Introduction

In the past, middle and senior managers have tended to emerge unscathed from economic recession, and those who did lose their jobs received substantial pay-offs and long notice periods. Until the late 1980s the number of unemployed managers was relatively low, but job loss through economic pressures and structural changes is increasingly affecting this occupational group, especially middle managers. The 1990s have seen record levels of organizational downsizing which has had a major impact on managers, who have borne the brunt of these cutbacks (Capell, 1992). Much of the work performed by middle management has been eroded by information technology and the drive for efficiency, which has placed many managers under enormous pressure to perform ever increasing workloads (Malo, 1993). Increasing numbers of managers are being discarded as surplus to requirement because they are unable to perform at the required levels; those who have few or no formal qualifications are particularly susceptible to redundancy (White, 1991).

The number of unemployed managers, registered with the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in December 1995, exceeded 100 000. Over 86 000 men and over 22 000 women had previously held managerial positions, most of whom (72%) were seeking jobs at a similar occupation level (Department for Education and Employment, 1996a). The majority of unemployed managers were registered with the DfEE for the first time in their careers, but 8% had registered once or twice previously and 3% had registered at least three times (Employment Service, 1995a).

The DfEE have identified two important variables which affect the levels of unemployment experienced by managers – location and age. The highest levels of managerial unemployment are found in the south of England (56.7%), followed by the north of England (23.3%) and the Midlands (20%) (Department for Education and Employment, 1996a). These figures do reflect...
the general levels of unemployment found in the south of England, where unemployment is three times higher than anywhere else in the country, but not for the north or the Midlands. Unemployment levels are higher in the north than in the Midlands but the number of unemployed managers is proportionally less in the north, with the lowest numbers of registered unemployed managers recorded in the DfEE Northern Region, an area which includes Newcastle and Sunderland.

The second, and most important variation is related to the age of unemployed managers. A clear relationship is found between the age of unemployed managers and the levels of unemployment experienced by managers, with the proportion of unemployed managers increasing substantially with age (Department for Education and Employment, 1996a). In addition, the duration of unemployment experienced by managers also increases with age, with older managers being much more likely to experience periods of unemployment in excess of six months than their younger counterparts.

The greatest social change over the last two decades has been the increase of women in paid employment. In 1996 women accounted for 49.5% of the UK workforce (Department for Education and Employment, 1996b) and this figure will continue to rise until the year 2006 according to recent government projections (Employment Service, 1995b). Although almost a third of all UK managers are now women (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1996) the majority are employed at the lowest levels of the managerial hierarchy and tend to be concentrated in marketing, personnel, catering, retailing and education (Davidson, 1996).

Employment is important to women both as a source of income and as a defining factor in self conceptions. Attitudes and social patterns which deny the legitimacy of women’s employment persist and ignore the importance that work has come to occupy in lives of many women (Ratcliff and Brogden, 1988). It has often been proposed that women will actually experience less stress than men during unemployment because the work/family interface, which is a major source of stress for working women, is removed (Newell, 1993). This approach has been used to further devalue the worth of women’s employment, but research does not support this view. Studies that have included unemployed women show no significant difference between unemployed men and women in terms of self-esteem, hostility, and personal distress. However, they have found that unemployment is experienced differently by each sex (Leana and Feldman, 1991; Stokes and Cochrane, 1984). In addition, further research has shown that women are faced with additional sources of stress and the denial of the importance of work in women’s lives often results in unsupportive social ‘support’ and an undermining of self-worth (Ratcliff and Brogden, 1988).

Stress and unemployment model

Employment, and specifically managerial employment, still appear to be intrinsically linked with masculinity, resulting in few studies of women’s unemployment and only one previous study relating to unemployed female managers, conducted by the authors (Fielden and Davidson, 1996). This paper aims to present a review and comparative research model illustrating sources of stress, moderators of stress and stress outcomes that may affect the experiences of unemployed male and female managers. Figure 1 presents the proposed model of stress and unemployment in managers, specifically distinguishing areas in which gender differences are likely to be found. This multivariable approach is the first comprehensive paradigm to consider all aspects of unemployment, personality factors and coping strategies cumulating in a model of stress and unemployment in both male and female managers, based upon the findings to date. However, it should be noted throughout this review that, as there is limited information available as to the effects of unemployment on women, the findings quoted will, unless otherwise stated, refer to unemployed men. Moreover, one must also acknowledge that the majority of research to date, relates to blue-collar workers, with only a minimal number of studies concentrating on white-collar workers or managers.

Sources of stress

The first section of the paper will concentrate on reviewing the literature delineating sources of stress which have been specifically isolated as having specific relevance to managers with particular emphasis on gender differences between
male and female managers. The following five major sources of unemployment stress will be discussed: job loss and unemployment status; financial effect; social support; activities; and job search (see Figure 1).

**Job loss and unemployment status**

**Job loss.** For the purpose of this review, job loss is defined as *an event that removes paid employment from an individual*, regardless of the motives of the parties involved (Doran *et al.*, 1991; Wanberg and Marchese, 1994). Job loss leads to the loss of both the psychological and practical benefits provided by paid employment, which can create a situation ‘replete with intra-psychic and interpersonal turmoil’ (Estes, 1973). Research suggests that job loss causes reactions on several levels: on the *emotional* level, anxiety, depression, and/or apathy (Eales, 1988; Melville *et al.*, 1985); on the *cognitive* level, disturbed ability to concentrate, perceive, make decisions, and/or be creative (Latack, Kinicki and Prussia, 1995); on the *behavioural* level, abuse of alcohol, tobacco, drugs,
and/or food (Hammarstrom and Janlert, 1994); and on the physiological level, neuroendocrine ‘stress reactions’ (Arnetz et al., 1987; Fleming et al., 1984). Job loss is a key determinant of physical and emotional ill-being for the unemployed person and in some cases these reactions may even lead to increased morbidity and mortality.

The degree to which job loss is experienced as a negative event is dependent upon a number of contextual factors. Kelvin and Jarret (1985) for example, suggest that in times of high unemployment, stigmatization of the unemployed is relatively rare, as it is generally assumed that external factors, such as recession, are responsible for unemployment and not individual characteristics. Thus, those who do not see unemployment as a personal stigma are more likely to experience better psychological well-being than those who perceive the unemployed as a stigmatized group.

Those who feel that they have no personal control over their job-loss experiences are also more likely to experience distress, and are more likely to suffer negative effects during their period of unemployment, than those who feel that they have some degree of personal control over their situation (Swinburne, 1981). Individuals who see their job loss resulting from external factors are more likely to perceive themselves as similar to others without jobs, thereby deriving a sense of self-worth from similarity in comparison with other unemployed people (Sheeran et al., 1995). In contrast, those who believe that they are responsible for their own job loss are more likely to perceive themselves as less similar to others without jobs. They generally believe that society also views them as responsible for being unemployed (Breakwell, 1985), thereby stigmatizing themselves by denying the legitimacy of their own unemployment in both social and personal terms. Unemployed managers, who may be more prone to view their own positions as unique or exceptional because of their relatively small numbers, may be more likely to experience self-blame than other unemployed groups. This may be particularly prevalent in unemployed female managers, who are even less likely than their male counterparts to have contact with others in similar positions.

