

# **A STUDY OF WOMEN IN ATYPICAL CAREERS**

by

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that I have edited the language of Jolene van den Berg's dissertation for a Master's degree.

I am qualified to have done so, having taught English at Matriculation and First Year SA University level, as well as United Kingdom GCSE, A and A/S level, for approximately 40 years, as well as having been an Associate Editor of a national magazine for two years. I am in possession of the following academic qualifications: BA (Rhodes) (English and History); Hons BA (SA) (English); Hons BTh (SA) and HED (SA).

I trust that this is what you require.

(The Revd) David J. Swanepoel

## **REMARKS**

The reader is reminded of the following:

- This dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article.
- The references as well as the editorial style of this dissertation comply with the requirements as prescribed by the Publication Manual (5th edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA). This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University, Vanderbijlpark Campus.

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## SUMMARY

**Title:** A study of women in atypical careers.

**Keywords:** Gender enactment, gender-based micro culture, person-group fit, gender-based macro culture, person-organisation fit, self-efficacy, perceived stress, career decisions

As a result of structural changes in the global economy, many organisations are faced with changing workforce demographics. The global workforce is changing not only in terms of age and race, but also in terms of gender (International Labour Office, 2009). This change is referred to as the feminization of labour, and it poses many challenges to organisations as women are entering careers that have previously been predominated by men such as medicine, pharmacy, accounting, engineering and mining (Blau & Kahn, 2000). The retention of women in atypical careers has become a growing concern, as these women are often faced with challenges in the workplace, such as sexual discrimination, hostility and resentment from their co-workers, and physical violence in the workplace (Cognard-Black, 2004). These obstacles encountered by women in atypical positions result in their experiencing difficulty fitting into their groups at work and their organisations as a whole, which increases their turnover intentions (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

For effective retention of women in atypical positions in an effort to secure a truly diverse workforce, organisations must be aware of the factors that affect their career decision making. Young and Hurlic (2007) have proposed a model of gender enactment and fit in relation to career decisions of women in atypical positions. They suggest that gender enactment of employees in atypical positions, in relation to the gender-based micro-culture of their work groups ultimately affects their person-group fit, person-organisation fit and career decision making. The main objective, therefore, of this research has been to explore the constructs outlined in the model of Young and Hurlic (2007) within the South African context and to establish their influence on the career decision making of a sample of South African employees in atypical positions.

The research has been explorative in nature, and a qualitative design was used to achieve the research objectives. Participants were invited to participate in the research on a voluntary

basis, and they were selected by means of a purposive sampling method. Criteria that were decided upon for the selection of participants were that participants needed to be female, permanently employed and occupying atypical occupations within the same organisation. Based on these criteria, a total population of ten employees was included in the research study ( $N=10$ ). Qualitative data was collected by means of unstructured and semi-structured interviews.

The results indicated that awareness, group acceptance, person-group fit, perceived stress, and person-organisation fit were the key determinants of the career decisions of participants. Awareness was found to be related to group acceptance, whereas group acceptance was identified as being related to person-group fit. Person-group and person-organisation fit were found to result in participants considering lateral career moves, choosing to stay in their current positions, or seeking promotions. Conversely, perceived stress was found to have a negative impact in the career decision making of participants, as all participants who reported perceived stress planned to leave their respective organisation.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This mini-dissertation explores the factors that are important in the career decision making of women in atypical careers. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the research and explains the research objectives. Chapter 2 consists of the research article, and Chapter 3 includes conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

### **1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

#### **1.1.1 Overview of the problem**

Organisations worldwide are currently faced with the challenges brought about by changing workforce demographics (International Labour Office, 2009). Remaining competitive in the current business arena requires optimal utilization of employees that differ in terms of race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, origin and gender (Shore et al., 2009). According to Standing (1999), one of the most challenging changes occurring worldwide is that of global feminization. This implies a change in the division of labour, suggesting an increase in female labour participation and a decrease in male participation (Standing, 1999).

The shift in labour market participation is evident in estimates presented by the International Labour Office (2009) which indicate growth in female employment as opposed to a decrease in male employment from 1998 to 2008. A similar trend is obvious in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the male employment to population ratio has decreased from 86,2% to 85,4%, and the female employment to population ratio has increased from 60,8% to 62,9% over the same period (International Labour Office, 2009).

Blau and Kahn (2000) identify several reasons for the increase in global female labour participation. Technological advancements are seen as a main determinant of the feminization of labour as they have provided women with more flexibility in terms of working hours and the opportunity to work from home. This has enabled women to maintain work-life balance and fulfil their domestic responsibilities (Blau & Kahn, 2000). Furthermore, anti-discriminatory legislation, coupled with improvements in female education has equipped women with sufficient knowledge and skills to enter the labour market (Goldin, 1990).

Krueger (1993) argues that economic restructuring may also be responsible for the increase in female labour participation. The economic focus has shifted away from manufacturing towards the service sector, raising the demand for less gendered skills such as computing and administrative abilities more commonly held by women thereby increasing the demand for female labour.

International female employment is mainly segregated into the service industries because most women still prefer traditional female careers (International Labour Office, 2009). However, there is a significant increase in females interested in traditionally male dominated fields. According to Levin and Mattis (2006) there has been a significant increase in women's enrolment in MBA programmes and traditionally male fields of study such as science and engineering. This has resulted in women entering traditionally male dominated careers such as construction, manufacturing and psychology (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995).

Women's interest in non-traditional careers can be explained by looking into the benefits that these careers offer. According to Blau and Kahn (2000) non-traditional careers offer higher wages and benefits than traditional female careers. Furthermore, non-traditional careers provide women with more advancement opportunities and greater work autonomy, resulting in increased levels of job satisfaction (Blau & Kahn, 2000). Levin and Mattis (2006) add to this argument by stating that women often perform better than their male counterparts in non-traditional careers because they have smaller hands and body structures, making them better equipped to work with small parts and in little compartments. This ultimately increases the demand for female workers in non-traditional careers.

Upon entering predominantly male careers, women are often faced with numerous difficulties in their work groups (Cognard-Black, 2004). In his study about the turnover intentions of "token men" doing sex-atypical work, Cognard-Black (2004) discovered that it is common for workers in typical positions to sabotage the work of individuals who are in atypical positions and to exclude them from conversations during lunch breaks, thereby making these employees feel as if they do not belong. In addition, Sargent (2000) found that employees in atypical positions may encounter suspicion about their sexual orientation, suffer from severe role conflict, and experience feelings of marginalisation and alienation from their work groups. This, ultimately, results in these employees experiencing poor person-group fit and person-organisation fit, which increases the likelihood of their leaving the organisation (Sargent, 2000). This poses a unique challenge to organisations worldwide, as the retention of

employees in atypical positions is crucial to maximize the benefits held by a diverse workforce.

In their research about the impact of gender and gender-related behaviour on person-organisational fit and career decisions, Young and Hurlic (2007) suggest several reasons for employees in atypical positions experiencing poor group- and organisational fit. They imply that the gender enactments of these employees, in conjunction with the gender-based micro-culture of their work groups, have a significant impact on their person-group- and person-organisation fit, which ultimately influences their career decisions (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

Since Young and Hurlic's (2007) research is primarily theoretical in nature, they suggest that empirical verification of the aforementioned proposed relationships would yield valuable information as very little has been done to assess gender and its impact on group- and organisational fit.

By understanding the impact of gender-related behaviours in the workplace, an organisation can truly begin to modify its culture and establish an equitable, open working environment where individual differences can be respected, valued and accepted (Parkes, Bochner, & Schneider, 2001). This would in turn, empower employees in atypical positions to participate fully in the work environment and avoid unhealthy conflict in their work groups, and so ultimately improve their personal wellbeing (Eylon & Bamberger, 2000).

The aim of this study is to explore the application of Young and Hurlic's (2007) model of gender enactment and fit in relation to career decisions of employees in atypical positions within a South African organisation.

### **1.1.2 Literature review**

A literature study was conducted to explore the constructs outlined in the model of Young and Hurlic (2007). This model is represented in the figure below.

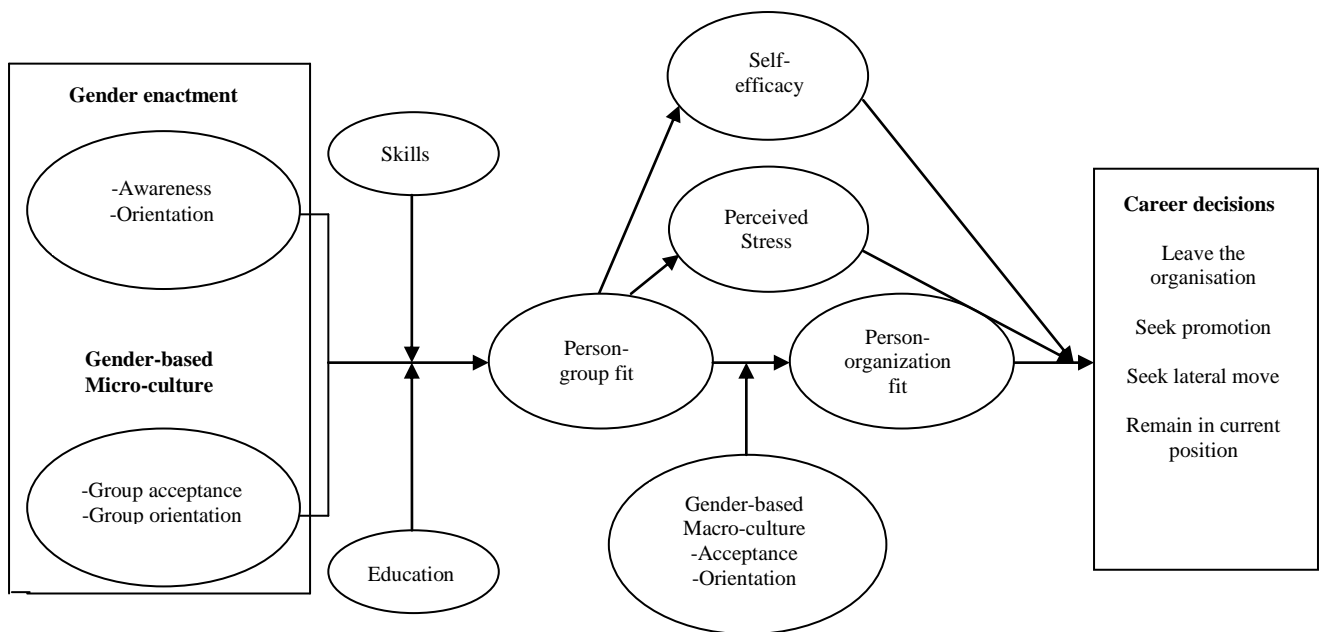


Figure 1: A model of gender enactment and fit in relation to career decisions (adapted from Young and Hurlic, 2007).

The constructs outlined in the model of Young and Hurlic (2007) are well represented in literature. Necessary background information, definitions and explanations of constructs, as well as possible influences these constructs may have on one another, will be outlined in the section below.

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), biological sex is ascribed by biology, whereas gender is an achieved status constructed through psychological, cultural and social means. This implies that there are certain behaviours that have been associated with masculinity and others with femininity (Young & Hurlic, 2007). Gender impacts on how members of society develop ideas about gender appropriate behaviour, jobs and activities (Pullen & Simpson, 2009).

Laslett and Brenner (1989) argue that, even though there is a connection between them, biological sex is not the main driver of gender-related behaviour. This implies that a woman may engage in typically masculine behaviours, while a man may act in a manner considered feminine. The decision to engage or not engage in masculine or feminine behaviour relies on the demands of the situation as well as others' expectations of gender appropriate behaviours (Laslett & Brenner, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Being aware of situational demands and others' expectations in terms of appropriate gender-related behaviour enables individuals to adjust their gender-related behaviours accordingly (Young & Hurlic, 2006).

*Gender enactment*, also labelled gender display (Goffman, 1977), is the composite of an individual's *awareness* that situations demand gender-related behaviour adjustment and an individual's *orientation* towards masculine and feminine behaviours (Young & Hurlic, 2007). Gender enactments occur as a direct result of interaction between awareness of situational demands and an individual's gender orientation (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

Awareness refers to the ability to perceive and be conscious of events, objects and sensory patterns (Quinlan, Schwartz, Walker, & Zeitlin, 1990). This implies that an individual with high awareness will recognize situational demands that require gender-related behaviour adjustment, whereas an individual with low awareness will not be aware of these situational requirements (Young & Hurlic, 2007). One's awareness alone does not dictate one's behaviours. According to Snyder (1974), individual behaviour is determined by both an individual's awareness levels, and self-monitoring behaviour. Also, according to Snyder (1974), self-monitoring behaviour occurs when individuals consider situational cues to adjust their behaviour. A high self-monitoring individual will, therefore, adjust his or her behaviour according to signals received from people or situations, whereas a low self-monitoring individual will be less attuned to the situation and reactions of others (Snyder, 1974). Awareness enables individuals to evaluate the organisational environment and make proper behavioural adjustments in order to fit successfully into a work group or organisation (Goleman, 2004).

Gender orientation assumes that masculinity and femininity are rooted in actual differences between men and women and that gender differences are based on personality characteristics which result in gender-related behaviour (Bem, 1974). Bem's sex-role inventory, developed in 1974, can be described as one of the first sex-role inventories to classify personality characteristics according to gender orientation. Personality characteristics that are normally associated with masculine gender orientations include rationality, independence and general competence, whereas characteristics normally associated with femininity include traits such as cheerfulness, reliability and helpfulness (Bem, 1974). Bem's sex-role inventory is the only one of its kind, and it is still widely used today. Very little other research has been done on personality characteristics and their relation to gender orientation.

*Gender-based micro-cultures* are referred to by Young and Hurlic (2007) as subcultures existing within an organisation that are unique in terms of culture and accepted gender-related behaviours. These micro-cultures are divided into two primary components, including

tolerance of gender-related behaviour different from group expectations and the collective gender orientation of the group (Karakowsky, McBey, & Miller, 2004). These components are labelled by Karakowsky, McBey, and Miller (2004) as *group acceptance* and *group orientation*.

*Group acceptance* of gender-related behaviours atypical to behaviours of the group have been found to impact positively on the altruism of individuals, as well as on team performance (Edwards & Cooper, 1990; Tierney, Bauer, & Potter, 2002). Furthermore, a high level of group acceptance is likely to result in a strong sense of person-group fit, whereas a lack of group acceptance is associated with lower levels of person-group fit (Karakowsky, McBey, & Miller, 2004).

According to Lynn-Martin and Dinella (2002) a schema is a cognitive or mental framework that helps individuals to organise and interpret information by means of pre-existing ideas and beliefs. A gender schema refers to a knowledge structure about sexes and their characteristics which facilitate how information surrounding gender is received and encoded, and how it is retrieved from memory and organised in memory (Lynn-Martin & Dinella, 2002). *Group orientation* refers to the existence of a collective gender orientation among team members who share similar gender schemas (Edwards & Cooper, 1990). According to Scherer and Petrick (2001), team members with a collective gender orientation perform better than those who do not have a collective gender orientation, and are likely to support gender-related behaviours congruent to the sex-type of the group. Therefore, if an individual's gender orientation is congruent with the collective gender orientation of the group, a stronger perceived person-group fit will result (Scherer & Petrick, 2001). For example, a woman with a strong female gender orientation will experience strong perceived person-group fit if the gender orientation of her workgroup is also female.

