua for the School of Psychology at Massey University, Albany. I discussed the potential involvement of Māori women in the study and the need to be culturally sensitive to Māori protocol. Following the advice of Pa Nephi Skipwith, I acknowledged that Māori participants may wish to have an initial face-to-face contact visit with me personally, prior to setting up an actual interview time (Pa N. Skipwith, personal communication, August 20, 2015).

Seidman (2013) indicates that an initial face-to-face contact before the interview, expresses mutual respect for all participants and acknowledges the participants' time and value in the study. The researcher is also able to become familiar with the location of the interviews. I therefore considered it necessary to conduct initial face-to-face contact visits with all the participants, regardless of culture. However, all nine women indicated to me that this would not be necessary or possible. Some women said that scheduling an initial visit would be inconvenient for their work schedules, location and would also not fit within other commitments. With respect for their preferences, I could not proceed with conducting initial contact visits face-to-face. The participants expressed their interest to participate via personal email and phone conversations.

The interview times and locations were arranged with the women. The women had busy lives as full-time professionals, with heavy work schedules and a few were working mothers. I arranged the interviews during times that were convenient and appropriate for each woman. I met the women at various locations across the Auckland region, including office rooms, conference rooms, cafes and at their homes. The locations were chosen by the women, as physical spaces where they felt most comfortable, and to be able to freely discuss the context of mentoring, work roles and challenges with mentors. The locations were also poetic spaces for the focus of the study, as conversations about mentoring were centred around workplaces or areas associated with work.

I prepared a list of four open-ended questions (see Appendix E) to focus on mentoring, which included a list of potential prompts. The prompts were used sparingly, when I felt it would be helpful to encourage the women participants to go into more depth in their narratives and for further clarifying what the women discussed.

The interviews with the women ranged between 36 and 75 minutes. I approached the interview as if it were part of everyday social phenomena as a two-way interaction and conversation between two people. I presented myself in a manner which was appropriate to the informality of the conversation including dress, body language and tone of speech.

As an appreciation for the women's contribution to the study and as a thank you gesture for being interviewed, I gifted the women with a \$20 MTA travel voucher.

### *Reflexivity*

After conducting the first interview I considered whether the first question "How did you come to be involved in mentoring?" was framed in such a way as to allow the first woman to fully engage in a mentoring discussion with me. I realised that the woman responded to me in a limited way, which portrayed mentoring in a matter-of-fact and a cut to the point kind of manner, with no further explanations. Her mentoring narrative eluded any personal accounts or references to specific mentors and mentoring scenarios. The language she used did not 'hint at', give away or highlight topic areas that I could internally reflect on and reference back to her, for her to further clarify to me by what she meant. I also felt a bit disheartened at the short length of the interview; as it showed that I had not truly captured her mentoring experiences in the interview.

I then reflected on a passage from Parker (2005) about the challenges of interviewing:

*The way these questions are framed will govern how far it is possible to develop rapport with interviewees, the freedom they will have to develop a narrative about their experiences and the security they feel in speaking about these things to you as a researcher (p. 58).*

For the second interview with the next woman, I reframed the question to: “How has your mentoring experience as a mentee, a mentor or both been like for you?” In framing the question as how has mentoring “been like for you” I realised that I had provided the woman space to personally narrate a story of mentoring that was meaningful for her. Her story was narrated through a personal account of a gendered mentoring, the challenges she faced as a woman at work and issues of institutional power. The rich and descriptive discourse that she used, meant that I was able to reference key principles that were important for a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, framed by feminist poststructuralism. I then proceeded with this line of questioning for the rest of the women participants.

Afterward each interview, I asked the women how my questioning was for them. The women mentioned that I was a good listener and that I was really interested in what the women had to say, as I had asked questions in an open and calm way and had allowed them enough time to answer. For example, one woman constructed mentoring as ‘brutal’ to narrate a challenging mentoring scenario and the expectations placed on her as a mentee. I was really intrigued as to why she used ‘brutal’ to narrate her mentoring experiences. It gave me the impression of a negative mentoring experience, that was in some way harmful or negatively affected her confidence. I later followed up with her in what sense the mentoring was ‘brutal’ for her, and why she had used such an evocative word to define her mentoring experience. In her response, she further elaborated to say that the brutality was the way the mentor worked and the mentoring conversations were straight to the point. Her elaboration allowed me to better understand her mentoring experience.

### **Transcription**

I made myself familiar with each recording by replaying the entire audio file from beginning to end. The continued exposure meant that I was able to become fully

immersed with the material and able to remind myself of the overall picture of each mentoring experience. I transcribed each recording verbatim into textual material, onto separate electronic Microsoft Office Word 2007 documents. The word documents were located in a password protected file on my personal computer.

Each new turn of talk, made either by me or the women participants, began on a new line. I included pauses, laughs, any stutters in speech and any breaks in conversation. 'Hmm', 'yeah', 'ah', 'umm', 'okay' and 'coz' were included as part of everyday language and causal forms of communication between myself and the women. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the women participants. All personal information and any details that could be traced back to the women were removed, for example, the organisation or company name, the names of mentors and any friends or family names.

The women were sent an electronic copy of their interview transcript for review. Those women, who requested their audio file as part of their original signed consent form, received their audio file at the same time as the interview transcript. The audio files that did not need to be returned to the participants, were deleted from the recorder.

Four women requested minor changes to be made to their transcripts. Two women did not like the casualness in the way the transcript presented their speech and asked me to remove the ums, yeahs and hms. Another woman requested that phone interruptions, pauses and stutters be removed, while another wished for a sentence to be removed from the transcript.

It appears that the women wanted the transcript to reflect formal spoken language and the way they saw themselves as professional women at work, even though the conversations were outside the work context. The women might have felt that the transcripts reflected the 'messiness' and informality in their language, which is in juxtaposition to how they might want to be viewed by the public. Therefore, this created a disconnect between spoken conversation and dialogue on paper.

Eight of the women signed the authority of release form (see Appendix F); allowing me permission to use extracts from their interviews for the purposes of this thesis and potential journal publications.

## Analysis

Analysis was not a separate stage of the study, but began during the interviewing stage and continued throughout the transcription phase. The overlap between data collection, transcription and analysis occurs, because the first stage of the analysis involves becoming fully immersed in the material. I focused on reading and re-reading the transcripts, in order to get a clear sense of how the women were accounting for their mentoring experiences (Gill, 1997). I was also assessing which sections of transcript were irrelevant, for example when the women went off topic, so that I was able to clearly distinguish which areas would be most useful for analysis (Gill, 1997).

The first research question: *how professional women narrate a mentoring discourse and how mentoring is understood in the context of work* informed the initial coding stage. I was interested in all the possible ways mentoring was captured in the conversations I had with the women in the context of work (Gill, 1997). I selected out all instances in the transcript, where the women were implicitly and explicitly communicating ideas around mentoring for women at work, the women's own definition and interpretation of mentoring and any mentoring scenarios experienced by the women (I. Parker, 1990). From there, the excerpts with mentoring were deduced to codes, which represented the overall and bigger picture of mentoring. For example, codes included mentoring philosophy, gendered mentoring, mentoring for career progression and barriers/challenges.

Following the advice of Parker (2005) of moving beyond mentoring themes, I identified the various ways that mentoring was discursively narrated by the women and the variability of mentoring. For instance, (see figure 1 below) illustrates the initial coding of various ways that the nine women discursively constructed their mentoring experience and the associated images to mentoring.

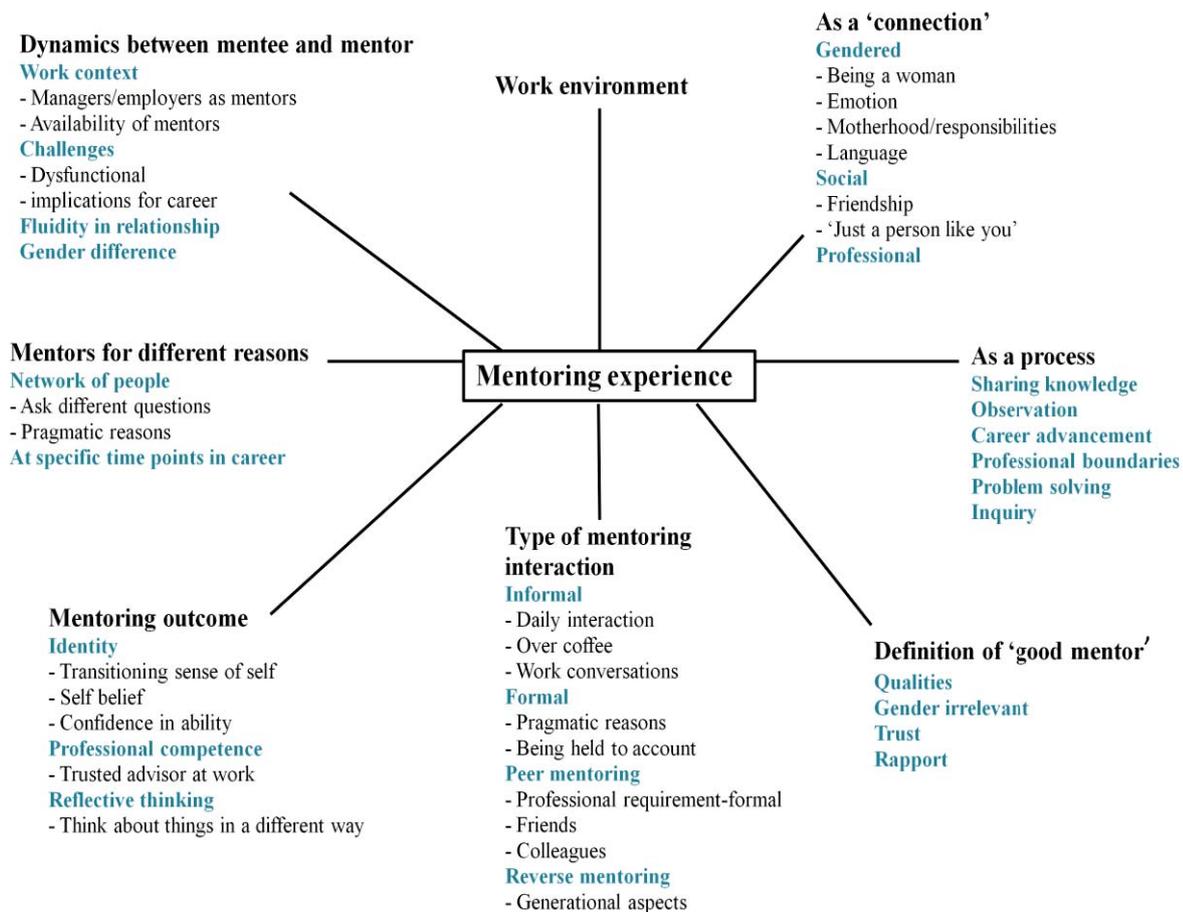


Figure 1: Initial coding of mentoring experiences (Haemmerle, 2016)