Job loss and managers. Most unemployment research has been concerned with blue-collar workers, but there are a number of studies which have looked at the impact of unemployment of male managers and these have produced mixed findings. Fineman (1983) found that male managers showed a significant depreciation in self-esteem, yet Hartley (1980a) found that the self-esteem of male managers (n = 87) did not decline during unemployment. Hartley proposed that there was no evidence that unemployed managers are any more anxious, tense, or apprehensive than employed managers, though this study was conducted during the late 1970s when managerial unemployment was much lower and it might have been much less of a threat to self-esteem. She suggested that, because managers have greater experience in dealing with stressful and pressurized situations, they cope with unemployment by responding in an assertive and resourceful manner. However, in a relatively small study (n = 20), Swinburne (1981) reported that male managers did experience the same phasic reaction as blue-collar workers, i.e. shock, optimism, pessimism and fatalism, although they passed through these phases more slowly. The initial shock of unemployment was the most frequently mentioned emotion experienced by participants accompanied by fear and uncertainty surrounding the future. Feelings of shame, loss of status and loss of self-respect were reported, but less frequently than anticipated.

Hartley (1980b) proposed that some managers actually welcomed the challenge of job loss and the new opportunities it may have provided, concluding that the responses of unemployed managers were much more complex and varied than those of other unemployed workers, who tend to respond in a more passive way. However, there is little support for the idea that managers take such a positive approach to unemployment. Swinburne (1981) found that, although 55% of participants recognize some positive aspects of being out of work, all but a small minority felt that any possible benefits were outweighed by the accompanying fear and uncertainty surrounding the depressed job market. In addition, it is important to note that few of the participants chose to discuss their unemployment voluntarily and this fact was attributed to poor levels of self-disclosure. Where these feelings were disclosed, their intensity varied considerably and, whilst causing distress for some, for some others they were strongly destructive forces (Swinburne, 1981).
To date only one study has been conducted into the effects of unemployment on female managers, and this has produced some interesting results. The qualitative study (n = 27), found that the impact of job loss on female managers is substantial, with unemployed female managers experiencing significant decreases in self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth (Fielden and Davidson, 1996). The most significant sources of stress experienced by unemployed female managers were those faced during job search, with discrimination being encountered at all stages of the recruitment process. The effects of these stressors were minimized by several coping strategies, which included the maintenance of high activity levels, social support and personal control (Fielden and Davidson, 1996). These coping strategies appeared to be extremely successful, with unemployed female managers experiencing similar levels of mental and physical well-being to the employed counterparts. This contrasts with recent research into the personality of unemployed male managers, which has found that unemployed male managers experience greater anxiety than their employed peers (Brindle, 1992).

The number of studies into the effects of unemployment on managers is minimal, and the findings of those studies have not been consistent. However, the weight of support favours the conclusion that the psychological effects of unemployment for managers are comparable with those for other workers, although the evidence suggests that the experience of unemployment may be qualitatively different. A recent report produced by the Institute of Management (Duffield, 1994) suggests that the loss of opportunity for skill use is a key factor in the impact of job loss experienced by managers. They believe that continuing unemployment frequently means that managers lose confidence in their managerial abilities, inhibiting their job search and reducing their chances of success in obtaining suitable employment. Thus, the activity that is most likely to benefit them most, i.e. job search, is the activity which is also likely to have the greatest negative effect on self-confidence and self-esteem.

Job loss and women. The majority of research conducted into the effects of job loss are based upon the male model of work. Thus, in order to compare the effects of job loss on male and female managers, we must first look at the role work has come to occupy in women’s lives and how the removal of that role may impact upon female managers. It is only by gaining an appreciation of women’s attitudes towards work that we can evaluate the possible effects of the removal of the psychological and material benefits of paid employment.

Although the myth that women only work for ‘pin money’ has been repeatedly exposed, this belief that women only work for money still prevails (Dilnot and Kell, 1988). Yet, studies consistently show that women derive both satisfaction and status from work, and have an extraordinary attachment to their paid employment, often experiencing an increased sense of self-control and empowerment (Coyle, 1984; Rosenfield, 1989). Peitromonaco, Manis and Markus (1987) found that full-time employment was of particular benefit to those who viewed themselves as career-oriented, reporting significantly higher levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction and well-being than their non-career oriented counterparts (p < 0.0002). These findings indicate that employment provides women with much more than just a source of income. In addition, previous research has also found that women’s commitment to work, unlike their male counterparts, is not directly derived from their level of income, but from the degree of satisfaction and sense of belonging they experience at work (Pittman and Orthner, 1988). However, as women enter positions that demand greater investment of time and energy they can experience increasing conflict between home and work relationships. Thus, although working women, especially those in managerial or professional positions, report high levels of job satisfaction they also report high levels of stress (Davidson, Cooper and Baldini, 1995; Travers and Cooper, 1991).

Working women have many conflicting roles and some observers of women’s multiple-role involvement have speculated that trying to be worker, wife and mother contributes to greater psychological distress (Pleck, 1985). Thus, it has been suggested that the removal of paid employment from women’s lives would reduce this distress. However, although multiple-role strain can have an adverse effect on women’s mental and physical health, studies have failed to substantiate a consistent relationship (Akabas, 1988). In an alternative approach it has recently been argued that it is the quality of women’s experience within and across roles, rather than the number of roles,
that influences mental health (Piechowski, 1992) with role quality accounting for significant increases in job satisfaction \((p < 0.002)\) and self-esteem \((p < 0.0004)\). Findings show that it is not the time investment required to maintain multiple roles that leads to conflict and distress, but the identity derived from those roles that predicts well-being (Carlson, Kacmar and Stepina, 1995). Further to this, it has been suggested that a greater number of roles can actually enhance psychological well-being by providing access to resources and alternative sources of gratification as well as promoting greater social interaction (Thoits, 1986). Thus, rather than having a negative effect on women’s health, it would appear that employment actually improves the health of women, married or single, who have a positive attitude towards work (Repetti, Matthews and Waldron, 1989). This improvement is found to be greatest for women in professional and managerial positions for whom employment is often the major identifying role in their lives (Arber, Gilbert and Dale, 1985).

In general, women have learned to cope with the demands of multiple roles by integrating their working and personal lives. However, this approach has often been interpreted as a lack of dedication and commitment to work, leading many to believe that employment is a low priority for women. It has been argued that working women are not happier or more satisfied than women who stay at home, and that employment itself bears little relationship to women’s well-being (Warr and Parry, 1982). This belief is not supported by previous research, which has clearly shown that unemployed women experience greater stress than working women (Warren, 1980). However, the belief that women’s employment is relatively unimportant still persists and has resulted in women experiencing greater employment insecurity than men. In times of recession women are the first to be discarded, are most vulnerable to future layoffs, and suffer more unemployment than men (Rogers, 1980; Snyder and Nowak, 1984).