Young and Hurlic (2007) suggest that individuals adapt their gender-related behaviour based on their gender orientation, awareness, and the micro-culture of their work group. In the case of a natural fit between an individual's gender orientation and the micro-culture of the group, person-group fit will be high and very little behaviour adjustment is needed (Scherer & Petrick, 2001). The opposite also holds true if an individual's gender orientation is incongruent with the micro-culture of the group and the individual has low awareness of the need for behaviour adjustment, or, when the micro culture is intolerant of incongruent gender-related behaviour, there is likely to be a low perceived person-group fit (Scherer &

Petrick, 2001). For example, a woman who is unaware of the fact that her feminine behaviours are incongruent with, and not tolerated by, her work-group will not adjust her behaviours, and a low person-group fit will result.

An individual working in a position typically held by members of the opposite sex is not always perceived as competent and benefitting the position (Heilman, Bock, & Martell, 2005). Daley (1996) argues that *skills* and *education* play a large role in improving chances of career success and group acceptance, especially for women. According to Daley (1996), women's career advancement is more reliant on skills and education than the career advancement of men, and they suggest that high levels of skills and education amongst women have a positive influence on person-group fit in non-traditional jobs. Therefore, skills and education have an impact on the relationship between gender enactment and person-group fit (Daley, 1996).

According to Kristof (1996), fit can be viewed from three perspectives, person-job fit, person-group fit and person-organisation fit. Person-job fit is the extent to which an individual's skills, interests, and personal characteristics are consistent with requirements of his or her job (Kristof, 1996). *Person-group fit* refers to the extent to which an individual perceives his or her behaviours and characteristics to be compatible with other group or team members (Kristof, 1996). Kristof-Brown, Barrick, and Kay-Stevens (2005) argue that person-group fit is concerned with the gender-related behaviour engaged in by an individual within the context of the group and not with the congruency between biological sex and gender displays. This implies that an individual may engage in behaviour incongruent with his or her biological sex and still experience strong group-fit, given that the team engages in similar behaviour (Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Kay-Stevens, 2005).

According to Young and Hurlic (2007), the extent to which an individual experiences person-group fit results in emotional outcomes including *perceived stress* and *self-efficacy*, which are likely to play a part in career decision making. When an individual perceives a lack of ability to meet actual or perceived demands, an imbalance is created. This imbalance has been identified by Edwards and Cooper (1990) as perceived stress. Edwards and Cooper (1990) propose that relationships at work are a significant source of job-related stress, which implies that person-group fit has an impact on perceived stress. Furthermore, women in male dominated industries also report higher levels of stress than men owing to tokenism, discrimination and other stressors in the organisation, indicating a causal relationship

between gender-related behaviour, perceived fit, and perceived stress (Edwards & Cooper, 1990). Young and Hurlic (2007) suggest that low perceived group-fit results in higher job-related stress.

Bandura (1986) defines *self-efficacy* as the belief individuals hold about their abilities to perform a specific task, or achieve a specific goal. Perceived ability is not the only influence of self-efficacy. According to Kane and Montgomery (1998), the way individuals react towards one another, as well as the way individuals perceive others' reactions towards themselves, influences their self perceptions, feelings of self-efficacy and confidence with regards to job-related performance. DeJong, Bouhuys, and Barnhoorn (1999) found self-efficacy to be an important consideration in career decision making which is highly dependent on group interaction. For this reason, Young and Hurlic (2007) propose that self-efficacy will be influenced by person-group fit.

Young and Hurlic (2007) suggest that person-group fit has a significant influence on perceived organisational fit. Carless (2005) distinguishes between complementary and supplementary organisational fit. Complementary fit occurs when a mutually beneficial agreement is reached between the individual and organisation, enabling each party to reach their individual goals (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). When a similarity exists between the values, characteristics or culture of the individual and the organisation, a supplementary fit occurs (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). *Person-organisation fit* is often focused on in recruitment and selection procedures, and it is based on the perception that a candidate fits into the organisation in terms of personality, skills, values and the environment (Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001). Person-organisation fit can be viewed from two perspectives, that of others and that of the individual. This is referred to by Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, and Geirnaert (2001) as actual and perceived fit, of which the latter plays the most significant role in influencing career decision making (Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001).

The term gender-based macro-culture is used by Young and Hurlic (2007) to define the broader and more general perceptions employees hold about the culture in other parts of the organisation. It refers to an individual's perception of acceptance of diverse gender-related behaviour in the organisation labelled *macro-culture acceptance*, and the gender orientation of the organisation as a whole, called macro-culture orientation.

Carless (2005) proposes that the macro-culture of an organisation influences the relationship between person-organisation fit and *career decision making* because an individual's perception of opportunities in the organisation plays an important role in actual and perceived career options. He argues that, when perceiving low person-organisation fit in a current job, an individual's decision to make a lateral career move within the organisation or leave the organisation depends to a large extent on the organisation's macro-culture. A macro-culture that is intolerant of diverse gender-related behaviours might leave little opportunity for individuals to make lateral career moves (Carless, 2005). A macro-culture which is perceived to be accepting of atypical gender-related behaviour may create the perception of openness, encouraging individuals to seek opportunities within the organisation, rather than leaving the organisation (Carless, 2005).

Similar to a team or work group forming a collective gender orientation, an organisation as a whole can also be perceived as having a collective gender orientation (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). This pertains to the actual gender orientation or to the predominant gender-based behaviour of the majority of organisational members (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Young and Hurlic (2007) argue that the perceived collective gender orientation of an organisation may impact on an individual's decision to remain with or leave an organisation.

To conclude, an individual is likely to seek a promotion or undergo a lateral move within an organisation if he or she experiences low person-group and person-organisation fit, high stress and low self-efficacy within a micro-culture that is accepting of atypical gender-related behaviour (Young & Hurlic, 2007). Conversely, a situation characterised by low fit, high stress and low self-efficacy within a macro-culture that is intolerant of atypical gender-related behaviour is likely to result in an individual leaving the organisation (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

In cases where person-group and person-organisation fit is high, it is more likely for an individual to remain with the organisation by seeking lateral moves and promotions regardless of the macro-culture acceptance (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

Based on the above literature review and problem statement, it can be concluded that the objective of this research is to explore the interactions between gender enactment, person-group fit, person-organisation fit and the career decisions of females in atypical careers.

The following research questions can be formulated based on the above-mentioned description of the research problem:

- How applicable is Young and Hurlic's (2007) model of gender enactment, fit, and career decisions to South African women in atypical careers?
- How are the constructs of Young & Hurlic's (2007) model, and the interactions amongst these constructs, conceptualised from the literature?
- What are the interactions between the constructs of Young & Hurlic's (2007) model in a sample of women in atypical careers?

In order to answer the above research questions, the following research objectives are set.

## **1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives are divided into general and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The general objective of this research is explore the constructs outlined in Young and Hurlic's (2007) model within the South African context, and to establish the influence of gender and gender-related behaviour to person-group fit, person-organisation fit and career decision making of South African women in atypical careers.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of this research are:

- To determine the applicability of Young and Hurlic's model of gender enactment, fit, and career decisions to South African women in atypical careers;
- To conceptualise the constructs represented in Young and Hurlic's (2007) model and the interactions between these constructs in the literature; and
- To determine the interactions between the constructs of Young and Hurlic's (2007) model in a sample of women in atypical careers.

### **1.3 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH**

A paradigm refers to established research traditions in a particular research discipline (Mouton & Marais, 1992). A paradigm is a model that refers to the way the researcher views his or her literature. This implies that paradigms and their supporting theory direct the research (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005). A certain paradigm perspective, including the intellectual climate and the market of intellectual resources, directs the research (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

#### **1.3.1 Intellectual climate**

The intellectual climate refers to the selection of non-epistemological value systems or beliefs that are underwritten in any given period in a discipline (Mouton & Marais, 1992). It refers to a collection of beliefs, values and assumptions that do not directly deal with the epistemological views of the scientific research practice as it normally originates in a non-epistemological context (Mouton & Marais, 1992). Since intellectual climate takes paradigms and assumptions into account it can be said that it will direct the research.

#### **1.3.2 Discipline**

This research falls within the boundaries of the behavioural sciences and, more specifically, Industrial Psychology. Industrial Psychology refers to the scientific study of people within their work setting. This involves scientific observation, evaluation, optimal utilization and influencing of normal and, to a lesser degree, unusual behaviour in interaction with the environment (physical, psychological, social and organisational) as visible in the world of work (Muchinsky, Kriek, & Schreuder, 2002).

The sub-disciplines of Industrial Psychology that are focused on in this research are personnel psychology, organisational psychology and vocational psychology. Personnel psychology focuses on measuring and predicting differences in behaviour and job performance of individuals (Muchinsky, Kriek, & Schreuder, 2002). This sub-discipline is applicable to the research as it is concerned with issues on an individual level such as intention to leave. Organisational psychology focuses on the influence of the organisational context on the attitudes and behaviours of organisational members (Muchinsky, Kriek, & Schreuder, 2002). The sub-discipline focuses on role-related behaviour, pressures that groups can impose on individuals, and social and group influences on individual behaviour

(Muchinsky, Kriek, & Schreuder, 2002). It can, therefore, be said that this sub-discipline is applicable to the research.

According to Muchinsky, Kriek, and Schreuder (2002), vocational psychology considers problems experienced by employees at work. This sub-discipline is applicable to the research because the constructs of perceived stress, self-efficacy, person-group fit, and person-organisation fit all relate to problems commonly experienced by employees in the workplace.

### **1.3.3 Meta-theoretical assumptions**

Three paradigms are relevant to this research. Firstly, the literature review is done within the behaviouristic paradigm, and, secondly, the empirical study is done within phenomenological and humanistic paradigms.

#### **1.3.3.1 Literature review**

The behaviouristic paradigm is a theoretical orientation based on the premise that scientific psychology should study only observable behaviour (Weiten, 2007). It is based on the assumptions that scientific claims must be verified, that a relationship exists between stimuli and responses, and that environmental determinism emphasizes the importance of the individual's environment when studying behaviour (Weiten, 2007). Since this study focuses on analysing observable behaviour of individuals within their immediate work groups and wider organisational context, it can be implied that the behaviouristic paradigm is applicable to the research.

#### **1.3.3.2 Empirical study**

In the phenomenological paradigm, the researcher is concerned with the meaning a person attributes to his or her experiences of reality, his or her world, and his or her relationships. An individual's cognitive experience must be understood and circumscribed because it is only through this that the true essence of the person can be realized (Rothmann, Gerber, Lubbe, Sieberhagen, & Rothmann, 1998). The phenomenological paradigm is applicable to this study as the aim of the research is to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of participants within their work groups, and the influence thereof with regards to person-group fit, person-organisation fit, and career-related decision making.

According to De Carvalho (1991), the humanistic paradigm is a school of thought that views humans as free agents with the ability to make choices and be intentional and aware during their actions. The humanistic paradigm assumes that people can be influenced by their relationships with others, and that they are more than the sum of their parts, which is considered an essential for well-being (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2005). Since this study will explore behavioural choices of individuals based on their awareness of situational demands and the outcomes of these behavioural choices in relation to person-group fit, person-organisation fit and career decision making, it can be assumed that the humanistic paradigm is applicable to the research.

### **1.3.4 Market of intellectual resources**

The market of intellectual resources refers to that collection of beliefs that directly involves the epistemological status of scientific statements. The two main types of epistemological beliefs are the theoretical beliefs and the methodological beliefs (Mouton & Marais, 1992) which are outlined below.

#### **1.3.4.1 Theoretical beliefs**

Theoretical beliefs can be described as all beliefs that can make testable judgements regarding social phenomenon. These are all judgements regarding the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of human phenomenon and include all conceptual definitions and all models and theories of the research (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

##### **1.3.4.1.1 Conceptual definitions**

The relevant conceptual definitions are given below:

*Gender enactment* is defined by Goffman (1977) as the composite of an individual’s awareness that situations demand gender-related behaviour adjustment and an individual’s orientation towards masculine and feminine behaviours.

*Micro-cultures* are conceptualised by Young and Hurlic (2007) as subcultures existing within an organisation that are unique in terms of culture and accepted behaviours.

*Person-group fit* is the extent to which an individual perceives his or her characteristics, behaviours, and interactions to be compatible with other group or team members (Chuang & Sackett, 2005).

The term *macro-culture* is used by Young and Hurlic (2007) to define the broader and more general perceptions employees hold about the culture in other parts of an organisation.

*Perceived stress* is defined by Edwards and Cooper (1990) as the imbalance created when an individual perceives a lack of ability to meet actual or perceived demands.

*Self-efficacy* is defined by Bandura (1986) as the levels of confidence individuals have in their ability to execute courses of action or attain specific performance outcomes. Bandura (1986) suggests that self-efficacy judgments derive from the cognitive processing of information from four principle sources, including performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal.

*Person-organisation fit* is defined by Kristof (1996) as the compatibility between people and organisations that occurs when at least one entity provides what the other needs or they share similar fundamental characteristics, or both.

A *career decision* refers to the process of making an informed career choice based on an individual's personal experiences (Harren, 1979).

#### **1.3.4.1.2 Models and theories**

A model is defined as a system of hypothetical principles that represents the characters of a phenomenon from which predictions can be made (Mouton & Marais, 1992). A model can be used to suggest new areas of research because certain relationships and dimensions are emphasised (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

A theory is defined as a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

The model to be utilised in this study is Young and Hurlic's (2007) model of gender enactment and fit in relation to career decisions of employees in atypical positions (see section 1.1.2).

#### **1.3.4.1.3 Methodological beliefs**

Methodological beliefs include all methods, techniques and approaches that are utilized in the research process (Mouton & Marais, 1992). The empirical study is presented within the phenomenological and humanistic paradigms. The phenomenological paradigm assumes that individuals attach meaning to their subjective experiences of reality, their world, and their relationships, and that these experiences must be understood to uncover their personal points of view which are often neglected or concealed (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2005).

The root assumption of the humanistic paradigm is that humans play an active role in actualising their inherent potential and that they can be trusted to follow a positive course in becoming the best they can be (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2005). This paradigm also assumes that all humans have a need for acceptance, affiliation and power (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2005).

### **1.4 RESEARCH METHOD**

This research, pertaining to the specific objectives, consists of two phases, namely a literature review and an empirical study.

#### **1.4.1 Phase 1: Literature review**

In phase 1 a complete review regarding gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture, skills, education, person-group fit, gender-based macro-culture, perceived stress, self-efficacy, person-organisation fit and career decisions is done. The sources that will be consulted include:

- Journal Articles
- Textbooks
- Internet

#### **1.4.2 Phase 2: Empirical study**

The empirical study consists of the research design, participants, data collection method, and statistical analysis.