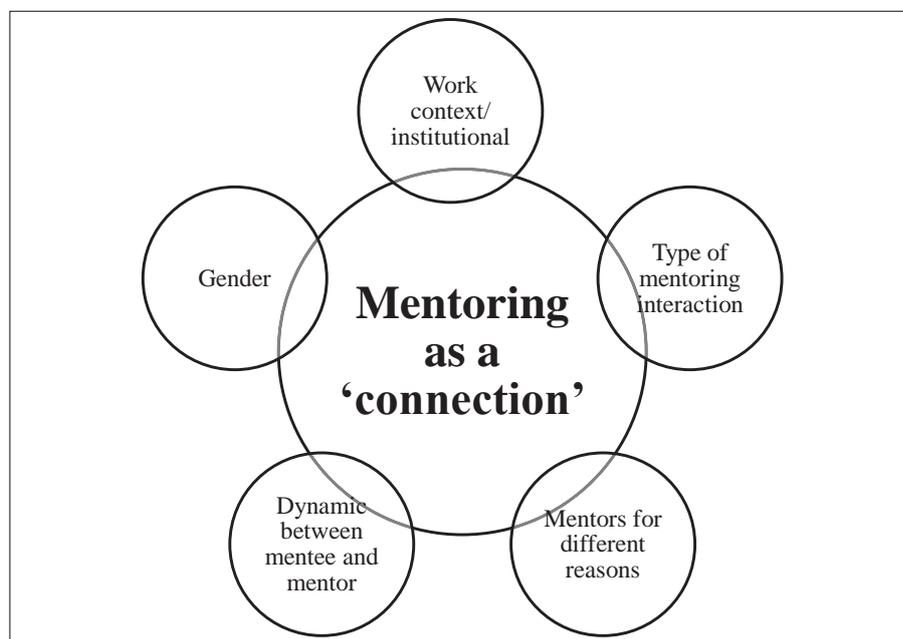
A construction of 'connection' was highlighted by the women as a significant component to mentoring and was connected to the idea of success at work, successful mentoring relationships and beneficial for professional development. I focus on the construction of 'connection' as my own interpretative stance, as a second coding phase. Other readers may identify alternative discourses and interpret a construction of subject positions differently to me. For this reason, I have endeavored to remain reflexive, so that readers can understand how my interpretations of a connection emerged through the analysis.

More specifically, I was interested in how the women used 'connection' and connectedness talk to position themselves and their relationships, with reference to their mentors at work. Following Davies and Harré (1990) theory of discursive positioning, I selected extracts in the women's transcripts, where it was possible to differentiate how the women positioned themselves as professional women and their sense of being women in relation to others. I was looking for the discursive language used by the

women to show their underlying expectations, beliefs and assumptions about mentoring and experiences with mentors. As a result, highlighting how women locate and negotiate themselves in mentoring.

I was also interested in the functionality of positioning with reference to mentoring as a connection. For example, how the women used positioning to frame their experiences with mentors and the social actions available to them. In doing so what social rights, duties and obligations were the women constrained/enabled to do within the context of mentoring and in what sense, if at all, did the women resist, challenge and or negotiate the subject positions available to them? (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003).

The second coding phase, involving the construction of ‘connection’ and how the women positioned a ‘connection’, revealed several contributing factors that were implicated in the process of forming a meaningful relationship with mentors (see figure 2 below). The factors are discussed in the following analysis chapters.



*Figure 2: Second coding phase of mentoring as a 'connection' (Haemmerle, 2016)*

### *Reflexivity of connection*

I realised that the women used different variations of connectedness talk to narrate mentoring and experiences with mentors. What I noticed, is that a ‘connection’ is not as straightforward and uniform as first thought. Each woman expressed a ‘connection’ differently, depending on their current work context. At its most basic level, the women narrated ‘connection’ as an interpersonal relationship and the sharing of common interests with another person. At the most complex and multifaceted level, constructions of ‘connections’ were contextualised within different historical, socio-political and institutional settings. Additionally, power relations between the women and their mentors complicated the process of understanding mentoring experience as a ‘connection’. For example, some women articulated a ‘connection’ as sharing a gendered viewpoint with their mentors and having similar home and family circumstances.

The unique and multiple interpretations of connections, granted me the ability to uncover the complexity of ‘connection’ and compare and contrast between the women. For example, were the mentoring accounts similar or being contradicted/resisted to across the group of women? Were the accounts similar of different within the same professional environment/institution? Or were there any discourses that were being rejected by the women?

### **Summary**

This chapter addresses the theoretical perspective of Foucault and key principles that are integral to feminist poststructuralism in this current study. I then describe the various components covered in the method, including participant recruitment, women participants, interviews, transcription and analysis. Having realised the significance and complexity of ‘connection’, it resulted in two in-depth analysis chapters which comprise: *institutionalised relationships* and *positioning*. The women’s extracts will be used to showcase the two key areas in relation to discursive constructions of ‘connection’.

## Chapter IV Analysis of institutionalised relationships

Institutional contexts are geographical and physical spaces, which produce particular workplace landscapes and understanding of work, which is familiar to all of its members (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). They involve a hierarchical and organised system of working, where the tone, value system and patterns of behaviour are set by a group, who determine how the organisation and individuals within the landscape are to function (Schein, 1990).

From a Foucauldian viewpoint, the focus of institutional contexts and its effect on mentoring, address the question of power and how power operates within different contexts (Foucault, 1983). The question of power takes into account mentoring dyads and how they become formalised around the understanding of work positions, the structure of work and within particular institutions. Moreover, identifying how power relations govern what is possible for women to do in mentoring dyads and what is appropriate mentoring conduct within institutional contexts. For instance, looking at the difference in position between individuals, as when one is in a dominant more senior role and the other in a inexperienced junior role, addresses whether or not mentoring is successful for those involved (Topal, 2015).

Institutionalised relationships are then specific types of workplace relationships, governed by the institution itself and/or the organisational culture. Workplace practices and interactions between the women participants are enforced by the institutional context. The women's interactions and conversations with mentors become so deeply enmeshed as daily habits and normalised ways of interacting with other people at work. Work interactions are then taken-for-granted dominant ways of producing work knowledge (Foucault, 1977; Rabinow, 1991). As a result, the institutional context and the relationships within them, have a particular effect on the women's construction of 'connection' and how they make sense of 'connectedness' talk with their mentors at work.

The following sections are organised around institutionalised settings as mentoring contexts. I address how the context of work shapes the different kinds of 'connections'

available to the women and influences how the women participants make ‘connection’ meaningful at work.

### **Socio-political work context**

Heather<sup>2</sup> understands mentoring in a broad sense of institutional context. Heather spoke about how the economic and socio-political instability of the recession and restructuring of the industry deeply affected women employees. Women felt a particular vulnerability when the recession hit. It affected women’s sense of job security, income and opportunity to develop leadership skills. Women were stressed about the work context and where they would go next. Heather storied her narrative of becoming a role model and mentor for other women around the recession and her role as a senior woman on a panel of advisors. Heather’s narration of her leadership position constructs a ‘protective connection’ towards other women. She has a responsibility to help safeguard and care for women during the financial crisis.

A ‘protective connection’ is articulated in the sense of offering advice and support to various women. For example, Heather’s advice is constructed as safeguarding women from financial, emotional and social harm through facilitating mentoring conversations with women. Heather helps the women become resilient, self-reliant and to develop their skills as women leaders. Heather is the most experienced mentor in the group of women participants. She realised the need to comfort and support women during times of stress and therefore became a trained mentor and coach for women.

### **Mentors with direct line of responsibility**

A particular institutionalised relationship some women participants have experienced, is mentoring relationships with managers, employers and partners. The nature of work and working in close contact with managers on a frequent basis meant that managers were primary mentors. Managers provided direct supervisory advice about work and took responsibility for the women’s professional development. The mentor’s management position in the institutionalised social hierarchy, their level of seniority and expertise,

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<sup>2</sup> While Heather did not withdraw from the study, she did not release her transcript so I have not been able to use extracts from her interview in my report.

governs the women in particular ways. It informs the type of relationships that can be formed with mentors at work.

### **Work context**

Like many mentoring relationships at work, Clara, Ana and Olivia articulate that they have been mentored by work managers (Collins-Camargo & Kelly, 2007). The managers are directly responsible for developing the women as professional individuals, to become competent and skilled in the organisation and to assist the women with future career opportunities. Clara recognises that the “partners of this firm would be my mentors, so my employers basically”. The women’s mentoring stories are narrated with several women and men managers at various time points throughout their careers and for specific work purposes. Mentoring relationships with women and men managers are governed and formalised by the specificity of work and daily interactions with managers. The nature of working in close contact on “everyday work... client work as well as meeting other people and becoming involved in the profession” with managers as indicated by Clara, infers that mentoring is seen part of everyday work. It is associated with professional conversations with managers.

Ana tells me that she met with her manager for mentoring conversations “every month or every two months when he was in Auckland.” They discussed work related topics and engaged in how she could handle work situations or problems that she was facing at work differently. The aim of mentoring is to develop her skills to become “better professionally”. Workplace mentoring is linked in this way to an ‘ideal worker’ discourse. It reinforces the taken-for-granted views of being professional, which privilege work discussions, being visible at work, seeking work opportunities and being totally committed to the work context (Brumley, 2014).

However, Olivia and Ana point out, that because of regular work interactions with managers, the role to mentor a less experienced individual within the organisation, is inherently connected and aligned with the formalised workplace role as manager. Olivia remarks “they were managing me, so it wasn’t that I sought that relationship out...that was just the nature of the working relationships that there were meetings”. Ana’s narrative is similar to Olivia as she tells me “I guess your manager it’s their job to mentor and guide you anyway”. The women understand the mentoring role, being

inherently linked with the role as manager, rather than a spontaneous relationship that naturally evolved.