Although recent research has addressed many of the myths about women’s attitude to work (Billing and Alvesson, 1993; Dex, 1988) the legitimacy of women’s work is still denied by the lack of research in their experiences of job loss and unemployment. This denial is nowhere more evident than in the male-dominated realms of management. Unemployed female managers, unlike employed female managers, seem not only to be considered less valuable than their male counterparts but have continually been disregarded. Unemployed female managers have been treated as an invisible group whose exclusion from previous research highlights how undervalued they and their experiences are.

**Unemployment status.** Unemployment can be distinguished from job loss by the concept of duration, i.e. if an individual does not obtain new employment immediately, job loss will lead to a period of unemployment. Thus, job loss and unemployment form part of a continuum based upon time, with job loss as the precipitating event at one end of the continuum and long-term unemployment at the other. Therefore, in order to understand the full impact of unemployment we need to consider not just the effects of job loss, but also the effects of ongoing unemployment on mental and physical well-being. In assessing these effects we need to consider the consequences of the removal of both latent and manifest benefits, i.e. financial and psychological deprivation, experienced by both men and women.

**The financial effects of unemployment**

Most unemployed people experience substantial reductions in their income. Warr and Jackson (1984) found that 66% of people had a total household income between 33% and 50% of their previous employed income. This considerable loss of income, coupled with the meagre level of state unemployment benefits, ensures that the majority of unemployed people live in relative, if not absolute, poverty (Fryer, 1995). Even those who are initially protected from the effects of reduced income, by either redundancy payments or savings, experience increasing economic deprivation as these resources diminish. Thus, economic deprivation is inevitably associated with increasing length of unemployment (Brief et al., 1995), leading to decreases in both physical and psychological well-being. It is therefore not surprising that findings consistently show that unemployed people experience not only objective financial distress but also significant subjective distress (Fryer, 1995).

Financial stress has been shown to increase the incidence of reported symptoms of illness (Aldwin and Revenson, 1986) and the incidence of mental problems in unemployed populations.
(Frese and Mohr, 1987) – a situation highlighted by a large-scale longitudinal Dutch study, which showed a direct relationship between the level of state benefits and mental well-being, with low levels of financial strain accounting for between 50% and 76% of the psychological distress experienced (Schaufeli and Van Yperen, 1992). The effects of job loss on income levels mean that even the ‘affluent’ unemployed can experience distressing financial deprivation relative to their previous situation (Fryer, 1995). It is important to note that financial hardship is a relative experience, and economic deprivation should not be viewed solely in terms of income change. The degree of deprivation experience by an individual is based upon their financial position in relationship to self-selected reference groups and the normative expectancies of those groups (Seidman and Rapkin, 1989). Personal identity is increasingly experienced and expressed through spending and consumption – it has been proposed that we are what we can afford to buy (Fryer, 1995). An inability to spend money on non-essential items, such as entertainment, often leads to a withdrawal from social contact. Thus, economic deprivation can result in social isolation, a situation which significantly accentuates the effects of financial stress on mental well-being (p < 0.05) (Viinamaki et al., 1993).

The performance of many roles is either inhibited or prohibited by poverty, and it has been suggested that men are likely to suffer most from the effects of financial stress because of their inability to fulfil their role as breadwinner. George and Brief (1990) suggest that, whilst there have been dramatic changes in sex roles in the twentieth century, there appears to remain an attachment of males to the breadwinner role in many families. Although men are becoming financially more and more dependent upon women, whilst women are becoming increasingly less financially dependent upon men, conceptions of masculinity still retain the breadwinner role as a defining characteristic. The continuing existence of this role has been reflected in several studies which have found that men’s earnings have a direct and negative effect on the level of depression they experience, accounting for 67% of the variance of reported life-satisfaction, whilst no such link has been found for women (George and Brief, 1990; Ross and Huber, 1985). Thus, whilst in real terms there may be no difference in the financial responsibilities of unemployed male and female managers, these findings would suggest that the effect of economic deprivation experienced by unemployed male managers may be substantially greater than that experienced by unemployed female managers.

Research into the effects of financial hardship experienced during unemployment has been almost solely based upon the income levels of blue-collar workers, with two notable exceptions. A comparative study by Payne, Warr and Hartley (1984), found that working-class respondents reported significantly greater financial problems than middle-class workers (managerial and non-managerial white-collar). However, this does not appear to be supported by the more in-depth work of Fryer (1995), who found that higher pre-unemployment earnings were linked to greater financial distress during unemployment. Managers potentially earn significantly more than blue-collar workers, hence it may be anticipated that their reduction in income, as a result of job loss, would be much greater than that experienced by other workers. Thus, the effects of unemployment in terms of financial strain may be more traumatic for managers than for blue-collar or non-managerial white-collar workers.

Social support
Employment is an important source of social support, especially for women (Pittman and Orthner, 1988). The loss of this manifest consequence of work through unemployment can lead to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. It is during this time that family and friends can be a valuable source of support, support which can help reduce the general distress, depression and anxiety experienced by unemployed people (Warr, Jackson and Banks, 1988). In order to understand the effect family and friends can have on the experiences of unemployed female managers, we must first look at the forms social support can take and their impact on psychological health.

Type of support. A well-established social network is a structural prerequisite of feeling socially integrated and emotionally accepted (Veiel and Baumann, 1992). The size of an individual’s network, i.e. the number of friends and family and the frequency of contact with them, is referred to as social integration. Studies have found a
positive association between the time spent with others and psychological well-being (Bolton and Oatley, 1987; Warr, 1987). However, it is not only the number of active social ties which determines the degree of isolation experienced by an individual, but it is the quality of those ties. Social support refers to the perceived quality of relationships, the function of those relationships and the benefits provided by those relationships (Schwarzer, Hahn and Fuchs, 1994). It is important to note that it is not the amount of social support an individual actually receives that moderates the impact of unemployment on well-being, but the perceived availability of that support (Wethington and Kessler, 1986).

The degree to which an individual experiences social integration is an important aspect of most people’s lives, but it is close personal relationships, with either family or friends, that for the majority of people are what ‘makes life meaningful’ (Argyle, 1989). These relationships are often the most salient forms of social support, providing both emotional and instrumental support for unemployed individuals (Argyle, 1989). Emotional support is characterized by the actions of caring or listening sympathetically and instrumental support is characterized by rendering tangible assistance, for example in the form of advice or knowledge (Fenlason and Beehr, 1994). It has often been assumed that emotional support is more effective than instrumental support, but research would suggest that the most effective sources of social support are those that provide both types (Kaufmann and Beehr, 1986).