### **1.4.2.1 Research design**

The aim of the research design is to direct the study so that it is conducted in an appropriate manner (Muchinsky, Kriek, & Schreuder, 2002). A design is used to structure the research to show how all the major parts of the research project (participants, measuring battery, and statistical analysis) work together to address the central research questions (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

In this instance, the research can be classified as descriptive and explorative in terms of its objectives. Therefore, exploratory and descriptive research methods will be utilised for this study. Exploratory research is described by De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, and Delpont (2005) as a method of gaining insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individual. This form of research will be applicable to this study. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, and Delpont (2005), exploratory research is applicable when limited information on the topic is available and, also, when it falls within a new area of interest.

Descriptive research involves the understanding of, explaining and describing of specific details of phenomena, situations, social settings and relationships identified in the explorative phase. This approach will be adopted once the researcher has gained insight into the necessary phenomena involved in the study. Since the research study has a qualitative design that requires intensive examination of phenomena, a descriptive approach will be applicable (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005).

A qualitative design from a phenomenological approach will be used to conduct the present study. Qualitative methodology rests on the assumption that valid understanding can be gained through accumulated knowledge acquired by a single researcher (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005). The qualitative researcher is, therefore, concerned with understanding rather than explanation, naturalistic observation rather than controlled measurement, and the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider as opposed to the outsider perspective that is predominant in the quantitative paradigm (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005). As such, a qualitative study is concerned with non-statistical methods such as participant observation, unstructured interviewing and small samples, often purposefully selected (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005). As was mentioned earlier, this study will focus on subjective experiences and perceptions of participants. For this reason, a qualitative research design will be applicable to this research study.

### **1.4.2.2 Participants**

A purposive sampling method will be used to select a sample of women who are employed in atypical careers, such as artisans, process controllers or machine operators within a particular organisation and work group.

Permission will be acquired to conduct research by presenting a letter explaining the importance of the study. Informed consent will be acquired from participants, and confidentiality will be guaranteed prior to conducting interviews. Participants will be informed of their right to terminate their participation at any time. Research objectives will be clearly indicated, and the research procedure will also be explained. Upon completion of the study, both the participants and the organisation will be informed of the research findings.

### **1.4.2.3 Data collection method**

Data will be collected by utilizing both unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. Participants will be informed of the importance of the research beforehand and asked to sign consent forms. An interview schedule will be compiled prior to interviews being conducted. This will enable the researcher to obtain specific and correct information from participants by asking pre-determined questions. Questions will be formulated in such a manner as to enable participants to contribute freely to the conversation. All interviews will be recorded and data will be transcribed verbatim and checked by independent researchers. Participants will be notified upon completion of the research that recordings will be erased and that their identities will remain anonymous throughout the entire process. Furthermore, they will also be given the option to withdraw from the research should they choose to do so at any given time. Participants will each receive a biographical questionnaire to complete once interviews have been conducted. This biographical questionnaire will include age, race, language, and qualification-related factors.

### **1.4.2.4 Field notes**

Field notes with regard to every interview will be written down immediately after each interview. Field notes are a written account of what the researcher experiences during the interview (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005). They will include factors like sounds, sights and thoughts, preconceptions, emotions, expectations and prejudices (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005).

#### **1.4.2.5 Physical setting**

Interviews will take place at a suitable venue. The researcher will ensure that the setting is comfortable by paying attention to the venue's climate, lighting, noise levels, layout, privacy and other factors of importance.

#### **1.4.2.6 Trustworthiness**

Guba's requirements for trustworthy qualitative data will be considered in all phases of the research. These requirements include credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Shenton, 2004). Credibility implies that research findings should be congruent with reality and that the research should measure what is intended (Merriam, 1998). Credibility will be ensured by adopting several preventative measures. Well established research methods will be utilised throughout the research process, especially during data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, the researcher will aim to become familiar with the culture of the participating organisation prior to data collection to gain an understanding of the organisation and to establish a relationship of trust with the parties involved (Shenton, 2004). Several tactics will also be employed to ensure the honesty of participants. These will include providing them with the opportunity to refuse and withdraw from participation, encouraging openness during interviews, and emphasising the independent status of the researcher (Lincoln, 1995). The research project will also be subjected to scrutiny by colleagues, peers and academics who are familiar with qualitative research, and feedback from these parties will be integrated into the research where applicable (Cresswell, 1998).

Transferability requires demonstrating that findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. This will be ensured by providing adequate descriptive data and dense description of the data (Merriam, 1998). Dependability refers to the research yielding the same results, should it be repeated within the same context, using the same methods and participants (Shenton, 2004).

The researcher will ensure dependability by keeping unprocessed material for auditing purposes, giving a clear and full description of the research method used, and by applying the same procedures throughout the research process (Krefting, 1991).

Conformability implies the objectivity of the researcher. This will be guaranteed by ensuring that the research findings are the result of experiences of participants and not the preferences of the researcher and by keeping a suitable distance from participants to eliminate possible influences on the research. The research will also be subjected to coding by several individuals, and inter-coder agreement will be attained to ensure the reliability of data, and conformability of the research (Krefting, 1991).

#### **1.4.2.7 Data analysis**

Audio tapes of the interviews will be transcribed by the researcher. The data will then be categorised, based on the identification of salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of beliefs that link participants and settings together. In order to ensure reliability of the qualitative data analysis, intercoder agreement will be determined. This entails involving several individuals in coding a transcript and comparing their findings to determine whether they have identified the same codes and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Peer validation will be used to ensure the validity of the qualitative data. This involves peers (faculty members and graduate students) who are familiar with qualitative research reviewing the data. After the data has been transcribed, categorised and coded by more than one researcher, research results will be interpreted.

#### **1.4.2.8 Ethical considerations**

The researcher will attempt not to mislead or deceive participants, and will aim to be fair, honest and respectful to others at all times. Privacy, autonomy, the rights of participants with regards to participation and confidentiality of all participants will be considered of utmost importance. The researcher will also aim to be sensitive towards cultural or individual differences among participants and will not knowingly discriminate against any participants based on these factors. All of the above will be performed whilst keeping in mind the welfare of others. To ensure the minimization of harm to research participants as a result of participation in the study the researcher will also debrief participants immediately after interviews have been conducted, and provide them with suitable counselling if necessary (Struwig & Stead, 2001; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000).

## **1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the reason for the current research was discussed and research questions were formulated, which in turn became the objectives of the study. The main paradigms and assumptions from which the research will be conducted were described, as well as the discipline and sub-disciplines for which this research is intended. A model which is relevant to this research was explored, and the research method was explained, including the research design, data collection method, and data analysis techniques that will be used to answer research questions. An outline of the chapter division was also given.

The research article will appear in the following chapter. This will include an in-depth literature review, followed by the results obtained from the research, which will then be discussed.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **A STUDY OF WOMEN IN ATYPICAL CAREERS**

### **ABSTRACT**

The primary objective of this research was to explore the constructs that are outlined in the model of Young and Hurlic (2007) within the South African context and to establish the influence of gender and gender-related behaviour on person-group fit, person-organisation fit and career decision making of South African women in atypical careers. A qualitative design was used and a purposive sampling method was applied to select the sample ( $N=10$ ). Unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect research data. Results indicated that awareness, group acceptance, person-group fit, perceived stress and person-organisation fit are the most influential variables to be considered in the career decision making of South African women in atypical positions.

As a result of globalisation, economies around the world are characterised by growing flexibility, technological advancement, as well as transformed working patterns (Standing, 1999). The aforementioned structural changes in the global economy have had a profound impact on the labour force participation of women (Orr, 2001). According to Kanji (2001), there has been a rapid and substantial increase in the proportion of women in paid work over the last two decades, resulting in 70% of women in the age group of 20-54 being members of the paid workforce in developed countries around the world. This increase in female labour force participation is referred to by Ozler (2000) as the feminisation of labour.

Labour participation in South Africa indicates consistency with this trend of feminisation, as female employment is increasing at a much faster rate than male employment (Barker, 1999). Casale and Posel (2002) report that, although the female population of working age has increased by approximately one million women in the period between 1995 and 1999, the number of economically active women has increased by approximately two million women over the same period. This phenomenon is also evident when considering the 60% labour participation of South African women between 25 and 50 years of age during 2007 (Van Klaveren, Tijdens, Hughie-Williams, & Martin, 2009).

Several reasons exist for the feminisation of the South African labour force. Klasen and Woolard (1999) attribute the cause of this change to women having access to education that was not previously made available to them. This is very clear in statistical data released by Statistics South Africa (2000), which indicates that there were approximately 585 000 more economically active women with Grade 12 in 1999 compared with the figures for 1995. According to Van Klaveren, Tijdens, Hughie-Williams, and Martin (2009), enrolment for primary, secondary and tertiary education is higher for girls and young women than for males. In 2009, 50% of South African women had completed their secondary or tertiary education, compared to 45% of South African men. Furthermore, nearly 21% of South African women had completed their tertiary education, compared to only 17% of men.

Casale and Posel (2002) have identified the decline of South African male employment to be another determinant for the increase in female labour participation. This can be seen in statistical data indicating that there were approximately 1.1 million more unemployed males in 1999 than there were in 1995 (Statistics South Africa, 2000). Possible explanations for the decline in male employment include the rising HIV/AIDS epidemic, increasing rates of

foreign employment, and the escalating number of female-headed households in South Africa (Casale & Posel, 2002; Posel & Todes, 1995).

Even though female labour force participation in South Africa has increased noticeably, female employment remains segregated mainly into the service industry. Duffield (2002) argues that traditional areas of employment such as administrative, secretarial and caring occupations still remain dominated by women. Furthermore, she claims that a total of 68% of employed women work in either sales or customer service occupations. As a result, South African women remain unrepresented in less traditional occupations such as skilled trade occupations and occupations in process, plant and machine operations (Duffield, 2002).

Despite this under-representation of women in non-traditional fields, Sibiyi (2001) has identified a recent increase in South African women entering non-traditional careers that were previously restricted to men. With the advent of the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) and other equal opportunities legislation, more women are now entering non-traditional occupations, and the number of women in professions such as medicine, pharmacy, accounting and engineering is increasing (Sibiyi, 2001). The mining industry also provides an example of this phenomenon. The role of women in the South African mining industry has changed significantly since the end of the apartheid era (Manganyi, 2006). Owing to rules instituted by the law during the apartheid era, the mining industry was dominated by a male workforce for many decades. However, the number of women in the mining workforce today has doubled since the end of 1994 (Manganyi, 2006).

There are several reasons why South African women are considering non-traditional occupations. Occupations that are skewed in the favour of men offer higher pay, prestige and advancement opportunities. They also offer higher job satisfaction and more learning opportunities than traditional female occupations (Coser, 1981; Galbraith, 1992). Furthermore, many non-traditional careers, especially in skilled trades, have potential overtime pay and provide a greater variety of schedules and shifts to choose from (Chusmir, 1990).

Upon entrance into predominantly male careers, women often encounter various obstacles. Yoder (1991) argues that women in non-traditional careers commonly have higher visibility and attention which increases their pressure to perform well. These women also often find themselves isolated from informal, social and professional networks, and they are encapsulated into gender-stereotyped roles by their co-workers (Yoder, 1991).

Furthermore, they often have their work sabotaged by their co-workers, encounter suspicion surrounding their sexual orientation, and are likely to suffer from sexual discrimination and severe role conflict (Cognard-Black, 2004; Sargent, 2000). With regards to the attitudes of their co-workers, women in atypical positions often experience hostility and expressions of resentment from their male colleagues, ranging from inappropriate remarks to physical violence in the workplace (O'Farrel & Harlan, 1982).

As a result of the aforementioned experiences, women in non-traditional jobs often encounter difficulty with fitting into their groups at work and their organisations as a whole, which increases their turnover intentions (Sargent, 2000). This is confirmed by Waite and Berryman (1986), who found the sex composition of the work group to be an influential factor in the turnover of women in non-traditional occupations. In more recent research, Young and Hurlic (2007) found that the career decisions of employees in atypical positions are affected by their gender enactments in collaboration with the gender-based micro-cultures of their work groups, their person-group fit, and their person-organisation fit.

The various constructs in Young and Hurlic's model that are considered to have an effect on career decision making of atypical employees include gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture, skills and education, person-group fit, person-organisation fit, perceived stress, self-efficacy, gender-based macro-culture, and person-organisation fit (Young & Hurlic, 2007). These constructs and how they interact are represented in the figure below, and are discussed in the subsequent section.

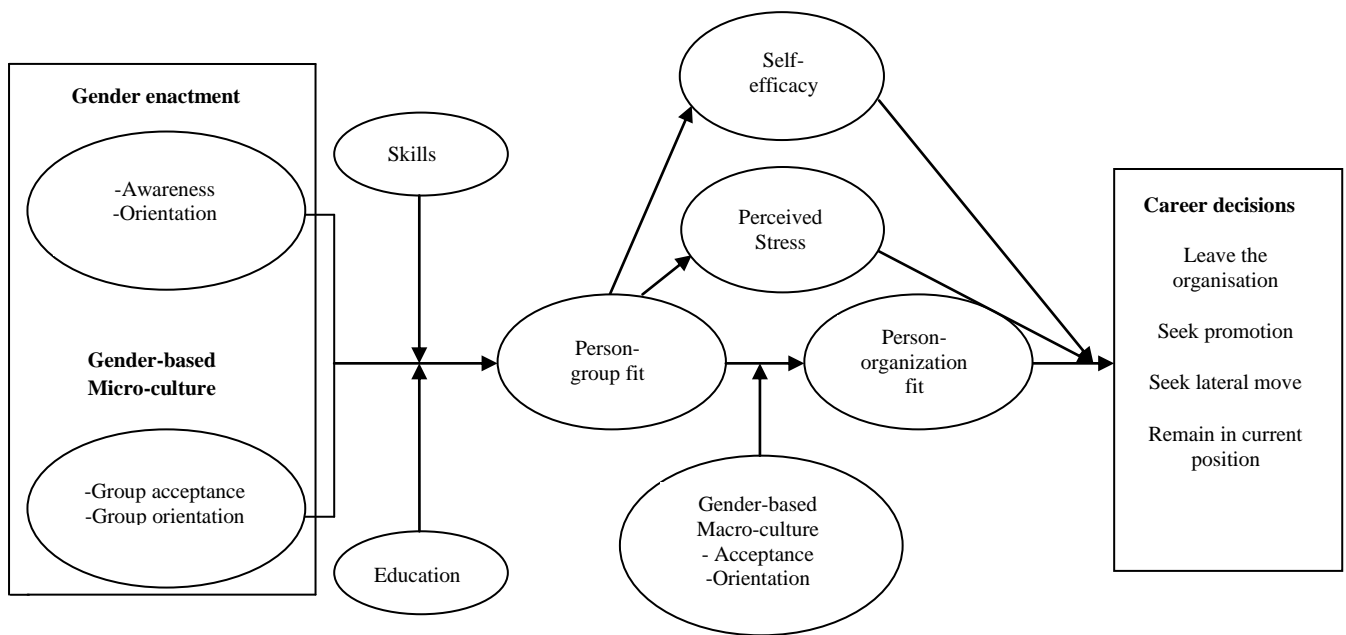


Figure 2: A model of gender enactment and fit in relation to career decisions of employees in atypical position (adapted from Young and Hurlic, 2007).