Unlike Heather, who felt a commitment towards other women, the managers take up the role as mentor, not necessarily because that are personally invested in the individual or want to mentor someone of their own accord; but are making sure they are properly following institutional regulation, in accordance with performing managerial duties. Mentoring from the manager's side is therefore perceived as a necessary work task. Also, as a result of the manager's status as mentor and the hierarchical manager-employee dynamic, the women feel obliged to be involved in mentoring relationships with their managers. Mentoring is therefore considered a part of a contractual work agreement made between the two (Haggard & Turban, 2012; Scandura, 1998).

### **Dynamic between managers and women**

The context of hierarchical manager-employee relationships has a particular effect on the mentoring dyad. For instance, differences in working style, an authoritarian management style and managers being critical of employees' work can lead to dysfunctional mentoring. An imbalance in power relations between the manager and employee is detrimental to the quality of the mentoring relationship. The manager holds the control and authority of employment/termination decisions and overtly uses their position and status to negatively undermine the employees action (Beech & Brockbank, 1999; Scandura, 1998).

For instance, the ability for the women participants to freely discuss concerns with managers when something has gone wrong at work, is limited by fear of being wrong or being positioned as not knowing enough as an employee and mentee (Markham & Chiu, 2011). As Clara comments "I can find that hard to raise with partners that I think I've done something wrong". In the extract, Clara is uncomfortable to go to her partner, for fear of being judged by her mistakes as a junior employee and the partner misjudging her ability to perform her role competently at work.

The ability to give feedback to managers about their work role and how managers perform the role as mentor, is constrained by the exercise of power that governs the mentoring relationship (Christie, 2014). Managers have an enormous influence on the women's career and their ability to move up in the organisation. Therefore, the women

feel uncomfortable that their mentors are their managers. It limits what the women can and cannot say to managers. Olivia mentions “I felt that I might want to say to them that I don’t think that they are doing something that, you know that actually give feedback on what they’re doing... you know feedback if it’s somebody whose say above you in the hierarchy it’s difficult... so there’s a whole power structure that goes on”. The feedback communication between Olivia and her managers becomes something that is one-sided and reserved for her mentor. Managers offer the advice, and women employees are expected to willingly receive the advice from their mentors. This however, limits the women’s agency to give feedback and offer advice in a two-way fashion between each other.

Similarly, Ana describes how the level of power of having managers constrains what she can and cannot say to them. She talks about having to consider “with the manager you’re always sort of thinking in the back of your mind what’s the best response, what’s the best thing to say... you don’t want to say something that’s going to be career limiting”. As a result, the women are regularly self-monitoring their communication style and feedback that comes across to their managers and employers. The women “don’t want to seem like an idiot”, as indicated by Ana. Mentoring with managers therefore governs the women’s interactions and conversations, limiting how women make sense of connection with mentors.

### **Forming a meaningful ‘connection’**

As a result, within institutionalised relationships involving workplace managers, partners and employers as mentors, the women construct their ‘connection’ with their managers as limited in specific ways. This is evidenced in an extract from Clara who says:

“I’d say we’re friends, as far as you can be with your boss [laugh]”

Clara quantifies the limitations of the mentoring relationship as a friendship, which has developed through sharing similar interests. By saying, “as far as you can be” Clara recognises the limit to the friendship which is specified by the type of relationship allowed at work. There is a certain type of conversation and interaction with her employer that is ‘inhibited’, instead, disclosures more common in friendships, are not permitted with her mentor. Clara recognises that while she may consider the

relationship a friendship, she still has to remain professional at work. The boundaries of the institutional work context limit how far Clara can engage in a friendship discourse. Clara therefore acts towards her partner in accordance with the immediacies of work and the work context. This is kept more separate from more personal dimensions of Clara's life.

Having a mentor, who the women have to *report* to on a daily basis, limits the type of interactions and conversations the women can have, to being very work specific. There is a clear division of boundaries, work responsibilities and a system of working. It does not allow for the fluidity in the relationship to change and evolve over time as the mentor's and mentee's identities are shaped by the work context (Beech & Brockbank, 1999). The 'connection' is therefore inhibited by institutionalised relationships that are formed within the current work context. A 'connection' is a work necessity rather than a spontaneous sense of bonding with another person. Clara has to monitor herself to remain on her mentor's good side at all times. She has to keep in mind a '*disconnect*' between her and her mentor could negatively impact her success at work.

### ***Reflexivity***

Reflecting on the quote from Clara, I was drawn to the function of her laugh and how this displayed her immediate 'gut reaction' to her mentoring relationship with her employer. There have been a few occasions throughout Clara's interview, where she laughed. The position of her laugh, in relation to this comment, seemed almost an afterthought or a realisation of the challenges of having a mentor who is her partner and is also a friend. Clara's laugh was an indication of how the position of both the partner/employer and mentor, governed the type of mentoring relationship Clara could have. For me, the laugh functions as a nervous laugh, showing that Clara is uncomfortable with the relationship. She has to be conscious about her career and professional development, while still being aware that her boss plays a dual role as mentor and employer. She has to be mindful of the things she says, and to what extent her personal life is divulged to her partner, whilst still remaining professional.

Clara's laugh appears that she is conscious of the possibility of the friendship turning sour and negatively impacting on how the small law firm operates, as there are only three partners and nine employees working in the organisation. Because of this, Clara

has to be quite guarded in her approach and monitors herself in relation to how she handles mentoring, the friendship and the working relationship with her partner.

### **Institutionalised employment relations**

Joanne's example of an institutionalised relationship is slightly different from Clara's, Olivia's and Ana's, who all had work managers as mentors. Joanne performs a mentoring role for a woman colleague, who is transitioning into a more permanent role within the institution. The mentoring relationship is governed by Joanne's boss, who "asked me to do it", and act as a mentor for the woman colleague. The governance of mentoring is also inherently tied up to the work context and the necessity of "working in a small team when there are new team members then the more experienced members have got a responsibility to be a mentor". Joanne articulates the responsibility she feels to mentor the woman colleague as part of the institutional work context, her responsibility as course leader "of how things pan out" and "what gets reported", team teaching and working alongside the woman colleague. Joanne's position within the institutional setting and her employer both hold her to account. She is made accountable to the mentoring relationship, as it is beneficial for the functioning of the small team work environment and making sure that the woman colleague transitions smoothly into her permanent role.

However, the ability to form a meaningful 'connection' with the woman colleague is limited and constrained by the institutional work role as course leader and the obligation involved in being asked to mentor someone by her employer. Joanne says "the mentoring role still needs to be, ah its difficult ... you can mentor someone you don't need to be on a personal level... I think at work... you still need to be professional in terms of this is the mentoring role". The decision to mentor is not a personal choice or freedom to decide whom to mentor, but a consequence of the hierarchical governance of the institution. As a result, Joanne constructs a 'professional connection' with the woman colleague that is characterised by distance and making clear distinctions between professional boundaries at work and the role as mentor in the work context. Similarly, creating clear professional boundaries as a form of constructing an 'esteemed connection' for women and men nurse leaders, implies a workplace 'connection', which is built on professional respect, but doesn't include social and personal dimensions as

friends (McCloughen, O'Brien, & Jackson, 2009). Respect is however, different from mutual trust, as argued in Gibson (2004), which implies providing a safe and trusting environment for open conversations with mentors. In another sense, respect is different to a 'connection' viewed as 'chemistry', which is much more like a personal bond and attraction to one another (Jackson et al., 2003; Straus, Johnson, Marquez, & Feldman, 2013).

Erica's and Fiona's narratives of mentoring are interesting examples of women, who don't have managers as mentors, but still find that employment relations with an employer/CEO and the institution, constrain the type of 'connection' the women can have with their mentors. Erica's story, of how mentoring becomes available to her at work, centres around her having a particular work challenge and needing help with not "being too operational". The CEO arranged and paid for the professional services of a mentor to offer new insights and help Erica "deliver at a more strategic level for the organisation".

Erica's construction of mentoring is influenced by her CEO financing the mentoring time, as she tells me that "the organisation paid for that mentoring time umm so I've got I feel a sense of obligation to ensure that that is not fritted away". The mentoring context makes her institutionally accountable to her employer and the investment he has made in her. She feels indebted to the CEO for making mentoring happen, and feels a sense of responsibility and duty as an employee to fulfil the expectations of mentoring. Erica understands that the CEO is making a commitment to her and her career in the organization, by paying for the mentoring time. As a result, Erica is disciplined to feel compelled and obliged to make sure the mentoring time is not wasted and take on the mentoring discussions with the mentor.

The disciplining action of mentoring has a direct effect on the mentoring dynamic between her and the woman mentor and influences how the women construct connectedness talk. While Erica may be compelled to make the most of the mentoring opportunity for the sake of work and an "obligation" to her employer, the woman mentor still has a financial incentive to mentor and be involved in the year-long mentorship. As Erica comments "I'm not going to expect her to do that if I'm not going to make the most of it".

In this situation, the kind of ‘connection’ is constrained, firstly by the employer paying for the mentoring time and secondly by the financial incentive for the mentor to be involved in the relationship. There is virtually ‘no connection’ between the women, as Erica comments “I mean really for the mentor’s view apart that she’s wasting her time, there’s no skin off her nose if I choose not to make the most of it her”. Erica goes on to further comment that “I never got the impression that she was agreeing or disagreeing with any of the things... if she had a view on whether that was a good or bad idea she didn’t share that or express that to me”. The women understand the mentoring relationship as a contractual arrangement. Erica and her mentor are effectively moving through the formal motions and procedures of mentoring, as a strategy for handling work challenges. Beyond that, there is an apparent lack of personal interest and ‘connection’ towards each other. Having a ‘connection’ is irrelevant to the context and purpose of workplace mentoring for Erica and her mentor.