There is considerable evidence that the presence of close relationships helps to stave off depression, certain clinical problems and certain physical ailments by reducing stress (Duck, 1988). Brugha et al. (1990) found that satisfaction with social support accounted for up to 38% of the variance found in patient’s recovery from depression. This is further supported by longitudinal evidence (n = 100) which suggests that unemployed individuals who are unsupported experience significantly higher elevations and more changes in measure of cholesterol (p < 0.005), illness symptoms (p < 0.001) and affective response (p < 0.001) than those who are supported (Gore, 1978). It has been suggested that, for women, social support is the most important factor in determining mental health during unemployment (Ratchiff and Brogden, 1988). A lack of intimacy has been found to significantly increase the risk of major depression in women and is particularly destructive in those who are unemployed, substantially increasing their risk of depression (p < 0.05) (Hallstrom, 1986). Research shows that unemployed women actively seek and successfully receive social support from relatives and friends (Retherford, Hildreth and Goldsmith, 1988). However, not all social support is supportive and the type of support given appears to be qualitatively different depending upon whether it is given by a partner, a family member or a friend. Research tends to concentrate on these specific sources of support, therefore the literature on each area will be reviewed separately.

**Partner’s reactions.** The support offered by a partner during unemployment can be the most crucial variable regarding the well-being of both unemployed men and women. Living with a partner does appear to have beneficial effects, but it is the effective quality of that relationship that is important in determining psychological well-being (Schwartzberg and Dytell, 1989). Support from partners can help to bolster self-esteem and lessen feelings of helplessness and, whilst the levels of received support appear to be the same for men and women, the types of support given tends to be different (Caplan, 1982; Starrin and Larson, 1987). Unemployed men tend to receive emotional support from their spouses rather than any other form of support (Bolton and Oatley, 1987). In contrast, unemployed women tend to receive higher levels of instrumental support, i.e. financial or informational, than emotional support, although it does appear to be a crucial form of social support (Starrin and Larson, 1987).

Being in a satisfactory relationship can provide significant benefits, but being married per se does not guarantee better psychological well-being, and can lead to additional strain where there is a lack of support and understanding. Marital relationships not only act as moderators of the stress response but may also be a source of stress during unemployment. This source of stress appears to be experienced differently by men and women. For example, high rates of unemployment are associated with marital instability and an increased likelihood of divorce for men but not for women (Sander, 1992). Marital breakdown has negative effects on health regardless of an individual’s employment situation, but in conjunction with
unemployment can have devastating results on physical and psychological well-being (Taubman and Rosen, 1982). It has been suggested that this difference arises because there is a direct link between loss of male earnings and marital dissatisfaction, but not between loss of female earnings and marital dissatisfaction (Becker, 1981). This emphasis on male earnings is possibly related to the inability of unemployed men to fulfil their perceived societal role as ‘breadwinner’, and may be a source of both spousal and self pressure.

In contrast, unemployed women often find that their partners are unsupportive towards their situation because they actually prefer them to be unemployed (Ratcliff and Brogden, 1988). This can arise from a lack of enthusiasm for their wife working, with some partners deriving satisfaction from their being out of a job. These findings may lead to the conclusion that being married, or living with a partner, may be detrimental to the wellbeing of unemployed women. However, Starrin and Larson (1987) found that unemployed single women experienced greater amounts of depression and higher incidents of physical illness than unemployed wives, suggesting that even though the emotional support received from the partners of unemployed females is often limited, the instrumental support they receive is of substantial benefit. This is of particular relevance taking into account that female managers are less likely to be married compared to their male counterparts (Davidson and Cooper, 1992).

In contrast, Stokes and Levin (1986) reported that unemployed men are more likely to seek support from friends rather than from their close relations, as they prefer to keep family and work roles separate (Greenglass, 1993a).

Whilst considering the effects of social support on psychological well-being it must be recognized that it is possible for the family environment to exacerbate the effects of unemployment on mental and physical health. Family obligations may carry their own stressors and these may be increased during unemployment, a situation exacerbated by the inability to escape from the family environment (Hibbard and Pope, 1993). The impact of job loss may also be compounded by the negative feedback that unemployed individuals often receive from families. This appears to be particularly relevant for unemployed women, especially those for whom work is a defining factor in their self-concept. Ratcliff and Brogden (1988) suggest that women often experience depressive symptoms because their families are insensitive to the importance the role paid employment has in women’s lives. This lack of understanding can lead to feelings of rejection and of worthlessness.

Social contacts. Studies have shown that friendships are an important source of social support for both men and women. However, gender differences have been consistently found between the quality or nature of friendship sought by men and women (Greenglass, 1993a; Stokes and Levin, 1986). Women have a strong interest in developing close, dyadic relationships, whereas men tend to be more group oriented, including three or more people. In addition, employed men report having more friends and attending more ‘get togethers’ with significantly greater numbers of friends in an average week than employed women (Stokes and Levin, 1986). Yet men frequently report higher levels of loneliness than women, regardless of their employment status, with the lack of intimacy they experience in their relationships accounting for twice as much variance as for women (Brugha et al., 1990; Stokes and Levin, 1986). This lack of intimacy is exacerbated by the fact that men do not tend to talk to one another as a means of coping, thereby failing to utilize the resources available to them in a constructive or positive way (Greenglass, 1993a).

Work is an important source of close relationships for both men and women, often producing
intimate and lasting friendships that individuals frequently do not have access to outside of the work environment (Duck, 1988). The social support available at work has a direct effect on psychological well-being, with both working men and women reporting greater levels of social support than those who were either unemployed or non-working (Bolton and Oatley, 1987; Pugliesi, 1988). These social contacts are extremely important to women, with the ‘company of others’ being sighted as the main non-financial reason for working by both employed and unemployed women (Dex, 1988). In contrast, men frequently report financial reasons as their main motivation for working (Pittman and Orthner, 1988), although a large-scale study of Holahan and Moos (1982) suggests that the work environment is a more salient source of social support for men than it is for women, yet it accounts for three times as much variance in psychological ill-health of women than men.

The amount of active social support given by non-family members reduces significantly during unemployment, leaving individuals with smaller networks of social contacts (Jackson, 1988). In addition, the quality of social contact frequently changes after job loss, becoming less intimate and more casual (Stokes and Cochrane, 1984). This change may be precipitated by the unemployed person themselves by withdrawing from relationships in terms of their disclosure levels about their situation. Avoidance, often from embarrassment, guilt, shame or a lack of money, can rapidly lead to increased social isolation (Stokes and Cochrane, 1984). Thus, at a time when social support is most needed, some of the most beneficial sources of support may be removed (Duck, 1988).

Activities

The loss of employment means a loss of externally imposed structure and enforced activity which gives shape to people’s daily lives (Jahoda and Rush, 1980). Activity fulfils three important functions: it maintains mental alertness; it wards off fears and doubts; and provides an objective and a sense of achievement (Swinburne, 1981). Keeping active after job loss becomes increasingly more difficult, and the inability to replace the structure and level of meaningful activity can lead to apathy and depression. Two types of inactivity have been identified: not knowing what to do, and feeling too depressed to do anything (Swinburne, 1981). The two work together and once in a state of inactivity, individuals become trapped in a negative circle which is almost impossible to break.