The constructs of the model, as depicted in Figure 2, will be discussed in the following section.

### Gender enactment

According to Laslett and Brenner (1989) gender is a socially-constructed variable, and both masculine and feminine genders have their own set of behaviours that are prescribed to them by society. This results in society developing ideas and expectations about appropriate gender-related behaviours, jobs and activities (Scherer & Petrick, 2001). These gender-based behaviours are labelled gender enactment, or gender display (Goffman, 1977). Gender enactment is not necessarily linked to biological sex, which allows men to act in feminine ways and women to act in masculine ways (Young & Hurlic, 2007). Laslett and Brenner (1989) argue that masculine and feminine gender-related behaviours are intrinsic to both men and women, but that they can be exaggerated or understated to suit a situation or group. If an individual does not conform to societal expectations by exerting appropriate gender-related behaviour accordingly, negative person-group fit may result (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

A person's decision to choose appropriate gender-based behaviours is based on an individual's *awareness* of situational demands and his or her *gender orientation* (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

Quinlan, Schwartz, Walker, and Zeitlin (1990) define awareness as the ability to perceive and be conscious of events, objects and sensory patterns. Young and Hurlic (2007) have found that an individual with high awareness will recognize situational demands that require gender-related behaviour adjustment, whereas an individual with low awareness will not be aware of these situational requirements. According to Snyder (1974) an individual's awareness alone does not dictate his or her behaviours. He argues that individual behaviour is determined by both an individual's awareness levels and self-monitoring behaviour. Self-monitoring behaviour describes an individual's management of self-presentation, expressive behaviours, and nonverbal displays of affective behaviour (Snyder, 1974). Individuals with high levels of self-monitoring behaviour regulate their behaviour according to situational signals and the behaviours of others, whereas individuals with low levels of self-monitoring behaviour more typically express what they really think, feel, and believe regardless of the social context or the behaviours of others (Kumru & Thompson, 2003). A positive correlation has been found between awareness and self-monitoring behaviour, which implies that individuals with high levels of awareness are likely to have high levels of self-monitoring behaviour and will constantly monitor and adapt their behaviours (Kumru & Thompson, 2003). Conversely, this also implies that individuals with low levels of awareness are more likely to have low levels of self-monitoring behaviour, and, therefore, they will not regulate their behaviours according to situational demands (Kumru & Thompson, 2003).

Gender orientation is conceptualised by Spence, Helmreich, and Sawin (1980) as an individual's acceptance or rejection of societal expectations about the duties, responsibilities and behavioural rules to be assumed by men and women in specific situations. According to Bem (1974), society expects men to be rational, dominant, competitive and forceful, whereas women are expected to be nursing, cheerful, helpful and sensitive. Having a traditional gender role orientation (an orientation which is in line with one's biological sex) indicates acceptance of these societal expectations, and this is likely to result in strong person-group fit (Brooks, Morgan, & Scherer, 1990). Adopting a non-traditional gender orientation (an orientation which is the opposite of one's biological sex) implies non-conformance and rejection of societal expectations regarding masculinity and femininity (Brooks, Morgan, &

Scherer, 1990). This may result in poor person-group fit depending on the micro-culture of the work group.

### **Gender-based micro-culture**

Subcultures are normative systems of groups that may be different from the larger society of which they are a part in terms of language, values, beliefs, visions, religion, diet, lifestyle, class, race, occupation, residence, region, thinking and acting (Yinge, 1960). Within the confines and context of a larger macro-culture, a subgroup may form a micro-culture (Fitzgerald, 1988). Young and Hurlic (2007) define a micro-culture as a subculture that is unique in terms of its culture and accepted behaviours. The accepted behaviours of a gender-based micro-culture are determined by the gender composition of the group (*group orientation*) and the group's acceptance of gender-related behaviours that differ from group expectations (*group acceptance*) (Karakowsky, McBey, & Miller, 2004).

A collective gender orientation or *group orientation* refers to a collective gender orientation existing among members of a micro-culture who share similar gender schemas (Edwards & Cooper, 1990). Lynn-Martin and Dinella (2002) define a *schema* as a cognitive or mental framework that individuals use to organise and interpret information by means of pre-existing ideas and beliefs. A gender schema refers to a knowledge structure about sexes and their characteristics which facilitates how information surrounding gender is received, interpreted, organised, and retrieved from memory (Lynn-Martin & Dinella, 2002).

Shrerer and Petrick (2001) claim that team members with a collective gender orientation perform better than those who do not have a collective gender orientation and that they are likely to support behaviours congruent to the collective gender orientation of the group. Furthermore, they claim that if the gender orientation of an individual is congruent with the group orientation, a stronger person-group fit will result (Scherer & Petrick, 2001).

Gender-related behaviours that are atypical to that of the group can either be accepted or rejected by its members. This is referred to by Young and Hurlic (2007) as *group acceptance*. High levels of group acceptance are likely to result in strong person-group fit, and, in contrast, low group acceptance or intolerance is likely to result in poor person-group fit (Karakowsky, McBey, & Miller, 2004).

## **Skills and education**

Individuals in non-traditional careers are often perceived as being incompetent, and their co-workers are often of opinion that these employees were considered for their vacancy only as a result of affirmative action measures (Schneider, 2004). For this reason, skills and education play a large role in improving the career success and group acceptance of employees in atypical positions, especially for women (Schneider, 2004). Daley (1996) argues that the career advancement of women is more reliant on skills and education than the career advancement of men, and he suggests that skilled and educated women have a greater chance of experiencing person-group fit in non-traditional jobs than unskilled or uneducated women. It can, therefore, be assumed that skills and education influence the interactions between gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture and person-group fit (Daley, 1996). Furthermore, skills and education have a positive influence on job performance, job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and they may result in reduced turnover intentions (Schneider, 2004).

## **Person-group fit**

Person-group fit focuses on interpersonal compatibility between individuals and their work groups (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). Kristof (1996) considers co-worker similarity, psychological compatibility, similar characteristics, values and goals, personality traits, and demographic variables all to be influential variables that affect person-group fit. Muchinsky and Monahan (1987) distinguish between supplementary and complementary person-group fit. Supplementary person-group fit occurs when employees share similar qualities, beliefs and values, which then become group norms. These group norms can either be accepted or rejected by its individual members. Employees that accept group norms are, however, more likely to express positive work attitudes (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Complementary person-group fit occurs when the qualities or characteristics of individual members complement or support those of other members. This type of group fit is known for enhancing group performance and job satisfaction. Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) have established that both supplementary and complementary types of person-group fit are of equal importance as they both result in person-organisation fit and reduced turnover intentions.

### **The interactions between Gender Enactment, Gender-based Micro-Culture, and Person-Group fit.**

According to Young and Hurlic (2007), individuals adapt their gender-related behaviour based on their gender orientation, awareness, and the micro-culture of their work group. When a natural fit occurs between an individual's gender orientation and the micro-culture of the group, strong person-group fit will result, and very little behaviour adjustment will be necessary (Scherer & Petrick, 2001). For example, if a woman has a masculine gender orientation, and works in a group where the gender orientation is also masculine, her behaviours will easily be accepted, few behavioural adjustments will be necessary, and she will experience strong person-group fit.

If, though, an individual has a different gender orientation to that of the micro-culture, but is aware of the need for behaviour adaptation, strong group acceptance and person-group fit will also result (Young & Hurlic, 2007). For example, if a woman has a feminine gender orientation but is aware of the demands of the masculine orientation of her work group and adapts her behaviours accordingly, she is likely to have her behaviours accepted and experience strong person-group fit.

An individual who has a different gender orientation to that of the micro-culture, with little awareness of the need for behavioural adaptation, will experience strong group acceptance and fit only if the micro-culture is tolerant of atypical behaviours (Scherer & Petrick, 2001). For example, a woman with a feminine gender orientation who works in a group or team with a masculine gender orientation and who has low awareness of the need for behavioural adjustment may experience group acceptance and strong person-group fit only if her work group is tolerant of her atypical (feminine) behaviours.

In contrast, if the gender orientation of an individual is incongruent with the gender orientation of the group, the individual has low awareness of the need for behaviour adjustment, and the micro-culture is intolerant of atypical gender-related behaviours, a poor person-group fit will result (Scherer & Petrick, 2001). Should this individual, however, be skilled and educated, poor person-group fit might not necessarily be the case as it may cause group members to be more tolerant of atypical behaviours (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

For example, a woman with a feminine gender orientation and little awareness of the demands of the masculine orientation of her work group will not adjust her behaviour

accordingly. If her work group is intolerant of her atypical (feminine behaviours), a low person-group fit will result. However, if this woman is skilled and educated, her atypical behaviours may be tolerated or overlooked as a result, thereby improving her person-group fit.

According to Young and Hurlic (2007), the extent to which an individual experiences person-group fit results in emotional outcomes including *perceived stress* and *self-efficacy*, which are likely to play a part in career decision making.

### **Perceived stress**

Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) argue that stress can be viewed as a direct result of stressful events. This viewpoint assumes that stressful events are directly related to, and cause, stress-related behaviours. Lazarus (1977) disagrees with this perception and is of the opinion that people interact with their environment to assess potentially threatening and challenging events in terms of their available coping resources. This means that an individual will perceive a situation as stressful only when it has been assessed as threatening or demanding, and when insufficient resources are available to cope with the situation. Therefore, perceived stress is a cognitively mediated emotional response to objective events, and it is this response that leads to stress instead of the event itself (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983).

According to Lazarus (1977) perceived stress is directly influenced by levels of self-efficacy. This is confirmed by Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) who argue that the extent to which a person feels confident about his or her competence to handle a given situation affects whether the task is perceived as a challenge, or stressful and threatening. Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to evaluate the demands of their environments as challenging, enabling them to select effective coping strategies to manage their daily tasks (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). It can, therefore, be assumed that self-efficacy affects the perception of external demands and mediates the relation between external stressors and perceived stress (Bandura, 1995).

## **Self-efficacy**

Hackett and Betz (1981) associate high levels of self-efficacy with traditional occupations, and low levels of self-efficacy with non-traditional occupations for women. Self-efficacy focuses on beliefs or expectations concerning one's ability to perform certain tasks and behaviours (Brooks, 1990). These expectations determine whether or not behaviours will be initiated, the degree of effort that will be expended, and how long behaviours will be maintained in the face of adversities (Brooks, 1990). For example, a women's belief about her mechanical engineering skills will affect her choice of starting and continuing in a job as a mechanical engineer as well as the choice of maintaining the job even when under pressure. Individuals with a low sense of self-efficacy are likely not to persist in difficult tasks, might feel unable to do these tasks well, or they may be discouraged or overwhelmed by them. Individuals with high self-efficacy will persist in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1977). Overcoming barriers like discrimination, sexual harassment, and lack of support systems require high levels of self-efficacy (Foster, 2005).

Sources of self-efficacy include personal accomplishments, vicarious learning, including observational learning through modelling, social or verbal persuasion, and one's psychological state (Bandura, 1986). Zunker (2000) has identified self-efficacy together with outcome expectations and personal goals as determinants of career choices and career development related outcomes, such as job satisfaction of employees in atypical positions. Hackett and Bentz (1981) have found that a strong sense of self-efficacy enables women to make more effective career decisions which ultimately improves their job satisfaction.

## **Gender-based macro-culture**

Organisational macro-culture is defined as a shared perceived meaning reflecting the beliefs, values, visions, thinking, and feelings of organisational members based on organisational myths, stories and norms (Bailey, 2009). A gender-based macro-culture refers to a shared perception regarding behavioural norms that are applicable to gender (Young & Hulric, 2007). The gender-based macro-culture of an organisation has a profound impact on the career decisions of employees who experience low person-organisation fit. According to Carless (2005), an individual in an atypical career who experiences low person-organisation fit will consider the gender-based macro-culture of the organisation in making a career

decision. Gender-based macro-culture consists of two domains, including *macro-culture acceptance* and *macro-culture orientation*.

*Macro-culture acceptance* refers to an individual's perception of acceptance of diverse gender-related behaviour in an organisation (Young & Hurlic, 2007). An organisation with a macro-culture that is accepting of atypical gender-based behaviours will create the perception of openness and encourage employees to seek opportunities within the organisation itself when considering career moves, whereas intolerance of such behaviours might result in employees leaving the organisation (Carless, 2005).

The term *macro-culture orientation* refers to the collective gender orientation of the organisation as a whole (Young & Hurlic, 2007). An organisation can either be masculine or feminine in terms of its gender orientation. A masculine macro-culture (which will be the focus of this research) is often found in more traditional organisations that typically have been created, maintained and controlled by males throughout the organisation's history (Mann, 1995). This type of culture is normally associated with stereotypical male traits such as independence, internal competition, self-promotion, overt ambitiousness, decisiveness, aggressiveness, and the establishment of status and authority (Von Vianen & Fisher, 2002). Women often characterize a masculine organisational macro-culture as exclusionary because it creates barriers to their assimilation and advancement, which ultimately results in their being less committed to the organisation, and less satisfied with their careers (Bierema, 2001).

### **Person-organisation fit**

Person-organisation fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005) addresses the compatibility between people and organisations in terms of their personalities, values and goals. Muchinsky and Monahan (1987) distinguish between complementary and supplementary organisational fit. A complimentary fit focuses on individual needs and preferences and occurs when an individual's characteristics and skills fill a gap in the current environment, or vice versa (a demands-abilities fit), or when an individual's needs are met by their work environment (a needs-supplies fit). A supplementary fit exists when an individual and the environment are similar in terms of values and characteristics (Kristof, 1996).

Besides complimentary and supplementary organisational fit, Kristof (1996) also distinguishes between perceived and actual organisational fit. Perceived fit occurs when an

individual makes a direct assessment of the compatibility between himself and his environment, whereas an actual or objective fit is determined by comparing person- and environment related variables as reported by different sources. When an individual has an accurate assessment of his person-organisation fit, the actual and perceived fit will be the same.

Person-organisation fit is related to a number of positive outcomes including positive work attitudes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Posner, 1992). It has also been found to predict intention to quit, turnover intentions, organisational citizenship behaviours, teamwork, and contextual performance (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005).

Apart from person-organisation fit, the opportunities perceived to exist in an organisation and general perceptions of the culture of an organisation (macro-culture) also play an important role in career decision making.

### **Career decisions**

A career decision refers to the process of making an informed career choice based on an individual's personal experiences (Harren, 1979). According to Garavan and Coolahan (1996), career decisions involve a variety of choices and may take the form of choosing to remain in one's current position within an organisation, occupying a different position on the same hierarchical level within the organisation (a lateral or horizontal career move), moving upwards by means of promotion (a vertical career move), or leaving the organisation (resignation).

According to Fisher and Lerner (2005), the typical or atypical career choices of women are influenced by additional factors other than personal characteristics, values and life goals. They have identified economic, cultural, and labour market influences, as well as employment policies and labour regulations, to determine the career choices of women (Fisher & Lerner, 2005). Jackson, Malcolm and Thomas (2011) argue that these factors do not only influence the career choices of women who are entering the labour market for the first time, but also those of women who are already employed.