In Fiona’s case, she was involved in a formal mentoring scheme organised by the institution where she was employed. She was assigned a mentor, who was “contracting to the University” as an external coach. Similar to Erica, there is some form of institutional obligation, for her to maintain the mentoring relationship and to take on the advice of the external coach. Fiona comments “it’s an external organisation that you’re obviously paying to go and see” and having to “go with a specific thing you wanted to talk about... you had to almost go with a suggestion that you almost go with an agenda”. The institutional obligation is both to the work environment and to the woman who is employed to perform a mentoring role. The sense of obligation to mentoring and the institutional context, constrains the type a ‘connection’ and connectedness talk she can have with the mentor, as she says to me that the mentoring “is a little bit more structured, more business”. The working styles of the two women differed, as she mentions that the external coach definitely came “with the mentor hat on”.

### ***Reflexivity***

What I noticed is that in both mentoring contexts with Erica and Fiona, there is some sort of financial incentive involved in mentoring. The mentor is either paid by the institution or by the woman herself. The financial reason for mentoring maintains an institutional obligation. It privileges the position of the mentor, where the women are powerless to extend the relationship beyond the work domains and see it as a

connection. For me, the accounts from the women reveal that they feel like they owe it to the organisation that employs them to maintain the relationship, regardless of whether there is a connection with the mentor or not. Mentoring, in this institutional sense, is understood as something the women have to do which is contractually bound to the institution and their work role.

## **Summary**

In summary, the construction of ‘connection’ is governed by dimensions of power that circulate in and around the hierarchical relationship of the institutional work context. The employer/mentor maintains the authority to determine the level of support the mentee receives at work, the availability to work opportunity, the type of mentoring interaction, and how the two are to engage with each other at work. The ‘connection’ is constituted as a formalised interaction, where the actions of each person are sanctioned and regulated by the mentor’s status and authority at work, so that each person plays a particular workplace *role* that the mentoring relationship helps to maintain.

## **Mentors without direct line responsibility**

In comparison to managers as mentors, some women have experienced collegial/staff mentor relationships with other women and peer mentoring with a group of women. The women do not directly report to their mentors and neither can the mentors directly influence their careers. The types of alternative mentoring arrangements do not constrain the women in the way managerial and institutional relationships do. The women are instead able to construct alternative meanings of ‘connections’ and connectedness talk with their mentors, which are different from work connections.

## **Work context**

Professional mentors, peer mentoring and collegial mentoring with staff members serve as alternative mentoring relationships to managers. The mentoring relationships serve particular work purposes and are needed at specific times in their careers. Kelly tells me that she sought professional “independent advice on managing a situation” when she was “facing some quite challenging times... with some internal politics” in the workplace. Kelly mentions that she “employed a professional” to offer a “completely

unbiased perspective” about the work context and the issues she was facing. She effectively paid for the services of a mentor, and in some way I consider this to be institutional mentoring, where there is an expectation and obligation to make the most of mentoring because it is a paid service. While there may be some institutional power operating within the relationship, it does not influence the construction of a connection to the extent that managers, employers and partners do, as discussed in the previous section. This means that Kelly is able to construct an alternative interpretation of connection. Kelly shows this in her story to me when she tells me “so it ended up morphing from a professional relationship into you know... to us understanding that we could work really well together or we could progress and share a project together in common”. In this sense, Kelly helps me to recognise the fluidity in mentoring relationships that moves from professional conversations to sharing common interests.

Similarly, Ana speaks about peer mentoring with a group of women being “probably more useful than the more experienced mentors” as managers in the workplace. In Ana’s narrative, she constructs peer mentoring around the context of becoming professional, as part of an institution “requirement for registered psychologists in New Zealand”. She tells me how, as part of the formal process, the group of individuals get together and “have to sort of keep a log of our peer mentoring process, and every five years we get audited. So we have to show that we have been keeping our meetings”.

For me, while it is clear there is an institutional and professional obligation to mentoring, with a distinct review process and a system of becoming competent in the profession, the aspect of peer mentoring legitimises Ana’s sense of ‘connection’. She addresses how the group of peers “formed naturally because we studied together and have similar interests in the same industry”. In Ana telling me how peer mentoring with a “group of friends” evolved through sharing similar educational experiences as Master students, she is showing me that the institutional context of mentoring does not affect the sense of connectedness she feels towards her peers.

The fact that the mentoring happens with peers and “friends” means that Ana is able to understand mentoring and interpret a connection in a different way than with managers. She understands the difference by constructing two competing narratives, with having to think “what’s the best response” and it almost being “like you’re in a job interview” with managers as mentors. Instead you are able to be “totally open, honest and almost

naive and you don't have to think about what you're saying because you're just with your friends". The construction of a 'connection' she feels with her peers, is conveyed through a sense of agency and freedom. In this sense, peer mentoring is not just limited to professional discussions about ethical dilemmas or experiences within the industry, but is able to extend beyond lines of professionalism and into personal and social dimensions.

Peer mentoring with Māori women and men in academia, for instance, allows individuals the freedom to create a network of people who share similar cultural values, enables individuals to speak with others in their native language, and provides a platform to discuss professional issues (Kensington-Miller & Ratima, 2015). Peer mentoring enables women academics to resist the hegemonic and institutional assumptions of traditional mentoring: having to be mentored one-on-one by someone within the same University as you and helps to transform feelings of isolation (Driscoll, Parkes, Tilley-Lubbs, Brill, & Pitts Bannister, 2009). Alternative, informal peer mentoring disrupts the relations of power and governance imposed by a mentor and their mentee in a hierarchical formalised mentoring relationship, as each person has a responsibility to mentor and be mentored by each other (De Four-Babb et al., 2015).

The principle of a 'running bamboo' is used as a metaphor for mentoring connections with women academics (Agosto et al., 2016). The women can connect with other women who are not necessarily within the same team, department or even physical location. This is quite a clear distinction of the implication of informal peer mentoring on marginalised groups of women (Agosto et al., 2016). 'Running bamboo' networks of peer mentoring enable women to feel a sense of agency in connecting with their mentor beyond the boundaries of work and to form voluntarily 'connections', rather than through obligation enforced by the institution (Agosto et al., 2016)

Fiona and Megan speak about collegial mentoring relationships with women and the types of connections available to them. Fiona speaks about having a "head of school as my go-to-person, because I have to work very closely with heads of school." Her relationship with another woman is integral to how she is able to perform her role as a woman leader. Having someone in a similar leadership position means Fiona is able to discuss the "complexities of things" with the head of school.

Megan articulates her mentoring relationship with a woman colleague around a “monkey see monkey do” metaphor, where she is able to role model ‘good’ lecturing skills from a woman mentor. For instance, she tells me the monkey do, monkey see metaphor is “soft skills” that she learns directly in the work environment, and things that are not taught from reading a book. This includes “dealing with students” and how to react to difficult students, when to be firm and hold her ground as a lecturer, marking assignments and “the administration part of the work”.

For me, the narratives of mentoring reveal that the women are still being governed by workplace relationships and the conversations they have with mentors. Unlike institutional relationships, which govern the women’s actions through obligation and making them accountable to the institution, women with more peer-like/collegial relationships, discipline their actions through a more voluntary self-surveillance. It is not because the women are being held to account by institutional norms or their mentor’s position within the organisation, but in self-monitoring their own actions, they can see where they will end up in their careers if they follow their mentor’s advice.

### **Dynamic between mentoring dyad**

Unlike managerial relationships, the relationships with work colleagues, professional mentors and peer mentoring are non-hierarchical. They are not strictly limited to rule governing behaviour, that are privileged work conversations and actions around work. By Megan articulating “if you have a mentor which you don’t really know and it’s a bit high level, you start to organise your words” she is inferring that informality outside the context of an institutionalised hierarchy with a mentor means there is less opportunity for her to be misunderstood or have to explain herself. The ‘connection’ within a mentoring relationship with a colleague means that the conversations become more reciprocal. Each member in the relationship is able to give feedback and can informally mentor each other.

The women are able to negotiate meaningful ‘connections’, such as a ‘friendship connection’, which is referenced in Megan’s narrative, below, of her relationship with her woman mentor:

Megan: I think we’re not only colleagues, we’re not only mentor and mentees I think we’re friends in a way as well. You know... something we can chat about, something

we talk about, you know in the school holiday we really should get four girls together so we can have a wine and just sit together and running around this kind of thing... and we have same things talking about girls and talking about their growth, these are the things we have more in common in topic.

Megan uses an intimate friendship discourse to articulate her 'connection' with a woman mentor. She recognises being "friends" as a way to socially share similar gendered experiences, that may be areas of their lives that are personal and kept private from others they work with. In considering being "friends", Megan has *already gone* through the initial stages of identifying and forming a relationship with someone. She is actively saying that she has mutual affection and emotional ties towards her mentor, making the 'connection' intimate in the way that it would be an affectionate relationship. In speaking of herself and her mentor as "friends", Megan draws reference to them both as having rights and being entitled to engage socially with one another, as well as sharing private and personal information.

In the process of sharing more personally with her mentor, Megan makes a gendered distinction in the way she describes her 'connection' as intimate "as something we can chat about". Megan talks about the 'sameness' they share in being women and having an understanding of the responsibilities and duties of being a mother. For example, the school routine, co-ordinating school holiday activities, organising play dates with each other's children and being responsible for taking care of their children. They also share an understanding of raising two girls of similar ages, their development and "growth" and what it means to have "girls" in the family.

Alternative mentoring allows 'connections' between women, to become continuous and mobile throughout various disciplines of workplace environments and at various stages of women's careers. It also allows women to break away from traditional workplace relationships or one-on-one relationships, which might not allow for connections to evolve and become dynamic in the workplace.

## Summary

In summary, this chapter addresses institutionalised relationships as specific workplace contexts, in which mentoring women takes place. By addressing institutional mentoring, I was able to examine the socio-political context of work. This includes how power relations in managerial work relationships govern the women in various ways. Mentoring relationships with managers, employers and partners are limited to work conversations. These are discussions inherently connected with work duties and developing professionally, which overall constrain the ability for women to make meaningful ‘connections’ as women and engage in connectedness talk with their mentors. Mentoring relationships with mentors who did not have line responsibility for the women participants, enabled the women to develop alternative mentoring arrangements, which were not restricted to the work domain. In these situations they narrated alternative interpretations of ‘connections’ with their mentors.

Following on from this chapter, I will focus on *positioning* as a key area for addressing the way in which different institutional mentoring contexts with workplace mentors and the women’s construction of ‘connection’, position the women participants in various ways. As a result of positioning, I will address the kinds of actions the women are enabled and constrained to do within their mentoring dyads and what this means for their professional identity.