The activities imposed at work range from those of a vacuous nature to those which are highly self-directed and self-structured. Fryer (1986) suggests that unemployment may free people to structure their own time in line with the needs of valued, chosen tasks and their own personal requirements. If this is so, then those who were previously employed in repetitive manual positions would be expected to gain more from unemployment than those who had held more self-directed positions. However, structuring one’s time in a constructive and fulfilling manner may be an ability that the second group are likely to be more proficient at than the first. Those who are characterized by independence, internally developed self-structuring and self-directedness, are more likely to be proactive in unemployment and more able to achieve valued purpose (Fryer, 1986).

The importance of activity during unemployment has been shown in a number of studies which have found that one of the best single predictors of mental health during unemployment was whether or not a man felt his time was occupied, accounting for twice as much variance as the length of time unemployed or age (Hepworth, 1980; Kilpatrick and Trew, 1985). Men initially were able to fill their time with home improvements or gardening but, even though they reported subsequent difficulty filling their time, they did not engage in domestic or leisure activities (O’Brien, 1986). Once they became locked into a routine of inactivity they reported that they ‘just could not be bothered’ with anything, even job search (Hepworth, 1980).

The majority of studies which have investigated the effects of activity levels on mental health during unemployment have only included men. The exclusion of women from such research may arise from the view that women’s domestic roles provide meaningful and fulfilling activities for all women, and these roles take the place of work roles during unemployment (Warr and Parry, 1982). It has been suggested that, whilst there is a tendency for unemployed women to fill their time with domestic activities, unemployed female managers frequently reject these roles as they do not provide the self-esteem that women managers need (Duffield, 1994). There is also no support for the assumption that women will engage in higher
levels of activity during unemployment than men. Wanberg and Marchese (1994) found no gender difference in the activity levels of unemployed men and women, with equal numbers of men and women reporting high, moderate and low levels of time structure. These levels of activity were again associated with mental and physical well-being, and the degree of stress experienced by each group was directly linked to the degree of time structure they maintained.

Although the levels of activity pursued by unemployed men and women appear to be similar, the type of activity they engaged in is gender oriented. Leana and Feldman (1991) have found gender differences in the focus of activities pursued by men and women. Men are more likely than women to rely on problem-focused activities, i.e. behaviours that attempt to directly eliminate the source of stress, such as job search, retraining and relocation. In contrast, women are more likely to rely on symptom-focused activities, i.e. behaviours that attempt to eliminate the symptoms of unemployment, such as seeking social support. Symptom-focused activities may be more successful in reducing some of the effects of unemployment on mental well-being, e.g. anxiety, loneliness, but because they do not address the source of the problem (i.e. job loss) they may result in longer periods of unemployment.

Job search

The job search activities of the unemployed have received little attention, with few studies considering the difficulties faced by individuals during their search for work. The absence of research is particularly noticeable in regard to unemployed women and managers, with the majority of work that has been conducted concentrating on unemployed men in search of non-managerial positions. Job search is an integral part of the unemployment experience, and unemployed managers are strongly encouraged to use all methods of job search, e.g. networking, speculative approaches to employers and employment agencies (Allan, 1989). However, the effectiveness of an individual's job search is not only dependent upon their own motivation to gain employment, but upon their approach to job search, their access to alternative methods of job search and the barriers they encounter during their search for employment.

Approaches to job search. Women depend much more upon formal methods of job search than men, reporting more frequent use of public advertisements and private agencies. They are also more likely to find work via the Job Centre, a finding reflected in their tendency to hold more favourable views about the Employment Service than unemployed men. In contrast, men tend to make more speculative approaches to employers, and utilize their personal and business networks more extensively (Daniel, 1990). It has frequently been argued that many of the differences in the experiences of men and women during unemployment arise from the fact that women are not as committed to finding work as men (Sheridan, 1994; Stokes and Cochrane, 1984). This appears to receive support from the finding that, on average, women will spend longer out of work than men. However, this generalization conceals major differences between single women, married women without children and married women with children. Single women find jobs more quickly than single men and, whilst the average duration for married women without dependent children is slightly longer, it is not dissimilar to that for all men. The most striking difference in the duration of unemployment is found in married women with dependent children, who spend significantly longer periods out of work than any other group. In contrast, the duration of unemployment experienced by men appears to be similar for all groups, regardless of marital status and domestic responsibilities.

Barriers to re-employment. It has been suggested that the most significant barrier faced by unemployed managers in their search for work, is their age (Allan, 1989). Previous research with male managers over 40 years of age has shown that, whilst age discrimination is not perceived an important factor in job loss, it is believed to be the main barrier preventing re-employment (Allan, 1990). Unemployment can be a particularly wrenching experience for older managers, especially those who have had many years service with one organization (Pittman and Orthner, 1988). The second most important barrier faced by male managers in their search for work appears to be being over-qualified (Allan, 1990). These findings have led to the recommendation that unemployed managers, especially those over 40, should expect to be offered jobs at lower levels of responsibility and lower
levels of pay than those they had previously held (Allan, 1989; Newman, 1988). Unemployed managers are encouraged to see these jobs as an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities within an organization, enabling them to forge new management careers (Kirkpatrick, 1988). However, the recommendation that even a mediocre job is better than no job at all is not supported by previous research, which suggests that individuals employed in jobs perceived to be unsatisfying are just as distressed as those who are unemployed (Winefield, Winefield, Tigemmann and Goldney, 1991).

In addition to age and being overqualified, unemployed male managers have reported five other significant barriers to successful job search (Allan, 1990). These are: the lack of jobs in their area of expertise; the general economic conditions; lack of jobs requiring their type of experience; lack of jobs with comparable salaries to their last position; and being unemployed too long. It is anticipated that the barriers encountered by unemployed male managers will also be encountered by unemployed female managers, but in addition they are likely to face barriers that are solely based upon gender discrimination, an issue which warrants separate consideration.

**Occupational gender stereotypes.** Unemployed female managers have not only to deal with the same financial and psychological consequences as unemployed male managers, they also have to contend with the extra difficulties that the ‘think manager, think male’ stereotype poses for job search (Sheridan, 1994). Davies and Esseveld (1989) suggest that women’s experiences of unemployment and job search are strongly connected to the gender discrimination that they face in the workplace. This discrimination is particularly prevalent in positions that have been traditionally male dominated, such as management, where women are confronted with additional barriers. These barriers not only have the potential to prevent unemployed women managers from securing employment, but also serve to prevent women having access to those positions.

Female managers experience many barriers to advancement when they are employed, and it is predicted that they will experience even greater barriers when seeking new employment. The main barrier to unemployed women managers is the perception that ‘male = manager’ (Sheridan, 1994).

The successful manager is aggressive, competitive, independent and self-reliant – he is not feminine. In a survey of 40 organizations, Hirsh and Bevan (1988) found that the phrases most commonly used in management selection, to describe the attributes considered necessary to management, referred to masculine personality traits. Characteristics such as non-aggression, artistic inclination and concern for the welfare of others are associated with non-related management traits, and are seen as weakness that would interfere with effective business processes (Orser, 1994).