Within the context of Young and Hurlic's (2007) model, gender enactment, model gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture, skills and education, person-group fit, perceived

stress, self-efficacy, person-organisation fit, and gender-based macro-culture all are to be considered influential factors in the career decision making of employees in atypical positions.

Young and Hurlic (2007) argue that an individual is likely to seek a promotion or undergo a lateral move within an organisation if he or she experiences low person-group and person-organisation fit, high stress, and low self-efficacy within a macro-culture that is accepting of atypical gender-related behaviour. A macro-culture that is intolerant of atypical gender-related behaviours in the case of low person-group and person-organisation fit, high stress, and low self-efficacy is likely to result in an individual's leaving the organisation (Young & Hurlic, 2007). In cases where person-group and person-organisation fit is high, it is more likely for an individual to remain with the organisation by seeking lateral moves and promotions regardless of the macro-culture acceptance (Young & Hurlic, 2007).

As previous research provides a solid foundation for the assumptions made in Young and Hurlic's model (*Figure 2*), it can be assumed that strong person-group and person-organisation fit, low stress, high self-efficacy and an accepting organisational macro-culture are key factors in the career choices of employees in atypical positions. This poses a challenge to determine if these factors are equally influential in the career decision making of South African employees in atypical positions, and how they can be managed effectively to in order to secure a truly diverse workforce.

## METHOD

### Research design

The research was qualitative in nature, and a phenomenological research design was utilised throughout the research process. A phenomenological research design aims to describe the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, topic or concept for various individuals, and to reduce these experiences to a central meaning (Creswell, 1998). This design differs from other research designs as it aims to derive the meaning and essence of experiences instead of measurements and explanations thereof (De Vos, Fouché, Strydom, & Delport, 2005). A phenomenological design aims to obtain descriptions of experiences, through first person accounts in informal conversations and during interviews, for the purpose of understanding human behaviour (Creswell, 1998). Since this research has consisted of a small number of

participants and the general aim of the research has been to develop patterns and relationships of meaning, this design was found to be most applicable.

## **Participants**

The researcher made use of a purposive sampling method to select the study population. Silverman (2000) implies that when using this method, the researcher thinks critically about the criteria for the selection of respondents before selecting research participants. In this research, the criteria decided upon were that participants needed to be female, permanently employed and occupying atypical occupations within the same organisation. Another factor that needed consideration was the main aim of the research study which was to examine intensively the subjective experiences of participants. Based on these criteria, a small sample of 10 female employees was selected, consisting of Electricians, Millwrights, Steelmakers, Technicians and Engineers. Participants who were selected all did physically demanding work, previously viewed as unsuitable for women, under harsh working conditions on the factory floor of the organisation in which this study was conducted.

Participants were invited to participate in the research on a voluntary basis. Letters from the researcher and the supervisor were sent to participants who agreed to take part, describing the purpose and nature of the research (see Annexure A for a sample letter). The number of participants consisted of ten women ( $N=10$ ). After distributing the aforementioned letters, interviews were scheduled at a time that was both convenient for the participants and the researcher.

Descriptive information of the sample is given in Table 1 (on the following page).

Table 1

*Characteristics of the Participants (N=10)*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Race	Black	4
	White	6
	Indian	0
	Coloured	0
	Other	0
Age	24 years and younger	0
	25-35 years	4
	36-45 years	3
	46-55 years	3
	56 years and older	0
Qualification	Up to grade 11	2
	Grade 12	2
	Diploma	5
	Degree	1
	Degree +	0
Length of Service	Less than 1 year	0
	2-5 years	3
	6-10 years	1
	11-20 years	3
	More than 20 years	3

Table 1 indicates that the study population consisted of four black and six white participants. All the participants were between the ages of 25 and 55 years, with four participants in the age group of 25 to 35 years, three in the age group of 36 to 45 years, and three in the age group of 46 to 55 years. Half of the participants in the sample had diplomas, compared to two participants that had educational levels below Grade 12, two that had Grade 12 qualifications, and one that had a degree. Most participants had completed more than 11 years of service, as three participants had a length of service between 11 and 20 years, and three had been working for the organisation for longer than 20 years. The remaining participants had a length of service between two and 10 years.

## **Data collection**

Data collection was implemented in three phases. The first phase involved conducting a pilot study for the purpose of determining the applicability of the model of Young & Hurlic (2007) in the research context. This was done by asking broad, open-ended questions about the experiences of participants and identifying similarities between the responses of participants and the findings of Young and Hurlic (2007) regarding the experiences of women in atypical careers.

Participants for the pilot study were selected using the same criteria as had initially been used to select the study population to ensure that research questions were relevant and applicable. These participants were not included in the study population and were interviewed only for the purpose of the pilot study.

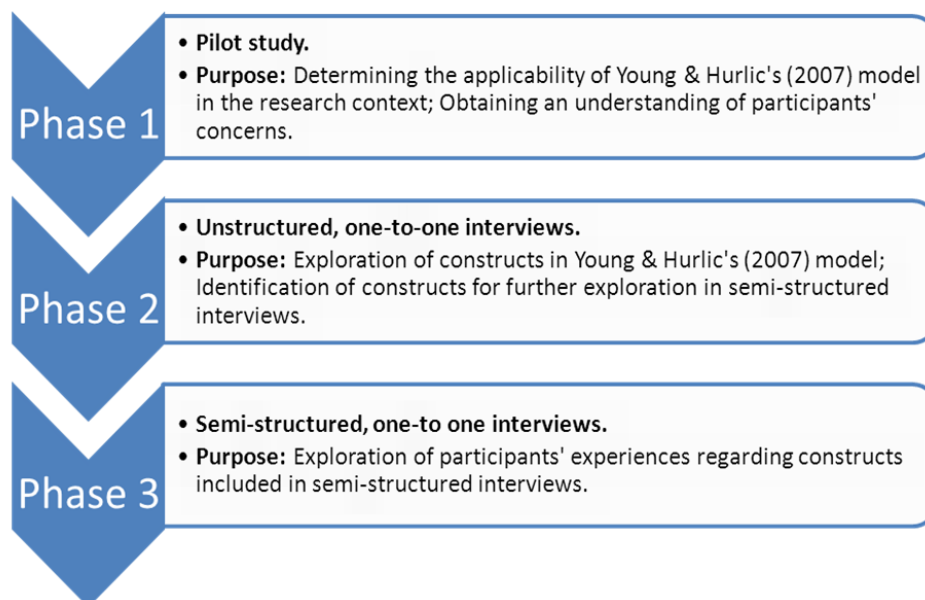
Findings from the pilot study showed that participants who spoke Afrikaans were more comfortable answering questions in their own language. It was, therefore, decided to provide participants with the opportunity of answering questions in Afrikaans or English to ensure that participants were comfortable enough to share their experiences with the researcher.

Furthermore, it was found that most participants were hesitant when asked whether they could be recorded during the interviews. To avoid this, the researcher decided to explain to participants the purpose of recording interviews, how recorded information would be utilised, and the anonymity of the process in order to obtain their agreement prior to recording their responses to interview questions.

After the completion of the pilot study, the researcher executed the second phase of data collection by conducting unstructured, one-to-one interviews with all participants. In this phase, the researcher asked participants to share their experiences as women in atypical careers, and probed further by asking open-ended follow up questions to explore the constructs of the model of Young and Hurlic (2007). This was done for the purpose of identifying what constructs to explore further in the semi-structured interviews, based on how many times these constructs were mentioned by participants, and to assist in the development of semi-structured interview questions.

After the completion of this phase, semi-structured, one-to-one interviews were conducted with all ten participants as a part of the third and final phase of data collection. The researcher allowed participants to share their experiences as women in atypical careers, and asked semi-

structured interview questions to probe further into topics raised during discussion (See Annexure B). Participants were asked to share their experiences as women in atypical careers. Data saturation was reached at interview number seven. Morse (1991) defines data saturation as data adequacy, indicating that the researcher has collected data until no more new information could be gathered or attained. It was decided to complete all ten of the semi-structured interviews despite data saturation to honour the commitment to the participants. If data saturation was not reached before all interviews were completed, additional participants would have been selected for participation in the study, based on the same selection criteria that was utilised for the initial selection process. A graphical representation of the three phases of data collection applicable to this research is provided below.



*Figure 3:* The phases of data collection as implemented by the researcher.

### **Data analysis**

A phenomenological data analysis method was used to analyse data that had been collected. All unstructured and semi-structured interviews were transcribed to enable the researcher to identify common categories, themes, patterns, and recurring ideas (De Vos, Fouché, Strydom, & Delport, 2005). A five step process was followed to achieve these results. Firstly, the researcher listened repeatedly to the audio recordings of each interview to become familiar with the data and to get a holistic perspective (Hycner, 1999). During this step, the researcher had to become aware of her own presuppositions to avoid making subjective judgements when analysing the data (Hycner, 1999). The second step in the analysis process involved

delineating units of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). This entailed the researcher scrutinizing statements from participants to isolate and extract statements that confirmed research phenomenon, and the elimination of redundant data. The number of times statements were mentioned, as well as non-verbal and paralinguistic cues, was considered important during this phase to determine the meaning of statements (Moustakas, 1994). Once this step had been completed, the researcher commenced with the third step, which entailed the clustering and coding of statements with shared meaning (Sadala & Adorno, 2001). This involved the examination of statements to elicit their meaning within a holistic context and clustering them together according to central themes using word-based techniques (Sadala & Adorno, 2001).

The two word-based techniques used in this study included an analysis of word repetitions, and key words in context (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Analysis of word repetitions required the researcher to read transcriptions of all interviews conducted and to note words or synonyms used repetitively by participants. These repetitions indicated which themes were important in the lives of participants. The analysis of key words in context involved the researcher's sorting key words with similar meaning into categories based on the context in which they were used by participants (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Upon completion of this step, the researcher completed the fourth step, namely validation and modification, by validating the data where necessary. This was done by listening to audio recordings again and by revisiting participants where necessary. Inter-coder agreement was obtained from two individuals to ensure reliability of the data. Prior to coding the transcripts, coders were briefed on the methodology to be used. Thereafter, they received the transcripts anonymously and coded them independently, without having access to the results of other coders. The percentage of overlap between the coding of the researcher and the two independent inter-coders amounted to 92,3%. This indicates that the data was reliable, and that similar results would be obtained should the research be duplicated using the same research method.

The fifth and last step involved looking for themes that were common to most or all interviews and reporting on their occurrence in research findings (Hycner, 1999). These findings are presented in the following section.

## RESULTS

After all unstructured interviews were conducted, transcriptions were analysed to determine how many times the constructs of Young & Hurlic's (2007) model were mentioned by participants. These frequencies are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Constructs mentioned by participants during unstructured interviews.

Themes	Participants										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Gender enactment											10
Gender-based micro-culture											10
Skills											5
Education											10
Person-group fit											10
Self-efficacy											8
Perceived stress											7
Person-organisation fit											5
Gender-based macro-culture											6
Career decisions											10

The table above represents the constructs of the model of Young & Hurlic (2007) that were mentioned by participants during the unstructured interviews. Gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture, education, person-group fit, and career decisions were mentioned by all 10 participants when asked about their experiences as women in atypical careers. Eight participants mentioned self-efficacy during their interviews, and seven revealed that they experienced stress on a daily basis. Gender-based macro-culture was pointed out by six participants, and five participants mentioned person-organisation fit and their skill levels, when discussing their experiences.

Since most of the constructs in the model of Young and Hurlic (2007) were mentioned five times and more by all participants who were interviewed, it was decided to focus on all of these constructs during the semi-structured interviews.

The section below will provide graphical representations of participant responses during the semi-structured interviews. Quotes from the interviews were used to illustrate key findings. Quotations that were extracted from interviews that were conducted in Afrikaans have been translated by a qualified language editor to enhance reader understanding.

Figure 4 indicates participant levels of awareness, group acceptance, skills and person-group fit. These levels were determined from the data collected during the semi-structured interviews.

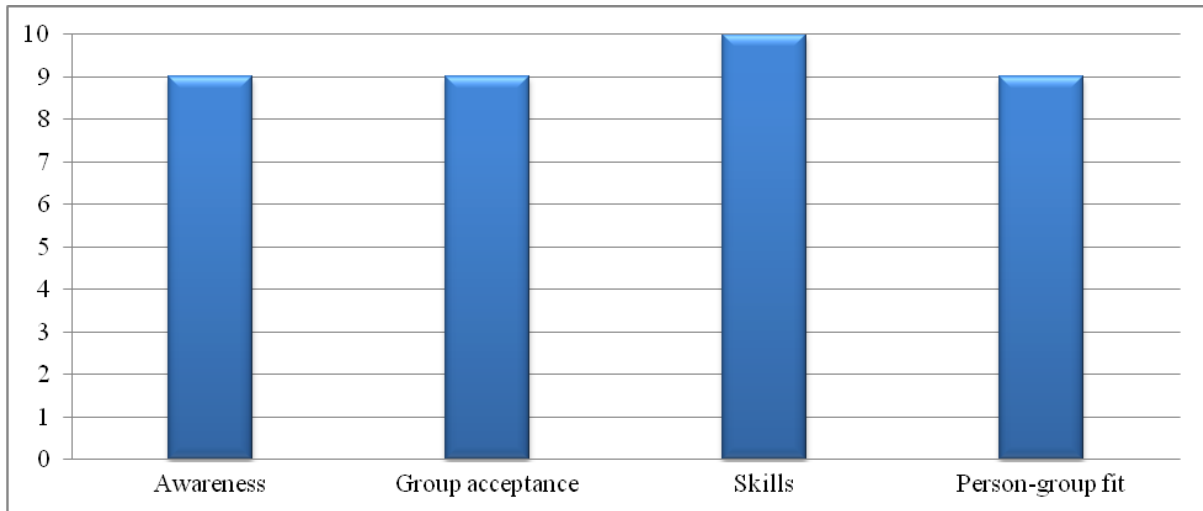


Figure 4: Participant levels of Awareness, Group acceptance, Skills and Person-group fit.

Figure 5 indicates participant gender orientations, the micro-culture orientations of their work groups, and the macro-culture orientation of the organisation as determined from the data collected during the semi-structured interviews.