## **Chapter V Analysis of positioning**

Positioning addresses the ways in which mentoring contexts enable the women's mentoring narratives and their construction of themselves in relation to others at work (Davies & Harré, 1990). In the context of mentoring, what are the particular "patterns of beliefs" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 4) about women at work, that position them in certain ways, and infer social meanings about the kinds of interactions and conversations women can occupy within mentoring relationships. Positioning engages in the various interpretations available for women at work and the kinds of mentoring activities and actions women are permitted to do or inhibited from doing at work (Harré & Langenhove, 1991). Positioning can also address the various ways women are simultaneously constrained and enabled within mentoring, mentoring contexts, connectedness and their implications on the construction of women's professional identity.

Positioning is therefore complex and multifaceted and is dependent on the various mentoring contexts that professional women are placed within. Part of the complexity of positioning comes about through the relationship between institutionalised mentoring arrangements and the gendering of women at work. The following sections are organised around how institutionalised mentoring contexts influence the gendering of women, and how women are positioned as mentee/mentors at work. In relation to gender, I explore the assumptions about being a woman at work and the influence they have for women to make meaningful 'connections' with others. I will also explore the various ways women actively position themselves and how their mentoring relationships are gendered, with implications for constructing a professional identity.

### **Institutionalised positioning**

The positioning of women and their construction of 'connections' are complicated by institutionalised mentoring arrangements and the gendering of women at work. Formalised work environments govern the positioning of women as mentees and mentors, so that women feel obligated and expected to occupy these subject positions within the mentoring context and in mentoring dyads.

The institutional context in which mentoring takes place, positions Erica and Joanne in particular ways, so that they feel obligated to be involved in mentoring relationships. Erica positions herself, and is positioned by the mentor, and employer as being accountable for fulfilling her role as mentee. Her narration of her story is around the structure of mentoring and the formalised arrangement. Erica is made to feel like she is responsible “to be held to account, for me to hold myself to account”.

The idea of Joanne being “asked to do it” by her employer implies an expected position as a mentor for a woman colleague. The mentoring role is linked to a compulsory requirement of Joanne’s workplace role, as a senior woman in engineering, paper leader and working alongside another colleague in a small team environment. Joanne is expected to conform to the institutionalised and social convention at work that governs hierarchical and formalised relationships between employer and employee. By taking up the role as mentor, Joanne positions herself, and is positioned by her employer, as a dutiful employee, who respects the decision of someone more senior to her in the work context.

Joanne is also positioned as relatively powerless and lacking agency within the mentoring dyad. Although Joanne is expected to mentor a woman colleague, she actually does not know how to be a mentor, nor does she have an understanding of what being a mentor means in the context of work. This is shown by her sharing with me that she had to ask her employer “I’m like well how do you define mentoring? What do you see as a mentoring role? It’s like just be a mentor! ... It’s basically just go away and do it” The lack of formal support, training or guidance from her employer on how to mentor, challenges Joanne’s ability to mentor and how she positions herself as a mentor for the woman colleague. Yet she feels compelled to provide a mentoring role regardless.

### **Gendering of women at work**

The mentoring narratives of the women are complicated by the way women are positioned in gendered discourses at work, and are positioned by gendered assumptions about what it means to be a mentor and a mentee.

Ana recounts a story to me, about when she was a young professional woman working in leadership – an area dominated by experienced men as leaders and managers. Here,

the work environment and individuals within it, made negative gendered assumptions about her being a woman. This is shown in how she conveys to me how her physical appearance and her gender influenced how leaders treated her in the profession, as she says “people looked at me like ‘oh what does that young little girl know about this leadership development or this profession’”. Men are positioned as the experts at work, who have “been leaders for twenty years”. Because men have been in the profession for so long, they are positioned as having extensive knowledge and a greater understanding about how to lead, what leaders look like and what leadership means in the context of work.

Ana is depreciatively positioned by her gender and her “young looking face”, indicating that because she is a woman and is relatively new to the profession, she doesn’t have enough valuable knowledge about leadership to contribute to the profession. Because of the gendering of women at work she is unable to give direction to men as leaders, since they “don’t respect me and my opinion” and treat her as a lesser individual to them. Instead of Ana directly telling men how to lead or offer leadership advice, she “gets them to the same point by asking questions ... or sometimes showing a YouTube clip”. Ana questions if gender is playing a part in her not being treated equally to men at work, by her mentioning to me “I suspect if I were male I wouldn’t have to work so hard to do that”.

For me, this quote really reflected the gendering of women at work. Ana is consciously aware of her gender influencing her work role. I feel that she is in positioned by her gender, and has to in some way compromise how she performs and understands her gender as a woman at work. It shows to me that she is performing her gender and her own intentions of how she wants to offer leadership advice, differently with men. She is also performing her gender in regard to how men want her to interact with them. By making this statement, it shows to me women are very aware of the implication of gender at work and how they may have to behave differently around men.

The gendering of women also complicates the positions the women take up as mentor and mentee. The gendering of women at work contributes to the way that Joanne’s positioning as a mentor governs her interactions with the woman colleague. The lack of women in engineering “in a school where there only three women” positions Joanne as being expected to assume the role as a mentor, despite her lack of understanding of the

role. It is a “proactive step” to overcome gender segregation in a profession dominated by men, which helps more women in engineering transition to lecturing posts and to develop professionally. Interestingly, this ‘proactive’ obligation puts another burden of responsibility on Joanne, for which she feels ill-prepared.

Joanne talks to me about the gendering at work in terms of the different expectations of men and women. For instance, she tells me that “we’ve got two new members of staff that are male, that have just turned up that are ex-researchers that have come into lecturing posts and I’m not aware that either of them have got a mentor ... I don’t know they’ve got a mentor, they may have a mentor, I may just not know that they’ve got a mentor, but it is a question of they don’t need a mentor because they are a man”.

Similar to Ana, she reflects on the implication of gender, and questions if her gender plays a role in her being asked to be a mentor for another woman colleague. Joanne is clear that she is not fully aware of the circumstances of the new staff with regard to mentoring. She has an assumption that the newly appointed men are positioned as not needing mentors, because they are more experienced and already have enough research experience to be more capable of transitioning into lecturing posts than women are. The idea that men at work *do not* need a mentor positions women as less likely to succeed as lecturers without the support of a mentor. In order for women to flourish in academia and to develop professionally, they need to be involved in mentoring relationships with other women.

A mentoring role is assumed for Joanne, because she is a senior woman in engineering and is aware of the lack of women in her profession. She is understood as automatically wanting to show solidarity towards other women and champion for the professional development of the woman colleague (Hurst, Leberman, & Edwards, 2016; Mavin, 2006). The very nature of being a women and understanding the challenges for professional women assumes that mentoring is something all women want to do for the benefit of other women.

### ***Reflexivity***

When I spoke with Joanne, I sensed that her questioning whether men were mentors for other men, if they received mentoring and the lack of formal support to mentor, indicated that she was actually annoyed with being asked to mentor the woman

colleague. I felt that she was annoyed by her employer's assumption based on gender, that she would voluntarily give up her time and resources to mentor another woman, for the sake of women sticking together as 'sisters' in engineering and helping each other out. I also felt she was annoyed that there was an expectation, that because they were women, they would more easily relate to one another and share commonalities. I realised that through the obligation to her employer and the work context, she created professional distance in the mentoring relationship. She was trying to resist a forced 'gendered connection' as a woman imposed by the institution. The mentoring conversations were more along a professional discussion of how to develop as a lecturer, rather than connecting as women.

For Erica and Joanne, the institutionalised mentoring relationships, as told through their narratives, limit the type of connection and sense of connectedness the women can have with their mentors. Mentoring is not so much about having a 'connection' with another person or the idea of understanding of each other as women at work. It is more to do with how they fulfil the professional expectation as mentee and mentor and how they perform their workplace roles as professional individuals. The 'lack of connection' is expressed in the way the women talk about mentoring and their professional identity. Erica views mentoring in a very pragmatic sense, where her mentor "couldn't create experiences for me, all she could do was ask quite intuitive questions to make me reconsider with my existing skill set how could I utilise those in a slightly different way". Erica understands the limits to what the mentor can offer her, and instead views mentoring as a process of inquiry for professional development. Mentoring is understood as being purely career focused, which helps Erica to provide critical insight into how she would handle different work situations. The questioning enables Erica to make informed and rational workplace decisions as a professional, but doesn't contribute to how she sees herself at work.

The gendering of women at work is also storied in the narratives of Heather. Heather explains to me that mentors can hold women back, especially when the mentee moves on or becomes more relevant at work due to their more contemporary understandings and skills. She tells a particular story of one of her mentors, who wanted to keep her in a subservient position and did not accept any resistance to his advice. He was her manager, and her work lent him prestige, but rather than praise her, he denigrated her. She explains that the mentor took the credit for her work, in order to give the impression

and appearance to others that he was skilful and competent in the work he did. She was made to feel as if she constantly needed to get his approval and permission to complete work. This experience made her very cautious of potential father/daughter or mother/daughter relationships, where the mentee felt obliged to be obedient to their mentor. A cautionary tale, of how mother-daughter type mentoring relationships can disrupt a connection to a woman mentor at work, is evidenced by Parker and Kram (1993). A junior woman became disillusioned with her woman mentor, as the parent-child inference disciplined her as an obedient child and she was expected to follow the mentor's advice (Parker & Kram, 1993). Heather's story and the contribution of research suggest that mentoring is not as straightforward as expected, as differences in age, familial representations, such as affection for father and mother figures and gender, complicate the issue.

## **Summary**

The institutions and workplaces that individuals inhabit make certain gendered assumptions about what it means to be a woman at work and gendered positions as mentee and mentor. The women have talked about explicit gendering within the work force. The women are viewed by others as lacking industry experience, knowledge and are somehow positioned as inferior to men in the work context. The gendering of women assumes that women need mentors to succeed at work as professional individuals, and expects women will automatically align themselves with other women colleagues. The assumption is that mentoring is a beneficial strategy for women in the workforce, and that women should support and mentor other women. However, the women have illustrated that this is not the case and that mentoring and the gendering of women at work and the 'connection' to other women is very complex and multifaceted. Institutional contexts and requirements can produce a 'lack of connection' that affects women's professional development and how they position themselves as mentees and mentors.