Gender segregation in the workplace persists and individual jobs (including management) continue to be highly gender-segregated, with the vast majority of organizational job titles being held by one sex or the other (Davidson, 1996; Jacobs, 1989). Job segregation means that women are frequently inhibited from moving from predominantly female to predominantly male occupations, because of their lack of experience in ‘male jobs’ (Rosenfeld and Spennier, 1992). However, this lack of experience may not necessarily be seen by unemployed female managers as a barrier to their job search activities (Fielden and Davidson, 1996). It is anticipated that, in order to avoid many of the barriers they would have to face applying for male-dominated occupations, their job search activities are more likely to be restricted to predominately female occupations. Consequently, this minimizes the risk of rejection and maximizes their chances of successful job search (Fielden and Davidson, 1996).

In addition to prejudice and sexual stereotyping, unemployed female managers also have to cope with other specific sources of stress which have been isolated as unique to female managers. These include: overt and indirect discrimination from employers and organizational climates; feelings of isolation; and being placed in the role of ‘token women’ (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). It is possible that these barriers to re-employment not only make job search more stressful for unemployed female managers, but may mean that they are less successful in their job search activities than their male counterparts.

**Recruitment.** Employers are under a legal obligation to ensure that their recruitment procedures conform with the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), which states that employers must not discriminate or indicate any hidden intention to discriminate.
against a potential employee on the grounds of their sex. The very fact that many jobs are still viewed as ‘male’ or ‘female’ is often sufficient to prevent the non-dominant group from applying for those positions (Ray, 1990). Recruitment literature often conforms to the typical ‘male’ manager stereotype. Job search guides often refer to managers as ‘he’ or ‘businessmen’ (Dudeney, 1980; Heidrick & Struggles, 1983; Scott and Rochester, 1984). Illustrations used in advertisements frequently portray only men in managerial roles, with women portrayed in supportive non-managerial roles, and job specifications are often worded in terms of ‘he/his’ (Davidson and Burke, 1994; Ray, 1990). This may not necessarily reflect an intention on the part of the organization to openly discriminate but it is, by implication, indirect discrimination and illegal. Discrimination of this nature may result in fewer women applying for positions and can be very effective in filtering women out of the recruitment process.

Indirect discrimination may also prevent women from reaching either the interview or shortlisting stages, and there is clear evidence that similarly qualified and experienced women receive lower evaluations than men in managerial selection situations (Glick, Zion and Nelson, 1988). The reason for this has been explained in terms of sex-role stereotyping and role incongruence. Interviewers frequently hold an image of what they consider to be an ‘ideal candidate’ and this image is based upon the male model (Stuart, 1992). Thus, interviewers often assume that the managerial qualities they are seeking are more likely to be found in a man rather than a woman, with qualities such as cooperation and teamwork not being given the same credit as aggression and competitiveness. This means that unemployed female managers are much less likely to be invited to interviews for managerial jobs than their male counterparts, especially for upper-middle and senior management positions. As interviews are the most common selection process used by organizations for management selection and unstructured interviews shown to be the least valid and reliable selection procedure (Robertson and Illies, 1988), this may pose a significant barrier for unemployed female managers in their search for employment. Those women who are successful in reaching the interview stage face yet further discrimination based on the male model of management, further decreasing their chances of success.

Interviewers tend to make attributions about the candidate based upon their own ‘self schema’, and generally choose a candidate with whom they can feel comfortable and who they feel will fit into organizational networks, both formal and informal (Duck, 1988). This means that the successful candidate usually reflects the main characteristics of the interviewer, with gender congruence exerting significant influence on decision-making (Yoder, Crumpton and Zipp, 1989). As the majority of senior managers, and therefore most interviewers, are male, unemployed female managers are at an obvious disadvantage. Interviewers, as Stephanie Allen, President of The Athena Group, so aptly says, ‘tend to pick guys like themselves. If you aren’t a guy, it’s kind of hard’ (Stuart, 1992). Thus, even when women are invited to interviews, they are less likely to succeed than the male counterparts.

The issue of sex discrimination during the recruitment process is widely recognized, yet the protection the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) provides women, is only effective when vacancies are officially advertised. It is estimated that over 50% of all jobs in senior management are never formally advertised, but are filled through personal contacts (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). The vacancies that are formally advertised tend to be with organizations that are committed to equal opportunities, and therefore unlikely to engage in any form of discrimination. This means that, although the legislation is in place, in reality unemployed female managers have little protection against indirect or direct discrimination during job search.

Networking. As many vacancies are never formally advertised, the utilization of networks during unemployment is recognized as one of the most important and effective approaches to job search available to managers (Allan, 1989; Moskoff, 1993). Personal contacts function through informal business networks and can provide knowledge, information, support, advice, influence and sponsors (Burke, Rothstein and Bristor, 1995). However, the effectiveness of this form of job search depends not only on an individual’s networking skills, but upon the power and influence of those with whom an individual has contact via their network.

The networks of male and female managers are substantially different, in both their composition
and their degree of influence. Men’s networks mainly consist of men, and afford access to those who have influence over critical human-resource decisions, such as promotion and recruitment. In contrast, women’s networks contain a larger number of women, with less influential members (Burke, Rothstein and Bristor, 1995; Ibarra, 1993). Previous research has consistently shown that managerial women are excluded from the business networks that are available to their male counterparts. This means that, because women managers do not have access to the same informal business networks as their male colleagues, they are denied the same information and assistance (Arroba and James, 1989). Consequently, unemployed women managers are likely to be missing out on important job opportunities, as they are excluded from a substantial number of unadvertised managerial positions that are reserved solely for male candidates.

**Job skidding.** Several large-scale studies have found that, because of financial pressures or lack of job availability, many unemployed individuals take jobs that are of a lower level, both in terms of status and remuneration (Mallinkrodt, 1990; Rosen and College, 1987). This ‘job skidding’ is experienced by both men and women. However, there is considerable evidence that women are more likely to take lower status jobs and are less likely to obtain a salary commensurate with their previous experience and education than their male counterparts (Mallinkrodt, 1990; Stroh, Brett and Reilly, 1992). This difference in the degree of ‘job skidding’ encountered by unemployed men and women may arise for a number of reasons.

First, men continue to believe that their adequacy as a provider is indicated by their income level. Pittman and Orthner (1988), in a major study of job commitment, found that a man’s perception of income adequacy rested primarily with his own contribution to the family’s income, regardless of whether his partner worked full or part-time. In contrast, women do not report income as their primary reason for entering a career, although salary level does play a significant role in job satisfaction (Loscocco and Spitze, 1991). These findings suggest that men’s commitment to the traditional role of provider may be the driving force during their job search, whereas women may be more influenced by a sense of perceived fit between themselves, their family circumstances and the prospective organization (Pittman and Orthner, 1988).