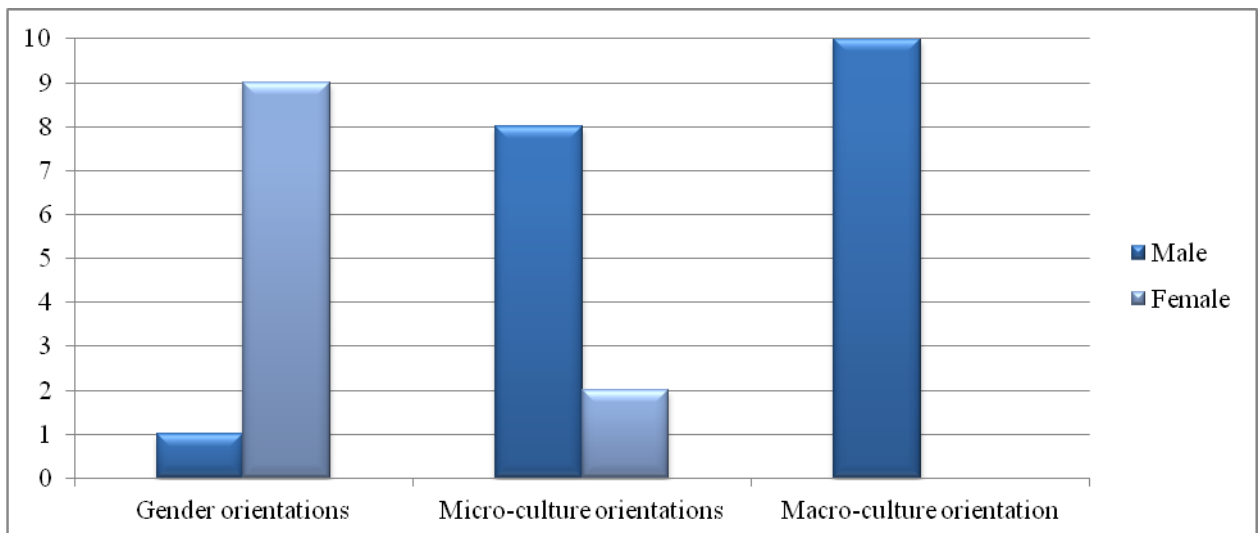


Figure 5: Participant Gender orientations, Micro-culture orientations, and the Macro-culture orientation of the organisation.

The themes that were depicted by Figures 4 and 5 include participant levels of awareness, group acceptance, skills and person-group fit, participant gender orientations, micro-culture

orientations of participant's work groups, and the macro-culture orientation of the organisation. All these themes, apart from the macro-culture orientation of the organisation, which will be referred to in a subsequent section, are discussed below.

**Theme 1: Gender enactment: Awareness.** Responses from nine out of 10 of participants indicated awareness of the situational demands of their work groups whereas responses from one participant implied that she was unaware of the demands of her circumstances and surroundings. This is confirmed by the following remarks from participants.

*“At home I am a woman, a mother, a wife, strictly a woman. Here it's different.”*

*“If you want to be competitive you have to be a bit male in character.”*

*“At home you are a mother, you are the provider of a lot of things in the household, you give advice, help when one of the children gets hurt...but at work I think you have to be less feminine.”*

*“I am the same everywhere I go. At home, at work, I don't need to change anything.”*

Based on these results it can be concluded that most participants were aware of the need to adjust their gender-related behaviours at work and are likely to regulate their gender-related behaviours according to the demands of their work groups. The findings of Kumru and Thompson (2003), and Quinlan, Schwartz, Walker, and Zeitlin (1990) support this view as they have identified awareness to be related to self-monitoring behaviours of employees in atypical careers.

**Theme 2: Gender enactment: Gender orientation.** Responses from nine out of 10 participants indicated that they had feminine gender orientations, whereas responses from one participant implied that she had a masculine gender orientation. This was determined by associating the characteristics that participants claimed to possess to masculine and feminine characteristics identified by Bem (1974) to be representative of masculine and feminine gender orientations.

Examples of feminine traits according to Bem's (1974) sex-role inventory include being more conscientious, sensitive, compassionate and conventional. Therefore, participants who demonstrated these traits, and other traits identified by Bem (1974) as feminine, in their responses were categorized as having feminine gender orientations. Examples of masculine

traits according to Bem's (1974) sex role inventory include being more competitive, dominant, forceful and ambitious. Participants who demonstrated these traits, and other traits identified by Bem (1974) as masculine, in their responses were categorized as having masculine gender orientations. Participant remarks surrounding their gender orientations are as follows.

*"A woman is inherently different from a man. I am inherently different to the men here."*

*"I am more sympathetic and compassionate than the men here."*

*"I would say that I am definitely more conscientious and tactful than the men."*

*"Other women are more different from the men than I am. I am more on the competitive, forceful and dominant side I think."*

*"I am no different from the men."*

*"I am in a gay relationship."*

Participants who were found to be aware of their situational demands all responded in a way that indicated that they had feminine gender orientations, whereas the only participant who was found to have less awareness of her situational demands responded in a way which implied that she had a masculine gender orientation. The participants who were found to have feminine gender orientations, and who were aware of their situational demands, responded by communicating that they adapted their behaviours according to the demands of their work groups. However, the participant who was found to have a masculine gender orientation, and who was less aware of her situational demands, responded by saying that she left her behaviours unchanged. These findings are supported by Quinlan, Schwartz, Walker, and Zeitlin (1990) and Snyder (1974) who have identified awareness to be related to self-monitoring behaviours of employees in atypical positions.

Whether or not participants change their atypical behaviours according to situational demands ultimately influences their person-group fit (Young & Hurlic, 2007). Other variables that have been identified by Young and Hurlic (2007) to have an influence on the person-group fit of employees in atypical positions include the collective gender orientations of their work groups (group orientations), their experience of group acceptance, their skills, and their educational levels (Young & Hurlic, 2007). These variables are discussed in the following section.

**Theme 3: Gender-based micro-culture: *Group orientation*.** The majority of participants (eight out of 10) reported that their immediate work groups consisted mostly of males, and they agreed that the collective gender orientations of their work groups were masculine. Two participants reported that their work groups had feminine gender orientations, even though these groups consisted mostly of males. These findings are confirmed by the following responses from participants.

*“The approach followed in my group is definitely male. Forceful, individualistic...you can’t be emotional here, you must be able to think and reason like they do.”*

*“I actually I think it is a male approach. The managers here they are all male and they all have a masculine approach. How they do things it is like a man.”*

*“A helpful and tactful approach is followed in the group. They are sensitive to your needs and your feelings most of the time, so I think the group has a feminine orientation in that respect.”*

In view of the fact that two participants reported that their work groups had a feminine collective gender orientation even though these groups consisted of mostly males emphasises that biological sex is not the main driver of gender-related behaviours (Laslett & Brenner, 1989).

Since nine out of 10 participants reported that they had feminine gender orientations, and only two of these participants reported that their work groups had feminine collective gender orientations, it can be concluded that there was incongruence between the gender orientations of a majority of participants and the collective gender orientations of their work groups.

Scherer and Petrick (2001) suggest that incongruence between gender orientations of atypical employees and the collective gender orientations of their work groups is likely to result in poor person-group fit. The consistency of the results of this study with the findings of Scherer and Petrick (2001) concerning the influence of incongruence between the gender orientations of participants, and the collective gender orientations of their work groups, will be discussed under construct seven (Person-group fit).

The section below discusses group acceptance as an influential factor in the person-group fit of participants in this study.

**Theme 4: Gender-based micro-culture: *Group acceptance*.** A majority of participants (nine out of 10) mentioned that they experienced acceptance from their work groups, whereas

one participant claimed she did not share this experience. These findings are derived from the following comments:

*“They accept me...they always have.”*

*“Ninety percent accept it, only a few still think women should be at home.”*

*“I would be lying if I said I need to change to be accepted.”*

*“I don’t feel accepted the way I am, no.”*

Seven of the nine participants who reported having gender orientations that were incongruent to the collective gender orientations of their work groups claimed to experience group acceptance. These participants reported that they were aware of their situational demands, and claimed to adjust their behaviours accordingly. Based on these results, it can be concluded that group acceptance does not depend on congruence between gender orientations of participants and the collective orientations of their work groups in this sample. Furthermore, it can be assumed that a connection exists between awareness levels and group acceptance of participants in this sample.

In the following sections, results regarding participants’ skills and education are discussed. Young and Hurlic (2007) suggest that skills and education influence the relationship amongst gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture and person-group fit of employees in atypical positions.

**Theme 5: Skills.** All participants claimed to be skilled in their specific occupations. This is likely as six of the participants have completed more than 11 years of service. However, since participants who have completed only between two and ten years of service also claimed to be skilled in their specific occupations, this might not be the only explanation. Another possible explanation for this high amount is that most participants commented that they find training and development programmes within the organisation to be satisfactory, and they also claimed to attend these programmes on a regular basis. Quotes from participants surrounding their skill levels include the following:

*“I have the necessary skills to do my job, yes.”*

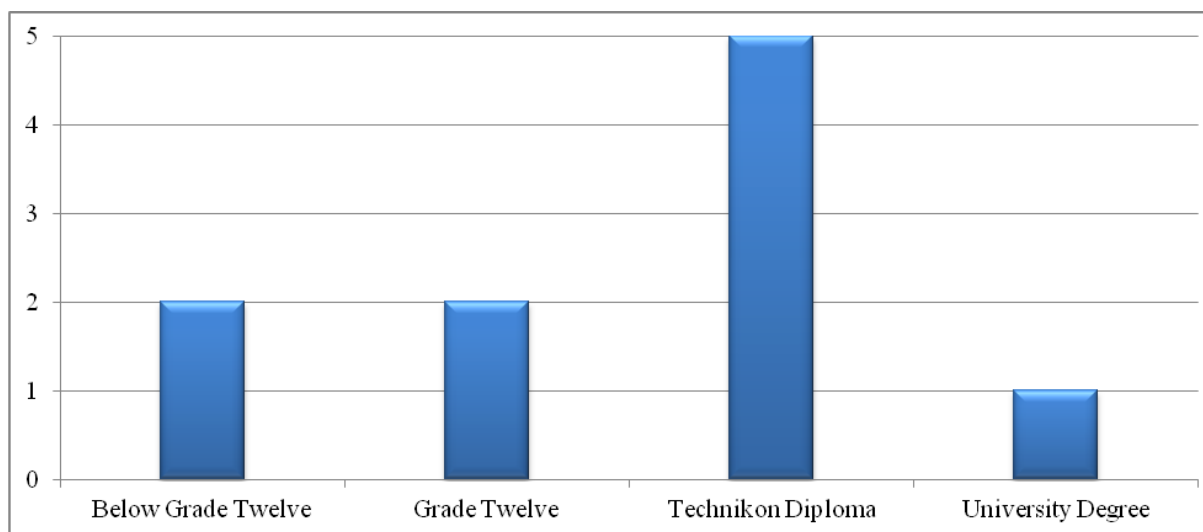
*“I am highly skilled. For this job you have to be.”*

*“After so many years I have learnt everything. I know all the techniques and I have all the skills that are necessary to do my job every day.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

A total of nine participants who claimed to be skilled also reported that they experienced group acceptance. This indicates that the skill levels of participants in this study may have a possible influence on their experiences of group acceptance.

Findings by Daley (1996) indicate that the skills and educational levels of employees in atypical positions influence their person-group fit. He argues that skilled and educated women have a greater chance of experiencing person-group fit in non-traditional jobs than unskilled or uneducated women, because skilled and educated women are viewed as being more competent by their co-workers. To understand whether determine the interaction among the skills, educational levels and person-group fit of participants in this study, their educational levels and person-group fit are discussed in the section below.

Figure 6 depicts the educational levels of participants, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.



*Figure 6: Participant Educational levels.*

**Theme 6: Education.** The figure above (Figure 6) indicates that two participants had educational levels below Grade 12, compared to another two who had Grade 12 qualifications. Five participants had attained diplomas, and one participant had completed a University Degree.

Since all participants claimed to be skilled in their specific occupations, it can be concluded that participants who claimed to have high skill levels did not necessarily have high educational levels. In addition, the educational levels of participants who reported group acceptance varied from qualifications below Grade 12 to tertiary qualifications. This indicates that there is no connection between the educational levels and group acceptance of participants in this study.

The section below explores the impact of education, skills, group acceptance, group orientation, gender orientation and awareness on the person-group fit of participants in this study.

**Theme 7: Person-group fit.** All but one of the participants reported that they experienced person-group fit at work. The following comments from participants substantiate these findings:

*“Yes, I feel like I am a part of the team. I don’t feel excluded because I am a woman.”*  
(Translated from Afrikaans)

*“What makes me feel that I fit in here? Well, the attitudes of the people I work with. The attitudes of the bosses I work with. This plays a big role in making me feel that I fit in here.”*  
(Translated from Afrikaans)

*“I mean they treat me as equal, they treat us like they treat the men. I fit in, we fit in here.”*

*“Ah... no I have given up fitting in... I feel I stick out like a sore thumb. I don’t know but I don’t feel like I fit in now... most of the time I feel excluded.”*

These findings indicate that most participants experienced person-group fit. Since the educational levels of participants that claimed to experience person-group fit varied from qualifications below Grade 12 to tertiary qualifications, it appears that there is no connection between the person-group fit and educational levels of participants in this study.

In addition, nine out of 10 participants reported person-group fit despite having educational levels at or below Grade 12 level. It can, therefore, be assumed that it is unlikely for education to affect the interaction between group acceptance and person-group fit of participants in this sample. These results are inconsistent with the findings of Young and Hulric (2007) and Daley (1996) who propose that education has a moderating effect on the person-group fit of employees in atypical positions.

Since all participants claimed to be skilled in their specific occupations, and nine of these participants reported person-group fit, it can be assumed that participants in this study who were highly skilled in their jobs, experienced person-group fit. It is not possible to determine the influence of participant's skill levels on their person-group fit in this study since all participants claimed to be skilled in their respective occupations.

A total of nine participants experienced both group acceptance and person-group fit. This suggests that a connection exists between group acceptance and person-group fit of participants in this study. These results are consistent with the findings of Karakowsky, McBey, and Miller (2004) who claim that high levels of group acceptance is likely to result in strong person-group fit.

In view of the fact that only three participants who reported person-group fit had gender orientations that were congruent to the collective gender orientations of their work groups, it is evident that congruence between gender orientation and group orientation did not necessarily result in person-group fit of participants in this study. These findings are inconsistent with the findings of Scherer and Petrick (2001) who have found congruence between the gender orientations of employees in atypical positions and the collective orientations of their work groups to result in strong person-group fit.

It can be assumed that a connection exists between person-group fit and awareness levels of participants in this study. A large amount of participants (nine out of 10) who experienced person-group fit responded in a way indicating high levels of awareness. It is likely that this is a result of these participants adapting their behaviour based on their awareness levels.

The interactions between awareness, gender orientation, group orientation, group acceptance, skills, education and person-group fit have now been explored for the sample. The remaining constructs involved in Young and Hurlic's (2007) model of gender enactment and fit in relations to career decisions of employees in atypical positions will be discussed next.

These constructs include perceived stress, self-efficacy, macro-culture acceptance, macro-culture orientation, and person-organisation fit. Figure 7 below represents the occurrence of these constructs in the semi-structured interviews. The macro-culture orientation is depicted in Figure 5.