## **Gendered positioning**

In the previous section, the women were aware and recognised the limitations of institutionalised mentoring arrangements and the gendering of women at work, which

influenced the way the women understood a 'connection' with their mentors. The focus of institutionalised relationships was in terms of career opportunities for women, but limited the type of conversations that women could have. The women were not able to discuss family and home life in these mentoring contexts. This is in contrast to mentoring narratives and contexts with women mentors, where the women actively engaged in gendered positioning and understood their 'connection' to their mentors through a gendered feminine discourse of being women.

### **Men are 'different' to women**

The women position themselves and their connection through a gendered discourse, as Olivia indicates "women have a different experience in the workforce". She shares with me, that women have a unique understanding and interpretation of the work environment and the gendered challenges they face at work. The gendered position of women being somehow 'different' to men at work, is discussed in terms of the various dimensions of mentoring in relationships with men and women mentors. Clara infers that mentoring with men results in a "slightly different relationship". Olivia says "if one was being mentored by a male, it definitely would ... they'd have to understand that and be able to empathise" suggesting that men would have to understand what it means to be a woman at work and the difficulties that women face.

Although Olivia doesn't explicitly define the challenges facing women, the biological and reproductive cycle of women could be inferred as a potential gendered challenge for professional women, who take time off work to be on maternity leave and look after and care for their children (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). For instance, professional women are treated differently by their employers and others at work - before and after maternity leave - and some women are denied the opportunity for career progression after maternity leave (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005).

The differences of being mentored by men are not simply because they are men. Rather, women are concerned whether mentors take into account the experience of a woman as a whole person and their professional identity at work. Heather and Clara mention that "you learn more, immediate, direct to the work that you're working on" with men and Kelly tells me that men are "a little bit demanding and tough on the deeds, the tasks". The gendered narrative of mentoring with men implies that men focus on providing the women with career support, advice about how to get ahead and what it means to be

successful in their careers. The men demand and expect a high level of commitment to work and that the women fulfil the “deeds” of the work tasks competently.

However, the importance and immediacies of work and mentoring conversations with men partition women into components where work, home, and personal lives are separates from each other. This partitioning, does not allow women to incorporate a gendered account in the way they understand mentoring as a ‘connection’, or the way they understand themselves as women.

Mentoring with men was more of a pragmatic understanding of the realities of work, of being an ‘ideal worker’, how to survive at work and how to become professional (Brumley, 2014). The responsibilities associated with work and the ability to perform work roles competently were valued as important outcomes of mentoring and reasons why women should engage in mentoring relationships at work.

### ***Reflexivity***

Men as mentors are depicted through masculine discourses, where Ana felt that her mentors were ‘savvy’, ‘business’, ‘arrogant’ and ‘unethical’. Kelly uses discourses of being ‘brutal’, having a ‘magic cut off’, ‘hardnosed’ and being a ‘chameleon’ to describe a mentoring experience she had with a mentor who had a business mentor ‘hat’ on. Both women experienced negative interactions with men as mentors.

For me, the participants’ descriptions of men send quite a strong message about the type of interaction they experienced. They depict a masculinised, hostile work environment, where the mentor’s mentoring style was controlling, being very business focused and straight to the point. I feel that the reason the women chose to use such strong discourses was to show the distinct disconnect and mental, emotional and psychological barrier they felt towards men as mentors. In particular, Kelly used the metaphor of being a ‘chameleon’, to show that she had to adapt her communication style and use of language to her mentor’s style, which privileged a more masculine rational, logical and direct way of communicating.

### **Constructions of a ‘feminine connection’**

The women participants recognise limitations with men as mentors, where the various elements of the women’s lives are separate and made into distinct components of being

a professional woman. The women are, however, better enabled in mentoring relationships with women mentors, as Fiona tells me “you know we spoke the same language”. The women actively engage in gendered positioning as women, by incorporating a ‘feminine connection’ with their women mentors.

A ‘feminine connection’ takes into account women as a whole person. This is shown in Fiona’s comment, when she references that there seemed to be “another layer” to mentoring, as the mentor really understood feminine gendered issues of women at work. Fiona tells me “I guess really understand all the extra responsibilities that they do”. It allows the women to be involved in mentoring relationships that nurture the more *‘feminine’* side of the women as mentees, and reveals more psycho-social and emotional qualities necessary for women at work. Heather mentions that she would previously seek the advice of men purely for work areas, but now specifically has a network of women mentors who help her nurture her more feminine side of being a woman and what that means for her at work. Women who identified in a feminine way, were more likely to experience typically feminine characteristics of mentoring such as receiving psycho-social support with their mentors (Ortiz-Walters, Eddleston, & Simone, 2010).

The women use feminine discourses to narrate their mentoring stories and to depict feminine characteristics with women mentors. Feminine discourses are emotionally laden to meet the psycho-social and personal needs of the women. For instance, Ana uses feminine discourses of ‘trust’, ‘confidence’, ‘emotional connection’ and ‘feeling’ to depict nurturing and emotionally supportive interactions with her woman mentor, while Kelly uses discourses of being ‘wordy’, ‘relationship focused’ and ‘confidence’ as feminine qualities of the mentoring relationship.

### **Women’s issues**

Kelly positions her feminine side with her mentor, where the woman mentor was able to understand and recognise “intrinsically female issues around umm sense of self umm, stumbling blocks to progressing and taking bold leaps and being brave about things”. The mentor was able to encapsulate how she felt as a woman and help her to work on specifically feminine struggles at work. Kelly mentions that because “she was a woman, there’s a real cut through... she went immediately into the psych, psychology of the female mind”. The ‘connection’ for Kelly was that her mentor understood exactly what her strengths and weaknesses were as a woman, and recognised that women internalise

negative thoughts and self-doubt about themselves as women. Her mentor was able to tap into a gendered issue of self-doubt and lack of confidence, and helped Kelly to realise the importance “around the power of language and how you think about yourself internally”.

Ana’s ‘feminine connection’ with her mentor was also around understanding women’s lack of confidence as a gendered stumbling block. Ana mentions that her mentor “kept saying to me you’re a wise woman [Ana], you know you should just have the confidence that you know that you do have knowledge, you are the expert and I probably wouldn’t have I don’t know developed the same level of confidence if it had been a male”. The gendered position around a lack of confidence creates a ‘different sort of connection’ with her mentor, that is uniquely *feminine* and specific to the context in which mentoring took place. Ana tells me that she left an emotionally charged and politically laden work environment, where her manager and mentor made some poor financial decisions for the company. Ana was going through some emotional turmoil with letting work colleagues go. During this time she turned to a woman psychologist for emotional support, guidance and comfort. Ana and her mentor heavily drew on an ‘emotional connection’ with each other, as this is seen in the way Ana narrates her mentoring story as being “a different sort of emotional connection there” that she might not have established with a man.

Women of colour in academia experience an ‘emotional connection’ with women mentors, where there is an emotional attachment to the mentoring relationship. The mentor genuinely cares and is invested in the mentoring relationship. A ‘mentoring of the heart’ as a relational emotional quality of women of colour, might help to alleviate ‘outsider’ perceptions, and help to re-position women as ‘insiders’ within the academic landscape (Buzzanell et al., 2015). A female connectedness of the ‘heart’ and soul as intimate and informal forms of mentoring through women-to-women mentoring relationships, nurtured and empowered the development of a young psychologist’s professional identity (Ruff, 2013).

Megan and Clara articulate a feminine position and sense of connectedness with their mentors through a discourse of being *mothers* and having children. The women comment that they share a gendered understanding with their mentors as mothers and parents, where Clara has found “being a parent, it’s easier to relate to other parents” and

support each other as working mothers. Megan positions her 'mothering connection' to her mentor, as "it's what I feel that it give us a special bond in a way... being female it makes our chat more relaxed in a relationship". The women are more easily able to relate to their mentors, as there is a common point of interest: that of being mothers, raising children and the difficulties with balancing work-life dimensions. A 'mothering connection' enables women the freedom to be able to openly discuss personal issues and extend their mentoring conversations beyond the boundaries of work. The women are able to transform the intention and function of mentoring, so that it incorporates all aspects of their lives as professional working mothers and what that means for them as women.

### **Transformative professional identity**

A more feminine gendered connection and a gendered relationship with mentors enables the women to transform, modify and alter their perception of themselves at work, in a way that is more fluid and organic than institutionalised and formalised mentoring arrangements. A 'feminine gendered connection' is transformative for the women, as it helps to position their professional identity and how they see themselves at work differently.

The women narrate mentoring and the relationship between a gendered connection and their professional identity through a discourse of '*retelling*' and '*rethinking*'. Olivia tells me that "what the coaching did for me was helped me rethink about, rethink myself and who I am at work and what I can do". Megan also narrates a change in the way she views herself through a discourse of '*rethinking*', where she mentions to me that mentoring "in a way makes me re-think whether I'm suitable for lecturing and I answer actually yes I'm suitable for it. I can do it".

The gendered relationship is transformative for Olivia, since she understands that "all women are very good at seeing their limitations. So I needed someone to make me turn around and see what my strengths were". A 'gendered connection' enables the women to change the way they see themselves, from looking at their inadequacies to acknowledging their successes. The women are then able to retell an alternative professional story, that includes Olivia saying to herself "I am successful" and Ana commenting that she realised "actually I am the expert". In each retelling, the women

narrate and adopt an alternative version of themselves as women at work, their position at work and their sense of accomplishment as professionals.

In the process of '*retelling*' their professional identity, the women constantly shift back and forth along a continuum of identity formation. They are reviewing, amending and modifying their sense of themselves at work, so that professional identity constantly evolves through multiple retelling of their stories. In so doing, the women are suggesting that the meaning of mentoring and the formation of a professional identity are not uniform, stable or complete (Elliott, 2011). Professional identity does not have a final destination or a designated termination point, but rather the women move through a process of discovery and self-evaluation of who they are at work (Elliott, 2011).

Overall, a more 'feminine gendered connection' with mentors is transformative for women, as it enables women to understand themselves professionally at work. It enables women to transform, modify and alter the definition of being professional and what that means for them as women in the context of work. Women are able to take up alternative versions of themselves throughout their career as professional women, and resist or accept the various interpretations of being professional that are available to them.