Second, the sense of fit experienced by an individual is considerably affected by the perception of adequate remuneration, or reward equity, for the position in question, and these perceptions are affected by previous experience and market forces (Loscocco and Spitze, 1991). It has been suggested that women have lower pay expectations and are easily satisfied with lower salaries, explaining why salaries in female-dominated occupations tend to be poorer than those in male-dominated occupations (Rubery and Fagan, 1993; Stevens, Bavetta and Gist, 1993). However, the evidence does not consistently support the assumption that women do not value pay as strongly as men. In their large scale study (n = 2706) Loscocco and Spitze (1991) found that organizational pay differentials accounted for twice as much of the variance in the pay satisfaction of women as of men. This indicates that women not only value pay levels, but are more likely to be adversely affected by pay differentials in organizations than their male counterparts.

It should also be noted that research indicates that one of the reasons women receive lower salaries is because they have poorer negotiating skills than their male counterparts (Stevens, Bavetta and Gist, 1993). Therefore, a combination of all these factors may lead unemployed female managers to feel undervalued and second-rate, affecting their self-image and self-worth. This may serve to further reduce their self-confidence, resulting in unemployed female managers becoming increasingly unable to pursue jobs at a similar level to those they had previously held.

**Unsuccessful job search.** A major determinant of well-being during unemployment is the experience of job search, an individual’s need for a job and their expectations that job-seeking will lead to re-employment (Vinokur and Caplan, 1987). These expectations appear to be influenced by two main factors: an individual’s attributional style in dealing with unsuccessful job search and the affirmative support of job-seeking behaviours by significant others, both accounting for 10% of the variance in psychological well-being (Ostell and Divers, 1987; Vinokur and Caplan, 1987) (previously discussed in social support section).

Attribution research focuses on the nature and consequences of causal attributions in terms of
the success and failure experienced by individuals, and how those attributions can lead to a state of learned helplessness and depression (Peterson and Seligman, 1987; Weiner, 1986). An individual’s attributional style is defined by the way they attribute causality in order to interpret events, and so far three styles have been identified (Peterson, Schwartz and Seligman, 1981). First, there is one external style, where a person tends to attribute the causation of events to external or temporary events, such as social or economic circumstances. There are also two internal styles: a behavioural style which is where an individual attributes an outcome to their own behaviour, and a characterological style which is where an individual attributes outcome to their character rather than their actual actions.

Those who make external or behavioural attributions for negative events, such as unsuccessful job search, generally have better mental health than those who make characterological attributions (Peterson and Seligman, 1987). Female managers tend to make characterological attributions when they are unsuccessful, whereas male managers tend to make behavioural or external attributions to explain their lack of success (Rosenthal, Guest and Peccei, 1996; Rothblum and Cole, 1988). This means that unemployed female managers are likely to attribute unsuccessful job search to personality characteristics that are relatively durable and unchanging, whereas unemployed male managers are more likely to attribute unsuccessful job search to actions which could be changed or altered relatively easily to meet the demands of the situation. Thus, it would be anticipated that unemployed female managers will suffer greater negative affect, in terms of poorer mental health, from unsuccessful job search, than their male counterparts.

As the number of managers chasing the same positions rises, it is inevitable that both unemployed male and female managers will have to deal with increasing levels of unsuccessful job search. Although male and female managers are used to dealing with heavy competition for managerial positions, their reactions to unsuccessful job search in terms of attribution are likely to differ considerably. The research suggests that unemployed female managers are more likely than their male counterparts to suffer poorer mental health as a result of unsuccessful job search, and are less likely to receive effective support.

Intervening variables

Individuals differ in the way they perceive and react to potential stressors. It is therefore important to consider those aspects of an individual’s environment or personality that change the likelihood that a stressor or set of stressors will increase the strain they experience. These intervening variables are referred to in the stress literature as mediators and moderators, with mediators producing additive effects and moderators producing interactive effects (Parkes, 1994). Mediators relate the stressor to dysfunctioning but, although they are directly and simultaneously related to the outcome measure, they contribute independently to the overall variance. Thus, the direct relationship between the stressor and stress outcome breaks down when the mediator is removed. In contrast, moderators change the empirical relationship between independent and dependent variables, altering the magnitude and direction of the effect of one variable on another (Frese and Zapf, 1988). The most important moderators in unemployment stress research are demographic and personality-type factors, e.g. social support, coping and control. Social support may be viewed as a demographic variable because it relies on the actual availability of family/spousal support. However, the majority of research tends to view social support as a personality-type factor, as the need for support and the perception of its availability are rooted in the individual rather than their environment (Ostell and Divers, 1987). People lacking social support tend to show greater stress reactions to unemployment than those with a high degree of social support. By way of a contrast, a mediator links directly sources of stress with outcomes, e.g. stressors which decrease the degree of social support available in turn influence the level of depression experienced during unemployment. The direct relationship between the stressor and stress outcome breaks down when the mediator is removed, or in this case when social support is returned. Mediators include social relationships, age and employment commitment.

Demographic factors

Research into the psychological impact of unemployment has clearly indicated that unemployment has negative consequences for the psychological
and physical well-being of most individuals. However, it is not a uniform experience and it should be noted that not all individuals react negatively to job loss. Some individuals actually view unemployment as a positive event which provides an opportunity to develop personal interests and to pursue better employment positions (O’Brien, 1986). The effects of unemployment, and the way in which people cope with the unemployment experience, are determined by a complex set of variables that can exacerbate or reduce its impact (Feather, 1992).

Several principal mediating factors have been identified which fall into two broad categories: demographic and personal variables, and environmental factors. Demographic and personal variables include: age, gender, social relationships, length of time unemployed, employment commitment and individual coping strategies. Environmental factors include: local unemployment levels, availability of social support, opportunities for interpersonal contact, opportunities for skill use, and the availability of money (Warr, Jackson and Banks, 1988). Some of these areas are of particular importance and will be given separate consideration.

**Age**

Numerous studies have linked the age of unemployed people to depressive effects and a curvilinear association between age and mental health during unemployment has been found by several researchers (Hepworth, 1980; Warr and Jackson, 1984), but the evidence is not conclusive. Rowley and Feather (1987) found that, apart from financial strain, there was little difference between age groups and the psychological effects of unemployment. In contrast, Wooton, Sulzer and Cornwell (1994) suggest that age is predictive of a variety of career and employment expectancies, especially relating to re-employment for which age accounts for 51% of the variance, which act as important moderators between age and stress-related effects of job loss. They concluded that the inability to fulfill these expectancies, because of reducing job opportunities, means that increasing age constitutes a substantial risk in terms of mental health. This effect is compounded as reduced expectancies also affect an individual’s willingness to participate in the job-search process (Kanfer and Hulin, 1985).

**Employment commitment**

In addition to vocational expectancies, employment commitment has also been found to act as a moderating factor on psychological distress during unemployment. The desire for work is inversely related to psychological well-being, as the desire for employment increases so affective well-being and self-esteem decreases (Jackson and Warr, 1987; Winefield and Tiggemann, 1994). A strong personal commitment to work in part reflects the need to earn money, but it also reflects non-financial reasons for wanting to work. Pittman and Orthner (1988) found that the employment commitment of men, whilst influenced by non-financial considerations, was based upon their income needs. In contrast, women’s employment commitment is less influenced by financial considerations, but based upon personal needs, accounting for 49% of the variance in employment commitment compared to 37% for men. It is this personal salience which has repeatedly been associated with adverse effects during unemployment, the greater the non-financial commitment the more the risks to mental health (Ullah, Banks and Warr, 1985).