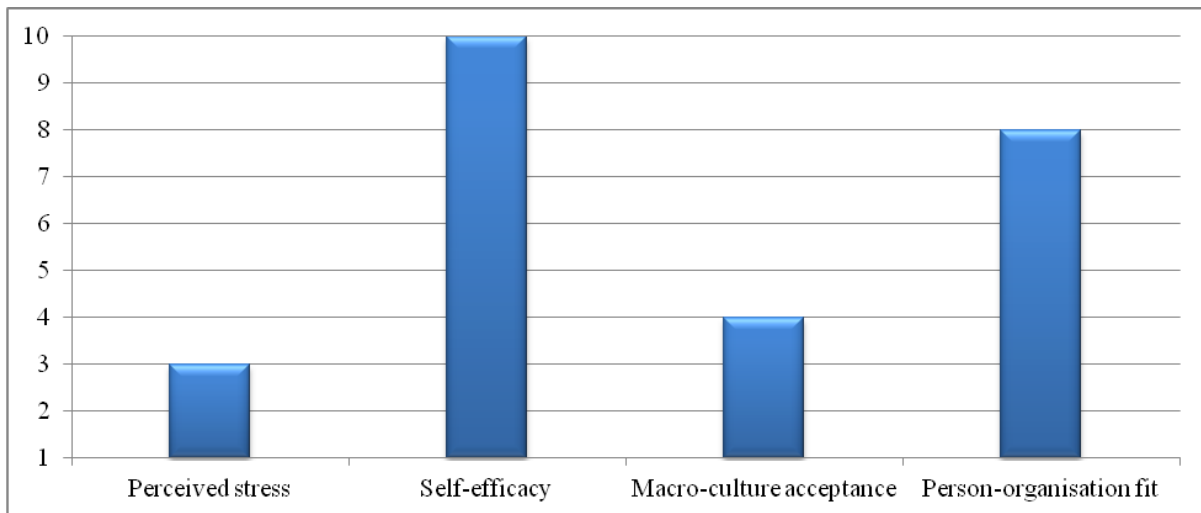


Figure 7: Participant levels of Perceived stress, Self-efficacy, Macro-culture acceptance and Person-organisation fit.

The next section explores the constructs represented in Figure 7 and how they impact on the career decision making of employees in atypical positions. Perceived stress and self-efficacy, being emotional outcomes of person-group fit will be discussed first, and subsequent sections will include macro-culture acceptance, macro-culture orientation, and person-organisation fit.

**Theme 8: Perceived stress.** A low amount of participants (three out of 10) claimed to experience their work environments as stressful, whereas seven participants claimed that they experienced little or no stress from their work environments. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

*“Look any job has a little stress and so on. It isn’t big things; it’s small things that solve themselves. I have no major stress.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“No I don’t really have stress at work...in the beginning, yes, but not anymore.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“No stress makes you make mistakes. The only time that you are stressed in our section is when the line is standing and they call you. That’s when you get stressed.”*

*“Incompetency of people...that causes me to stress.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) have identified person-group fit to be associated with low levels of perceived stress. This proposed association seems to be true for this study when considering that only two of the nine participants who experienced high levels of

person-group fit claimed to experience stress. Based on these findings, it appears that there is a connection between person-group fit and low stress levels of participants in the sample.

According to Lazarus (1977), perceived stress is directly influenced by levels of self-efficacy, as self-efficacy influences an individual's interpretations of external stressors. Self-efficacy and the impact thereof on the perceived stress of participants will now be discussed.

**Theme 9: Self-efficacy.** All participants reported that they experienced a strong sense of self-efficacy. These findings indicate that all participants felt competent in executing the daily tasks involved in their work (Hackett & Bentz, 1981). This could be the result of many years of service, as six out of 10 participants have completed more than 11 years of service, or because participants who took part in this study all claimed to attend training and development programmes on a regular basis. The following quotes were included to substantiate the findings above:

*“I feel competent. As I am saying I am running my shift by myself. I don't have a problem.”*

*“Even when I talk to them they understand...they listen to me...so they must think I am competent.”*

*“Absolutely. I am absolutely competent in my work.”*

All participants who claimed to experience person-group fit also reported high levels of self-efficacy. This indicates that participants in this study who experienced person-group fit, also experienced high levels of self-efficacy.

According to Lazarus (1977), high levels of self-efficacy reduce levels of perceived stress experienced by individuals who are faced with challenging, threatening or stressful situations. Since only three participants claimed that they experienced work-related stress on a regular basis and all participants reported self-efficacy, it can be concluded that these results are consistent with the literature, and that self-efficacy may be associated with low stress levels of participants in this study.

**Theme 10: Gender-based macro-culture: Acceptance.** Only four out of 10 participants reported that they experience tolerance and acceptance of their atypical (feminine) behaviours within the larger organisational context, whereas six participants reported that feminine

behaviours are not accepted or tolerated by the majority of organisational members. This is confirmed by the following statements from participants:

*“You have to downplay your feminine side a little bit in this company...Honestly I promise you. I’m not lying. It is like that.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“You have to do what they do, you can’t worry about your shoes or your nails or your hair. If you aren’t like a man they won’t accept you.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“They would have treated me differently if I didn’t adapt to the organisational culture...for sure.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“From the morning until night time you have to adapt in this place. No, they won’t accept you otherwise...they won’t.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“People will respect and accept it if you are yourself. I think I fit in within the larger culture of the company, and I am accepted as a female employee.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

Since less than half of the participants who claimed to experience person-group fit reported macro-culture acceptance, it appears that person-group fit does not guarantee acceptance of atypical behaviours within the larger organisational context for participants in this study.

Findings by Carless (2005) indicate that low levels of macro-culture acceptance are likely to result in low person-organisation fit of employees in atypical positions, which may cause them to leave an organisation in their efforts to seek career opportunities elsewhere. Whether or not the results of this study indicates similar connections between macro-culture acceptance, person-organisation fit and the career decision making of participants is determined in the section below.

**Theme 11: Gender-based macro-culture: Orientation.** When looking at Figure 3, it can be concluded that all participants reported the organisation to have a masculine collective gender orientation. This can be attributed to the fact that the organisation is a part of the steelmaking industry and that the majority of organisational members are male. Statements by participants regarding the macro-culture of the organisation include the following:

*“The company culture is masculine of course.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“I realize I am in a men’s world now. Yes, I think it’s a masculine culture.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“Ah...it’s still masculine. The culture is still masculine.”*

Because nine out of 10 participants responded in a way which indicated that they had feminine gender orientations, it can be assumed that there was incongruence between the gender orientations of participants and the collective gender orientation of the organisation as a whole. This incongruence could possibly be the reason why only four out of 10 participants reported macro-culture acceptance.

A masculine macro-culture, according to Bierema (2001), may result in women in atypical positions being less committed to an organisation and less satisfied with their careers, as it creates barriers to their assimilation and advancement. Depending on the person-organisation fit of women in atypical positions, this may cause them to consider alternative organisations when making career decisions.

The person-organisation fit of participants in this study is explored in the next section.

**Theme 12: Person-organisation fit.** A majority of the participants (80%) reported that they experienced person-organisation fit. They mentioned the following aspects relative to their experience:

*“The norms and values of the organisation are the same as my own.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“Yes, I fit in at this organisation...that’s how I feel.” (Translated from Afrikaans)*

*“Oh yes, I feel that I belong here...I am a member of this organisation.”*

*“It’s mainly because of the culture here... the company as a whole. Yes, it’s not a bad company but I don’t think somebody like me will really ever fit in this environment.”*

All participants that claimed to experience person-organisation fit also reported that they experienced person-group fit. This indicates an association between the person-organisation fit and person-group fit of participants in this study. These findings are consistent with the findings of Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) that have identified person-group fit to result in person-organisation fit.

Furthermore, six of the participants who reported person-organisation fit also reported macro-culture acceptance. This suggests that a possible connection exists between person-organisation fit and macro-culture acceptance of participants in this study.

Participants who reported person-organisation- and person-group fit did so despite not experiencing macro-culture acceptance and having gender orientations that are incongruent with the collective orientation of their organisation. Based on these results, it can be concluded that gender-based macro-culture did not affect the association between person-group fit and person-organisation fit of participants in this study. This finding is inconsistent with that of Young and Hurlic (2007) who found gender-based macro-culture to influence the relationship between person-group fit and person-organisation fit of employees in atypical positions.

Since all the constructs that are considered by Young and Hurlic (2007) to be influential in the career decision making of employees have been explored, the career decisions of participants should be considered in order to determine the interactions between these constructs and career decision making of employees in atypical positions. The career decisions of participants are outlined in Figure 8 below, and this construct will be discussed in the following section.

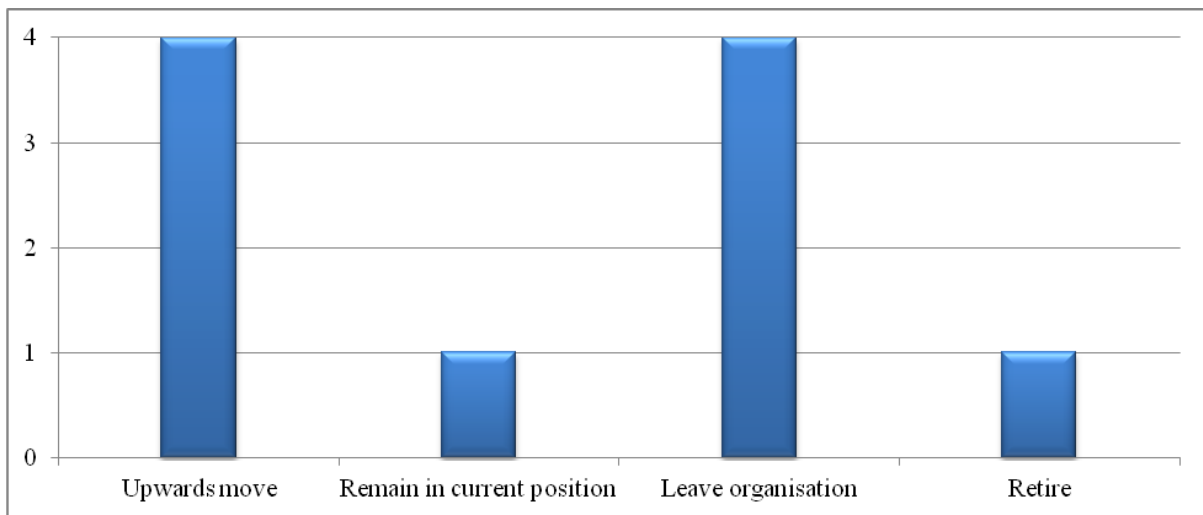


Figure 8: Participant Career Decisions.

**Theme 13: Career decisions.** Figure 8 indicates that four participants preferred to move upwards in the organisation, compared to one who chose to remain in her current position, four that wanted to leave the organisation and one participant that had reached retirement age.

Participants' responses represented a wide range of career decisions. Five participants who experienced person-organisation fit planned to remain in their current positions or move

upwards within the organisation. This indicates that a connection exists between person-organisation fit and intentions to stay of participants in this study.

All participants who reported perceived stress planned on leaving their current organisation (by choice or by retirement) despite experiencing person-organisation fit. This indicates that perceived stress has a possible connection with participant intentions to leave, and that perceived stress might affect the connection between person-organisation fit and career decision making of participants in this study. These findings are consistent with the literature, as Young and Hurlic (2007) have identified perceived stress to influence the relationship between person-organisation fit and the career decision making of employees in atypical positions.

With regards to self-efficacy, half of the amount of participants who reported high levels of self-efficacy planned to remain in their current positions or move upwards in their organisation. This suggests that there may be a connection between self-efficacy and intentions to stay of participants in this study. However, since participants who experienced low person-organisation fit still reported that they intended to leave their respective organisation despite having high levels of self-efficacy, it can be assumed that self-efficacy did not influence the connection between person-organisation fit and career decision making of atypical employees in this study. In the literature, Zunker (2000) has also found self-efficacy to be related to intentions to stay of employees in atypical positions. However, as Young and Hurlic (2007) have identified self-efficacy as an influential factor in the relationship between person-organisation fit and career decisions of employees in atypical positions, it can be concluded that the findings of this study are not consistent with what was found in the literature.

Apart from the themes that appear in the model of Young and Hurlic (2007), participants mentioned additional themes that they consider to be influential in their career decision making. These themes included Working Hours, Years of Service, Job Satisfaction, Job Autonomy, Working Conditions, a Preference for Working with Men, and a Preference for Working with People. Of these themes, those considered by participants to be the most influential in their career decision making were Working Hours, Years of Service and Job Satisfaction. All three of these themes were mentioned by at least eight out of 10 participants.

The biographical factors considered in this study include Age, Years of Service and Race. None of these biographical factors appeared to have had an influence on the career decision

making of participants. However, there appeared to be several differences between various age and race groups and between participants with different lengths of service. These differences are discussed below.

With regards to the different age groups within the study population, the oldest participants (between 46 and 55 years of age) had the lowest education, whereas the youngest participants (between 25 and 35 years of age) had the highest education. The youngest participants had the lowest levels of perceived stress compared to other age groups. Participants in the age group of 36 to 45 years of age all experienced macro-culture acceptance, whilst none of the younger participants between the ages of 25-35 reported this experience. It can, therefore, be concluded that younger employees have the highest levels of education and the lowest levels of stress, but that participants in the age group of 36 to 45 years of age experience the highest levels of macro-culture acceptance.

Participants with the least years of service (between 2 and 5 years) reported the lowest levels of group acceptance, person-group fit, macro-culture acceptance and person-organisation fit. Participants with more than 20 years of service reported the highest levels of group acceptance, person-group fit, macro-culture acceptance and person-organisation fit. These results suggest that many years of service, group acceptance, person-group fit, macro-culture acceptance and person-organisation fit may be associated with one another.

Black participants had the highest educational levels compared to White participants as all of them have obtained Technikon diplomas. All White participants reported to experience person-group fit, compared to only three quarters of Black participants. Furthermore, four White participants claimed to experience macro-culture acceptance, whereas no Black participants reported this experience. It can, therefore, be concluded that Black participants had the highest educational levels, and White participants had the highest levels of person-group fit and macro-culture acceptance in this study.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study has been to explore the constructs outlined in Young and Hurlic's (2007) model within the South African context and to establish the influence of gender and gender-related behaviour to person-group fit, person-organisation fit and career decision making of South African women in atypical careers.

The results of this research on Young and Hurlic's (2007) model will now be reviewed and compared to the literature.

According to Kumru and Thompson (2003), employees in atypical positions with high levels of awareness are likely to adapt their behaviours according to the demands of their work groups and are likely to experience group acceptance and person-group fit as a result thereof. This is confirmed by results from this study which indicated that a large amount of participants who experienced person-group fit also experienced group acceptance, had high levels of awareness, and adapted their behaviours according to the expectations and demands of their work groups.

Young and Hurlic (2007) suggest that congruence between the gender orientation of an employee in an atypical position and that of his or her work group is likely to lead to strong person-group fit. Based on the results of this study, most participants experienced person-group fit despite having gender orientations that were incongruent with that of their work groups. This indicates that person-group fit is not dependant on congruence between the gender orientations of employees in atypical positions and that of their work groups as proposed by the literature.

Findings by Karakowsky, McBey, and Miller, (2004) suggest that group acceptance of employees in atypical positions is likely to result in person-group fit. This proposed association is established by results from this study as it was found that all participants who experienced group acceptance also experienced person-group fit.