## **Summary**

This chapter addressed the complexities of positioning in the way the women positioned themselves, and were positioned by their mentors in their mentoring narratives. By addressing positioning, I uncovered the relationship between institutional and gendered positioning in the way women were positioned as mentees and mentors, the gendering of women at work and their sense of connection with their mentors. The women recognised the limitations with institutional mentoring arrangements, which privileges mentoring discourses around expectation and obligation. Instead, participants positioned their mentoring relationships as gendered. A feminine gendered position and 'connection' was constructed, as a way for women to uniquely understand their sense of themselves as professional women with their mentors and what it means in the context of their mentoring relationship. It enabled the women to transform the type of mentoring conversations, from focused work related mentoring and exclusively professional conversations with their mentor, to incorporating social and personal

components of being a woman that go beyond merely work dimensions. As a result of a feminine gendered connection, the women transformed their professional identity and their sense of belief in themselves as women at work.

## Chapter VI Conclusion

In this chapter I address my original focus of this study and review how I addressed the research questions. I also review what I have learnt, and draw attention to the contribution the study makes to the complexity of mentoring for women at work.

Mentoring is advocated as a strategy and workplace incentive to address gender segregation, pay inequity and the lack of women in leadership. It is advocated as a useful way to develop women professionally in their careers. Women to women mentoring relationships are considered as important workplace relationship for women employees.

The focus of the present study was to extend the work of Devos (2004), who examined mentoring and its influence on the formation of women academics' professional identity at work. The Devos (2004) study has contributed to my understanding of power and its social effect on women academics performing their identity at work. To a certain extent, Devos (2004) ignored analysing informal and formal mentoring contexts and the material effect of power on professional identity. For this reason, I engaged in a poststructuralist discursive study, that focused on exploring mentoring from the two different socio-political contexts, informal and formal mentoring. I was interested in how New Zealand professional women made sense of themselves as professional individuals at work and as women in the workplace in relation to mentoring.

I invited professional women to be involved in open-ended conversational interviews about their experiences with mentoring. Interviewing granted the women the freedom and physical space to personally narrate their own story, in a manner that was appropriate for them. It gave the women an opportunity to voice their journey in becoming professional women, their career development and their sense of themselves. This type of interviewing was also appropriate, because the women became 'co-researchers', who were jointly involved in the creation of the interview with myself. The ability to socially create the 'text' – transcript, empowered the women to negotiate the nature of the questions, the agenda of topics that were to be discussed and the ability to refute claims or suggestions made in the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

The women narrated mentoring experiences as mentees and mentors and particular mentoring scenarios with women and men mentors through discourse. I was interested in discourse and the discursive resources women used to narrate their mentoring accounts. This served the basis for analysis.

The study contributes to the mentoring literature by shedding light on the complexity of mentoring. It suggests that mentoring is not a straightforward solution, as previously thought for resolving gendered issues for women at work. The complexity of mentoring lies in the ambiguous nature and definition of workplace mentoring for women. Professional women have multiple and contrasting ways of understanding mentoring and what it means for them at work. My study highlights that, in order to address the meaning of mentoring for women, the context in which mentoring takes place and the power relations exercised within hierarchical institutionalised mentoring relationships should be addressed. These issues confound how women interpret mentoring and affect the women's professional identity at work.

Similar to the Devos (2004) article, informal and formal mentoring was found to be less of an issue in the narratives of the women participants and had no relevance for how the women constructed their professional identity as women at work. The women were more concerned with mentoring as an interpersonal relationship with another person or group of people, who were committed to mentoring and forming a high-trust relationship with the women. The women discursively drew on mentoring as a 'connection' to communicate the significance and value they placed on mentoring as a relationship, and its influence on how they saw themselves at work. A 'connection' was understood and interpreted by the women in multiple and diverse ways.

The previous chapters discussed the complexity of mentoring as a 'connection'. The women gave detailed accounts of the important influence of the institutional work environment in which mentoring takes place and the power relations exercised within interactions with work managers, partners and employers as mentors. The work context limits the type of conversations and interactions the women can have with their mentors. The women are governed in institutional contexts. The women are limited in forming a meaningful connection with their mentors and it greatly affected the women's ability to connect with mentors outside of work dimensions. The influence of gender, gendered dynamics between women and men and how women perform their role as

mentee and mentor for other women within institutional settings, also add to the discussion of the complexity of mentoring for women at work.

My study illustrates that a more ‘feminine gendered connection’ is appropriate for women in the workplace. Women are not constrained by the limits of institutional mentoring or conversations purely pertaining to work. Women are more easily able to relate to mentors who acknowledge and understand women, and the various components of women’s lives such as being working mothers and understanding feminine issues such as women’s lack of confidence and feelings of self-doubt in the workplace. A ‘feminine connection’ is transformative for women’s professional development and identity, as it enables women to redefine how they see themselves as work.

It is possible that the multiple interpretations of mentoring as ‘connections’ and the complexity of mentoring are a consequence of the selection of the women participants. It is important to note that the women I interviewed were mid-career women, with a minimum of 8 years professional experience and were aged 32-55.

The women narrated several mentoring experiences and scenarios with a wide range of mentoring with women and men mentors, at various time points throughout their career. Some women spoke about alternative mentoring relationships compared to traditional one-to-one mentoring relationships. For instance, the women spoke about peer mentoring with a group of women friends, having a network of women mentors and reverse mentoring with younger women. Two women also considered their husbands as mentors, who provided a different work perspective for the women, while one woman considered the advice she received from her mother as influential for how she saw herself at work. In this sense, mentoring ‘connections’ extended into personal relationships, and mentoring was not necessarily constrained to workplace relationships.

The fact that the women were mid-career and had experienced several mentoring relationships, meant that the women could clearly articulate mentoring relationships that were of value to them, dysfunctional mentoring experiences, work contexts, the influence of gender and gendering of women at work, as key contributors to how they understood mentoring and themselves as professional women at work.

It was also evident to me that because the women were mid-career and had experienced various mentoring experiences beyond work relationships, they had a strong sense of who they were as women and how they defined themselves at work. This came through in the interviewing, when I would repeat a question back to the women, inquire into something or ask the women to clarify what they meant by a particular phrase. The women were very clear in their responses, and would even correct me when I referenced something back to them that was incorrect or was not quite right.

### *Reflexivity*

Mid-career women were significantly more interested in taking part in the study than women in early career stages. A few of the women who approached me via email mentioned that they completely understood the difficulties with recruiting participants and knew what I was going through. Some of the women had themselves conducted research for a PhD and had gone through the necessary stages of research: recruitment, contacting potential participants, organising a time to meet or setting a schedule, gaining consent, and re-contacting the participants with a summary of findings. The women were very willing and happy to take part in the study, and freely offered their time to be interviewed. They were also very willing to discuss the topic and procedures with them over the phone.

I felt that the mid-career women were more interested in sharing their experiences of mentoring with me and were more open to discuss problematic mentoring experiences, gendered scenarios with mentors, mentoring scenarios and the types of knowledge they gained. This could possibly be because the women were more likely to have encountered a number of mentoring situations, have an understanding of what mentoring means for their professional development, and have become mentors themselves.

A feminist poststructuralist approach to mentoring has opened up new ways of thinking about the complexities of mentoring for professional women at work and the implication on identity. This includes the significance of an institutional environment on mentoring relationships, the gendering of women at work, and the ability for women to form meaningful connections with others.

There are areas that would benefit from further study which build on the analysis of this project and the complexity of mentoring. My study reveals that a 'connection' and women's construction of a meaningful connection with mentors, are paramount for the mentoring relationship. Further work exploring the different constructions of a 'connection' and the gendered understandings of a mentoring 'connection' in the workplace would be worthwhile to investigate.

Another possible area for future research would be to gather the mentoring narratives of men as mentors for women employees, and to explore whether men used similar or different discursive strategies to account for their mentoring experiences with women. It would be interesting to investigate how women and men interpret a 'connection' in the workplace.

Lastly, research examining mentoring and the consequence on professional identity for Māori women would be crucial to gather the insights of New Zealand indigenous people. While I had initially envisioned the inclusion of Māori women as part of my study, my ethnicity as a European woman might have contributed to the recruitment process and the lack of Māori women in the study, or women of other cultures. The contact people that I knew and approached were themselves European, and the proportion of women they contacted were mostly New Zealand/ Pākehā and European. It would be fair to say that the women's understandings of mentoring and professional identity were informed by the social practices and production of mentoring knowledge from a Western culture. Therefore a Western ideology and definition of mentoring might have been normalised into the social practices of women at work, workplace policy and organisational incentives.

Pa Nephi Skipwith, the Kaumātua for the School of Psychology at Massey University, Albany, made it evident that Māori professional women would have a clear sense of their identity due to cultural heritage and ancestral Whakapapa (Māori genealogy) (Pa N. Skipwith, personal communication, August 20, 2015). It would be interesting to see whether the context of Māori culture would influence the understanding of mentoring, and how women make sense of mentoring on the outcome on professional identity. It would also be worthwhile to explore whether Māori women contextualised mentoring as a 'connection'.

The construct of mentoring for Māori women would also be critical within the context of leadership and a discourse of Māori women leadership. For instance, Forster, Palmer, and Barnett (2015) argue a leadership discourse has been perpetrated by a long standing recognition of workplace and developmental leadership, which privileges a Western view of leadership. However, Māori people understand alternative interpretations of leadership which are framed around indigenous women figures (Forster et al., 2015). Therefore it would seem crucial to address Māori leadership discourse, as it appears that discourse about women, understanding about identity and the social roles Māori women occupy, are interlaced through discourse about cultural practices and indigenous beliefs.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Screening questionnaire

Appendix B: Low Risk notification

Appendix C: Information sheet

Appendix D: Participant consent form

Appendix E: Interview guideline

Appendix F: Authority for release

## Appendix A



**Massey University**

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

### SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE TO DETERMINE THE APPROVAL PROCEDURE

(Part A and Part B of this questionnaire must both be completed)

Name: *Bianca Haamerle*  
Project Title: *Negotiating women's professional identity through informal and formal mentoring systems.*

This questionnaire should be completed following, or as part of, the discussion of ethical issues.

#### Part A

The statements below are being used to determine the risk of your project causing physical or psychological harm to participants and whether the nature of the harm is minimal and no more than is normally encountered in daily life. The degree of risk will then be used to determine the appropriate approval procedure.

If you are in any doubt you are encouraged to submit an application to one of the University's ethics committees.

#### Does your Project involve any of the following?

(Please answer all questions. Please circle either YES or NO for each question)

#### Risk of Harm

1. Situations in which the researcher may be at risk of harm.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
2. Use of questionnaire or interview, whether or not it is anonymous which might reasonably be expected to cause discomfort, embarrassment, or psychological or spiritual harm to the participants.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
3. Processes that are potentially disadvantageous to a person or group, such as the collection of information which may expose the person/group to discrimination.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
4. Collection of information of illegal behaviour(s) gained during the research which could place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, professional or personal relationships.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
5. Collection of blood, body fluid, tissue samples, or other samples.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
6. Any form of exercise regime, physical examination, deprivation (e.g. sleep, dietary).	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
7. The administration of any form of drug, medicine (other than in the course of standard medical procedure), placebo.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
8. Physical pain, beyond mild discomfort.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
9. Any Massey University teaching which involves the participation of Massey University students for the demonstration of procedures or phenomena which have a potential for harm.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>

### Informed and Voluntary Consent

10. Participants whose identity is known to the researcher giving oral consent rather than written consent (if participants are anonymous you may answer No).	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
11. Participants who are unable to give informed consent.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
12. Research on your own students/pupils.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
13. The participation of children (seven (7) years old or younger).	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
14. The participation of children under sixteen (16) years old where active parental consent is not being sought.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
15. Participants who are in a dependent situation, such as those who are under custodial care, or residents of a hospital, nursing home or prison or patients highly dependent on medical care.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
16. Participants who are vulnerable.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
17. The use of previously collected identifiable personal information or research data for which there was no explicit consent for this research.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
18. The use of previously collected biological samples for which there was no explicit consent for this research.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>

### Privacy/Confidentiality Issue

19. Any evaluation of organisational services or practices where information of a personal nature may be collected and where participants or the organisation may be identified.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
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### Deception

20. Deception of the participants, including concealment and covert observations.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
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### Conflict of Interest

21. Conflict of interest situation for the researcher (e.g. is the researcher also the lecturer/teacher/treatment-provider/colleague or employer of the research participants or is there any other power relationship between the researcher and research participants?)	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
---	---

### Compensation to Participants

22. Payments or other financial inducements (other than reasonable reimbursement of travel expenses or time) to participants.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
---	---

### Procedural

23. A requirement by an outside organisation (e.g. a funding organisation or a journal in which you wish to publish) for Massey University Human Ethics Committee approval.	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input checked="" type="radio"/>
---	---

## Part B

### FOR PROPOSED HEALTH AND DISABILITY RESEARCH ONLY

Not all health and disability research requires review by a Health and Disability Ethics Committee (HDEC).

Your study is likely to require HDEC review if it involves:

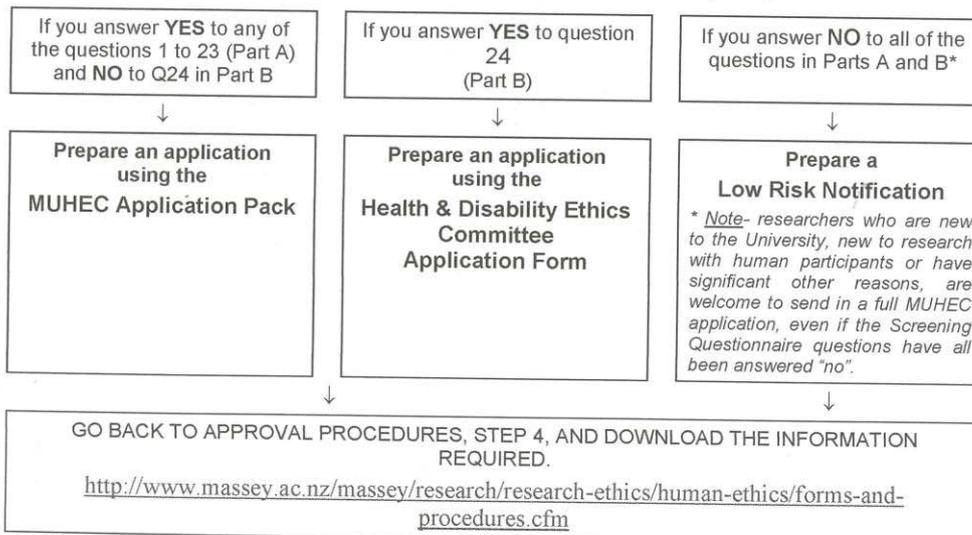
- human participants recruited in their capacity as:
  - consumers of health or disability support services; or
  - relatives or caregivers of such consumers; or
  - volunteers in clinical trials; or
- human tissue; or
- health information.

In order to establish whether or not HDEC review is required: (i) read the Massey University Digest of the HDEC Scope of Review standard operating procedure; (ii) work through the 'Does your study require HDEC review?' flowchart; and (iii) answer Question 24 below.

If you are still unsure whether your project requires HDEC approval, please email the Ministry of Health for advice ([hdec@moh.govt.nz](mailto:hdec@moh.govt.nz)) and keep a copy of the response for your records.

24. Is HDEC review required for this study?	YES	<input checked="" type="radio"/> NO
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Select the appropriate procedure to be used (choose one option):



## Appendix B



### MASSEY UNIVERSITY ALBANY

18 August 2015

Bianca Haemmerle  
150 Paremoremo Road  
Lucas Heights  
Auckland 0632

Dear Bianca

**Re: Negotiating women's professional identity through informal and formal mentoring systems**

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 18 August 2015.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

**A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:**

*"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 356 9099, extn 86015, e-mail [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)".*

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Brian T Finch (Dr)  
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and  
Director (Research Ethics)**

cc Professor Mandy Morgan  
School of Psychology  
Palmerston North

Professor James Liu  
Head of School of Psychology  
Palmerston North

## Appendix C



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

### **Negotiating women's professional identity through informal and formal mentoring systems**

#### **INFORMATION SHEET**

##### **Introduction**

My name is Bianca Haemmerle. I am currently completing a Master of Science (MSc) degree at Massey University. Professor Mandy Morgan, from the School of Psychology, is supervising my project. Our contact details are at the end of this information sheet.

##### **What is the project about?**

My study is intended to explore the lived experience of mentoring and how professional women make sense of, negotiate and manage their professional identities at work under different mentoring contexts. This research aims to address the contextual setting of mentoring and how this influences your sense of self as a professional woman.

##### **Can I participate?**

You are invited to participate in this study if you are:

- A professional woman with at least 2 years working experience in your profession
- 18 years and above
- Have experienced informal/formal mentoring within your profession
- Are interested in sharing your understanding of your professional identity
- Proficient in English

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

A contact person known by the researcher will have approached you with this information sheet. If you have any queries regarding this study and/or wish to participate, then please feel free to contact the researcher using the contact details below.

You will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute interview (digitally-recorded and transcribed) exploring your mentoring experiences and professional identity at work. Depending on your location, a study room at Massey University Library (Albany) has been made available for interviewing. However, if this is not convenient for you, an alternate location will be arranged. Later, at a time convenient for you, you will be provided the opportunity to read through your interview transcript and discuss/amend any information with the researcher. A summary of findings will be delivered to you once the study is completed. The findings will be presented to you either electronically via email or delivered to you via post.

##### **What will happen to my personal information?**

This study is confidential. Audiotapes will only be used for accuracy during the transcription phase and thereafter will be immediately disposed of. You will be asked to sign an *authority for the release of transcripts*. The edited transcripts will not be used in reports and publications should you not be happy for the content to be shared. All information collected

during this research is only accessible to those directly involved in the study, the researcher and supervisor. Interview material and coding data will be stored on a password protected file on the researcher's computer. Consent forms will be stored separately to interview data in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the supervisor at Massey University (Palmerston North). You are advised that interview material and consent forms will be held for 5 years, after which they will be appropriately disposed of.

The research report may be submitted to any academic journal, but no identifiable information will be made available to the public. I will not attach your name to your interview transcript and code-names will be used.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

*You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:*

- *Decline to answer any particular question;*
- *Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;*
- *Withdraw from the study up until the interview transcript has received your final signature;*
- *Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*
- *Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.*

**Who can I contact?**

If you have any queries about the project and/or wish to participate please contact:

Researcher  
Bianca Haemmerle  
Phone: 0210582983  
Email: bc.haem@gmail.com

Supervisor  
Mandy Morgan  
Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 85058  
Email: c.a.morgan@massey.ac.nz

*This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 86015, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.*

## Appendix D



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

### **Negotiating women's professional identity through informal and formal mentoring systems**

#### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

1. I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.  
My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
3. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
4. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name - printed** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Interview guideline

Thank you for participating in this research. I am most interested in hearing about your experiences with mentoring and how they have affected your professional development.

How has your mentoring experience, as a mentee/mentor or both been like for you?

How did you come to be involved with mentoring?

Prompts:

How often do you (did you) meet with your mentor?

Who usually arranged the meetings? Why?

What kinds of things were you most comfortable talking about?

What did you enjoy most about meeting with your mentor?

Were there any mentoring meetings where you felt you'd been misunderstood?

What happened in that case (if there is one)?

Were there any mentoring meetings that made you feel uncomfortable? Can you tell me what happened?

Can you tell me about your most valuable mentoring experience? What happened?

Prompts:

What do you believe has contributed to your sense of success in your career?

Is there anything you think you might not have achieved if you hadn't been involved with mentoring?

How do you think mentoring has influenced your career goals?

Do you think there is anything particularly important about the fact that your mentor was another woman/a man?

Can you tell me about your experiences of being both a professional and a woman practising [name field: law, nursing, social work, education]?

Prompts:

How would you describe your motivation to get into [field]?

Do you think there are any tensions between professional [field] and the expectations of you as a woman?

Can you think of a time in your profession, that you felt your contribution was particularly well respected? What happened?

Have you ever had any hesitations about becoming a [occupation]?

What is the most satisfying work that you do as a [occupation]?

Are there any ways that you think mentoring has contributed to your sense of yourself as a [occupation]?

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Thanks for your time... it's been really helpful and interesting to talk with you.

Appendix F



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

**Negotiating women’s professional identity through informal and formal mentoring systems**

**AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS**

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name - printed** \_\_\_\_\_