Skills and education were found by Daley (1996) to influence the relationship between gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture and person-group fit. Results from this study specified that a connection exists between education and person-group fit, but that education is unlikely to have an impact on person-group fit of atypical employees as is proposed in the literature. Also, skills and person-group fit of participants were found to be associated, but, since all participants claimed to be skilled in their respective occupations, the influence of

skills on the person-group fit on employees in atypical positions could not be determined in this study.

Lazarus (1977) identifies person-group fit to have a negative relationship with perceived stress. Furthermore, he views perceived stress to affect the relationship between person-organisation fit and the career decision making of employees in atypical positions. Lazarus (1977) also proposes that perceived stress has a negative relationship with self-efficacy of employees in atypical positions. These proposed associations were all found to exist between perceived stress, intentions to stay, and the levels of self-efficacy of participants in this study.

According to Brooks, Morgan, and Scherer (1990), employees in atypical positions who experience person-group fit will have high levels of self-efficacy. Furthermore, they argue that self-efficacy has an impact on the relationship between person-organisation fit and career decision making of employees in atypical positions. Brooks, Morgan, and Scherer (1990) also view self-efficacy as having a relationship with intentions to stay of employees in atypical positions. The results of this show that all participants who reported person-group fit had high levels of self-efficacy. Furthermore, self-efficacy was found to influence the career decisions of participants, as those with high levels of self-efficacy chose to stay within their current organisation. It was established that self-efficacy had no influence on the connection between person-organisation fit and career decision making of participants, as participants with low person-organisation fit still chose to leave their current organisation despite having high levels of self-efficacy.

According to Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005), employees in atypical positions who experience person-group fit are also likely to experience person-organisation fit. Furthermore, they argue that employees who experience person-organisation fit are likely to choose to remain in their current organisations by choosing to make lateral career moves, seeking promotions, or remaining in their current positions. Results from this study supported these findings, as it was found that an association exists between person-group fit and person-organisation fit. The majority of participants who experienced person-organisation fit chose to stay within their current organisation.

According to Young and Hurlic (2007), gender-based macro-culture influences the interaction between person-group fit and person-organisation fit. Results from this study indicated otherwise, as gender-based macro-culture was found to have no effect on the connection between person-group fit and person-organisation fit of participants.

All participants who reported both person-group fit and person-organisation fit did so despite having gender orientations that were incongruent with the macro-culture orientation of the organisation, and experiencing low macro-culture acceptance.

According to Young and Hulric (2007), employees in atypical positions who experience strong person-group fit and person-organisation fit are more likely to remain in an organisation by seeking lateral moves and promotions regardless of experiencing macro-culture acceptance. A majority of participants in this study reported high levels of person-group fit and person-organisation fit despite experiencing low levels of macro-culture acceptance, and they chose to stay within their current organisation by making lateral moves, seeking promotions, or remaining in their current positions. For this reason, it can be assumed that the proposed interactions between person-group fit, person-organisation fit and intentions to stay of employees in atypical positions were found to be applicable in this research.

Based on the findings that were mentioned above, it can be concluded that awareness, group acceptance, person-group fit, perceived stress, and person-organisation fit were the key determinants of career decisions of participants. The gender orientations of participants and their work groups, their skills, education and self-efficacy, as well as the gender-based macro-culture of the organisation, were not found to influence the career decisions of participants to the extent that is proposed by Young and Hulric (2007).

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## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide conclusions regarding the results of the study with respect to the research objectives that have been identified, to discuss limitations of the study, and to provide recommendations for the organisation and future research.

#### 3.1 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions are drawn in the following section with regards to the specific research objectives that were set in Chapter 1, and the findings obtained from this research study.

*Objective 1: To determine the applicability of Young and Hurlic's (2007) model of gender enactment, fit, and career decisions to South African women in atypical careers.*

Research findings indicated that awareness, group acceptance, person-group fit, perceived stress, and person-organisation fit were the key determinants to be considered in the career decisions of participants. It can, therefore, be concluded that these constructs were found to be applicable to the career decision making of a sample of South African women in atypical careers.

The gender orientation of participants and their work groups, their skills, education and self-efficacy, as well as the gender-based macro-culture of the organisation, were not found to affect the career decisions of participants to the extent that this is proposed by Young and Hulric (2007). This indicates that these constructs are less applicable when considering influential factors in the career decision making of South African women in atypical careers.

Additional factors that were identified by participants to be applicable in their career decision making included working hours, years of service, job satisfaction, job autonomy, working conditions, a preference for working with men, and a preference for working with people. Working hours, years of service and job satisfaction were considered most important by participants when considering their future career decisions.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the first objective of this research has been attained and that the applicability of Young and Hurlic's (2007) model to South African women in atypical careers has been established.

*Objective 2: To conceptualise gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture, perceived person-group fit, perceived stress, self-efficacy, gender-based macro-culture, perceived person-organisation fit and career decisions and the interactions between these constructs in the literature.*

The constructs of Young and Hurlic's (2007) model, and the interactions between these constructs, were well conceptualised in the literature. These interactions will be discussed next.

#### **Awareness, Self-monitoring Behaviours, Group Acceptance and Person-group Fit**

Awareness was found by Kumru and Thompson (2003) to be related to self-monitoring behaviours, group acceptance and person-group fit of employees in atypical positions.

#### **Gender Orientation, Group Orientation and Person-group Fit**

The connection between gender orientations of employees in atypical positions and the collective orientations of their work groups was explored by Young and Hurlic (2007) who found that congruence among these constructs resulted in strong person-group fit.

#### **Group Acceptance, Person-group Fit, Skills and Education**

Karakowsky, McBey, and Miller (2004) found that group acceptance resulted in person-group fit of employees in atypical positions, whereas skills and education were found by Daley (1996) to impact on the interaction between gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture and person-group fit.

#### **Person-group Fit, Perceived Stress, Self-efficacy and Career Decision Making**

The connection between person-group fit and perceived stress was established by Lazarus (1977) who found a negative relationship between these constructs. Lazarus (1977) also found perceived stress to moderate the relationship between person-organisation fit, and the career decisions of employees in atypical positions. Self-efficacy was claimed by Brooks, Morgan, and Scherer (1990) to result from person-group fit and to moderate the relationship between person-organisation fit and career decision making of employees in atypical positions.

## **Person-group Fit, Person-organisation Fit, Gender-based Macro-culture and Career Decision Making**

The connection between person-group fit and person-organisation fit was explored by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) who found a positive relationship among these constructs. They also identified person-organisation fit to be related to career decisions of employees in atypical positions. Young and Hurlic (2007) identified gender-based macro-culture to moderate the relationship between person-group fit and person-organisation fit of employees in atypical positions.

Based on the section above, it can be concluded that the second objective of this research has been achieved, as the constructs in Young and Hurlic's (2007) model, and the interactions between these constructs, were conceptualised in the literature.

*Objective 3: To determine the interactions between gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture, person-group fit, perceived stress, self-efficacy, gender-based macro-culture, person-organisation fit and career decisions in a sample of women in atypical careers.*

The findings of this research, with regards to the constructs outlined in Young and Hurlic's (2007) model and the interactions between these constructs, are presented in the section below.

### **Awareness, Self-monitoring Behaviours, Group Acceptance and Person-group Fit**

Findings from this research established that a connection existed between the person-group fit, group acceptance, self-monitoring behaviours, and awareness of participants. Participants who experienced person-group fit were also found to experience group acceptance, had high levels of awareness, and were found to adapt their behaviours according to the expectations and demands of their work groups.

### **Gender Orientation, Group Orientation and Person-group Fit**

Research findings indicated that congruence between gender orientations of participants and the collective gender orientations of their work groups did not affect the experiences of person-group fit of participants. Most participants were found to experience person-group fit despite having gender orientations that were incongruent with the collective gender orientations of their work groups.

### **Group Acceptance, Person-group Fit, Skills and Education**

Results indicated that there is a connection between group acceptance and person-group fit of participants as all participants who experienced group acceptance also reported person-group fit. Both skills and education were found to be related to the person-group fit of participants. Neither of these constructs, however, was found to impact on the relationship between gender enactment, gender-based micro-culture and person-group fit.

### **Person-group Fit, Perceived Stress, Self-efficacy and Career Decision Making**

Results of this study indicated that person-group fit resulted in low levels of perceived stress and high levels of self-efficacy among participants. Perceived stress was found to influence the relationship between person-organisation fit and the career decision making of participants as all participants who reported perceived stress chose to leave their respective organisation. Self-efficacy, however, was found to have no effect on this relationship.

### **Person-group Fit, Person-organisation Fit, Gender-based Macro-culture and Career Decision Making**

A connection was established between person-group fit and person-organisation fit of participants in this study. It was also found that participants who reported person-organisation fit chose to stay within their respective organisation by making lateral career moves, seeking promotions, or remaining in their current positions. Gender-based macro-culture was found to have no moderating effect on the relationship between person-group and person-organisation fit, as participants who reported that they experienced both types of fit did so despite having gender orientations incongruent to the macro-culture of the organisation and experiencing low macro-culture acceptance.

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that the interactions between the constructs of the model of Young and Hurlic (2007) have been determined in a sample of women in atypical careers, and, therefore, that the third objective of this research has been attained.

## **3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The following limitations of the research should be considered in contextualising the results mentioned in the section above.

A limited number of participants that met the criteria of the sample were available. A small sample was, therefore, used and that limited the statistical analysis of results. With regards to the sample, women in atypical positions only were interviewed, which limits the applicability of findings to the female gender. The research incorporated only the perspectives of participants, and other opinions, such as those of work colleagues and supervisors, were not solicited in this research. Had these views been incorporated in the research, different findings, from a more holistic perspective, might have been obtained.

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations are made for the respective organisation in which the study was conducted, as well as or future research in the section below.

#### **3.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation**

It is recommended that the organisation considers the factors explored in the research when recruiting and retaining women in atypical positions. There are several measures that could be put in place to ensure the job satisfaction of women in atypical positions which will ultimately affect their career decisions.

It is recommended that the concerned organisation appoints mentors to assist newly appointed women in atypical positions who enter the workplace. The role of this mentor should be to provide newly appointed women in atypical positions with sufficient information regarding plant processes, to introduce them to other women in atypical positions in their work area, and to act as a consultant in the case of personal, interpersonal and work related problems that they encounter. This should enhance the group acceptance and person-group fit of women in atypical positions within the organisation.

Another recommendation that ought to be considered by the organisation is that of enabling women in atypical positions to share the experiences they encounter on a regular basis. This could be a useful platform to discuss problems encountered in the workplace (both job-related and interpersonal problems with colleagues) and find solutions for these problems in a constructive environment. It may be helpful for these women to share their experiences with others who find themselves in similar situations. This would help them create meaningful relationships with one another, which will ultimately improve their person-organisation fit.

As stress was identified as a factor that had a profound influence on the career decision making of employees in atypical positions, it is recommended that stress management initiatives are put in place and made accessible to women in atypical positions within the organisation.

It may also prove useful to look into additional themes outside of the model of Young and Hurlic (2007) that were mentioned by participants to be influential in their career decision making when exploring methods to retain women in atypical positions. These themes included the working hours, working conditions, job satisfaction, job autonomy and work preferences of participants.

### **3.3.2 Recommendations for further research**

It is recommended that a quantitative study be conducted to verify the model of Young and Hurlic (2007). Data should be gathered from various organisations and different industries to obtain a more representative sample which will enhance the applicability of research findings in other contexts. It is advisable that men in atypical positions are also studied to determine the applicability of the model of Young and Hurlic (2007) to both genders. Furthermore, it may be beneficial not only to take participants' perceptions into account with regards to their experiences, but also to obtain opinions from their managers and work colleagues to get a more holistic perspective of their group acceptance, person-group fit and person-organisation fit.

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## **ANNEXURE A: LETTER TO REQUEST PARTICIPATION**



### **RESEARCH PROJECT**

#### **OVERVIEW**

I am currently conducting research towards a Masters degree in Industrial Psychology at the North-West University (Vaal Triangle Campus). The purpose of my research study is to investigate the experiences of women in traditionally male careers (atypical careers), and to determine how these experiences influence their career decision making. The focus will specifically be on the gender orientation of women in atypical positions in interaction with their immediate work groups, and how this influences their person-group fit, person-organisation fit, and ultimately, their career related decisions. This study will provide the organisation with useful information as to how its culture can be adapted to accommodate and ultimately retain women in atypical careers, which will enable the organisation to access the many benefits held by a diverse workforce.

#### **DATA COLLECTION**

This research study is qualitative of nature. It will therefore be necessary to conduct interviews with research participants. The process to be followed includes three steps and is outlined as follows. Step one involves conducting a pilot study to aid the formulation of interview questions. No more than three participants will be utilized as part of the pilot study. The purpose of this step is to aid the formulation of questions for step two.

The second step involves the application of unstructured interviewing to gather information from ten female participants including Engineers, Technologists, Technicians, Millwrights, Steelmakers and Equipment Operators. This sample has been selected on the basis of availability on each organisational level. The amount of time needed for each interview will be approximately 30 minutes per participant.

Participants will be treated with respect and information will be kept confidential and anonymous. The purpose of this step is to identify focus areas for step three and formulate interview questions for use in structured interviews.

The third and final step will include the application of structured interviewing on all participants used in step two. The results obtained from this step will be interpreted and made available to participants upon request.

If you have any queries please feel free to contact me via telephone or email.

Jolene (E-mail): [vdberg.jolene@gmail.com](mailto:vdberg.jolene@gmail.com)

(Cell): 076 882 0820

Kind Regards,

Danie du Toit (**Project Leader**)

Jolene van den Berg (**Researcher**)

## **ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Do you feel that you are expected to act less feminine at work than at home?
2. If yes: How do you adapt to these expectations? (Do you act differently, dress differently et cetera.)
3. Is there a difference between how men and women act in this organisation?
4. What are these differences?
5. Are you different from the men you are working with? Are you for instance more sympathetic, compassionate, conscientious and tactful than they are?
6. Would you say that they are more assertive, dominant and competitive?
7. How do these differences between the men you work with affect your work relationships and performance?
8. Do the men in your work group accept women as they are or do they need to change in order to fit in?
9. In your workgroup, what approach is more likely to be taken to get things done; a more forceful, individualistic and competitive approach, or a more helpful, sensitive and tactful approach? Why?
10. What can you do to change the way things are done?
11. Do you feel that you fit into your department at work? Why?
12. What skills do you think is necessary to do your job?
13. Do you possess these skills?
14. Are you able to meet the daily demands of you work, considering your current skills?
15. Are you experiencing any problems at work that cause you stress? Please elaborate?
16. Do you feel competent in your work?
17. Does your team recognise your competence? Do they see you as able to do the full job?
18. Do you think that you fit into the ArcelorMittal environment? Why?
19. Do you consider ArcelorMittal to be a masculine or feminine organisation?

20. Is it necessary for you to adapt your behaviour to fit into this masculine or feminine culture?
21. What do you think would happen if you don't adapt your behaviour according to this culture?
22. Would you describe ArcelorMittal as a female friendly environment?
23. What are your career plans for the future?