**Length of time unemployed**

Employment commitment, like many other aspects of unemployment, is frequently affected by the length of time an individual has been unemployed. Previous research has shown that the decline in mental and physical well-being experienced by individuals is substantial in the first six months following job loss (Jackson and Warr, 1987; Rowley and Feather, 1987). In the early stages of unemployment, uncertainty may lead to high levels of stress, but it has been suggested that the resulting rate of decline reaches a plateau after six months. Unemployed individuals continue to remain less mentally healthy, but they experience a much reduced rate of decline in terms of physical and psychological well-being. This psychological adjustment is attained by individuals establishing new routines at lower levels of activity, by the maintenance of lower levels of expenditure and by the avoidance of threatening situations. This can result in unemployed managers becoming increasingly passive and accepting of their situation and, whilst this may provide some protection against further decline in psychological well-being, it inhibits job search and their ‘rehabilitation’ into
a managerial position (Duffield, 1994). In contrast, others have predicted that as the effects of unemployment do decline but are cumulative, and as stress increases, via financial strain and job commitment and so on, the impact on the mental and physical well-being of individuals will be greater, rather than less, as the length of unemployment increases (Fleming et al., 1984).

The length of time an individual is unemployed is dependent upon many factors, but one of the main influences is the prevailing levels of local unemployment (Townsend, 1992). There is a great deal of local and regional variation in levels of unemployment and it has been suggested that high levels of local unemployment are likely to have several beneficial effects (Jackson and Warr, 1987). These levels have been found to moderate the impact of unemployment via Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory. Individuals who live in areas of high unemployment are more likely to perceive greater similarity between themselves and other unemployed people, thereby maintaining self-esteem and self-worth (Sheeran, Abrams and Orbell, 1995). Individuals also experience less self-blame, as they perceive less personal control over the circumstances surrounding their job loss. However, this can have adverse effects if individuals do not feel a sense of control over their future employment prospects.

**Personal factors**

**Self**

The impact of job loss and an individual’s subsequent experiences of unemployment are moderated by a number of factors including; self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, perceived personal control, coping resources and coping strategies. These components have an interactive effect, as well as each exerting a specific influence, on an individual’s psychological well-being (Sherer et al., 1982). However, as the psychological effects on unemployed male and female managers are likely to vary substantially depending upon the above factors, the implications of each of these factors will be considered separately.

**Self-concept and self-esteem**

According to Burns (1980) ‘self-concept is a composite image of what we think we are, what we think others think of us and what we would like to be’. An individual’s self-concept contains their experiences of their own body, their possessions, their family, their motive structure, drive status, defences and the feelings of pride and shame associated with these facets (Bala and Lakshmi, 1992). Managers tend to view work as more central to their lives than do other workers and are likely to obtain a significant proportion of their self-image, or self-concept, from their work (Kaufman, 1982). The effect of job loss on some managers is ‘ego shattering’, leading to bitterness, loneliness, helplessness, despondency and a loss of self respect (Fielden and Davidson, 1996; Mines, 1979), although it has been suggested that the degree of psychological devastation experienced does appear to be connected with the level of prestige associated with an individual’s previous position. Research has shown that unemployed male managers, at middle and senior levels, frequently retain their professional identity during unemployment, enabling them to maintain their self-esteem and self-worth (Hartley, 1980a). This contradicts the frequently accepted generalization that unemployment leads to lower self-esteem, but Hartley (1980a) claims that this assumption may be inaccurate because it fails to take account of individual reactions to unemployment. As women tend to hold less prestigious management positions than their male counterparts, it is more likely that unemployed female managers will experience greater negative affectivity during unemployment than male managers.

The impact of unemployment on an individual’s self-concept not only results from a possible loss of social identity and social status, but also from the identity they gain from being an unemployed person (Rosenberg and Kaplan, 1982). Although the social stigma associated with unemployment has decreased as the number of unemployed white-collar workers has increased, it does still exist. This affects how individuals view themselves and how they feel others view them (Rosenberg and Kaplan, 1982). Research has shown that, compared with unemployed men, unemployed women believe that other people’s views of them are significantly more negative (p < 0.001) and these views, in general, remain constant during unemployment (Sheeran and Abraham, 1994). As working women held more positive reflected appraisals than working men, the effect of unemployment on their self-concept appears to be substantial
There are several possible reasons why this gender difference may arise:

1. Work may be more central to women's self-concept;
2. Unemployed women do not have the same status as unemployed men;
3. Society does not place the same importance on women's careers thereby undermining their need to return to work;
4. Women's self-concept has or might have a greater degree of social determination linked to pressures during socialization, where girls seem to be required to conform to socially acceptable behaviours, norms, and so on, more than boys.

Although self-esteem is intrinsically linked to self-concept, its influence on an individual's psychological well-being is to some degree independent of self-concept, and therefore warrants separate consideration (Jex, Cvetanovski and Allen, 1994). Self-esteem is generally defined as the degree to which we like to value ourselves and may provide a buffer from the negative psychological impact of unemployment. Moreover, a loss of self-esteem has frequently been associated with acute psychological distress experienced during unemployment (Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985). Previous research has shown that unemployment frequently results in lower self-esteem and increased stress, which places individuals at considerable risk – as unemployment progresses self-esteem tends to decrease, whilst self-dissatisfaction, self-rejection, and self-contempt tend to increase (Kates, Greiff and Hagan, 1990). However, whilst previous studies have recognized the importance of individual differences in people's reaction to unemployment, only a few recent studies have identified important gender differences. The evidence suggests that for men, self-esteem has no moderating effect between unemployment and anxiety, depression and life-satisfaction (Jex, Cvetanovski and Allen, 1994). In contrast, for women unemployment is more strongly associated with anxiety and depression amongst those reporting low levels of self-esteem, accounting for 22% and 21% of the variance respectively. This difference may arise for a number of reasons:

1. Women are more likely to blame themselves for being unemployed;
2. The general tendency of women to attribute failure to internal factors;
3. Women value social relationships more than men but doubt their ability to replace those social relationships that may have been lost due to unemployment.

Thus, women are more likely to suffer lower levels of self-esteem during unemployment, resulting in increased levels of depression and anxiety, than their male counterparts.

The effect of unemployment on the self-esteem of managers may also be subject to these gender differences. Hartley (1980a) found that the self-esteem of male managers, unlike male blue-collar workers, does not decline during unemployment, although it can be temporarily depressed by certain events. This may be because the global self-esteem of male managers is strong enough to withstand a decrease of self-esteem in the domain-specific area of employment. This approach appears to buffer the impact of unemployment on male managers who, in comparison with employed managers, do not report high levels of anxiety, tension or apprehension (Hartley, 1980a). In contrast, female managers do experience a decline in self-esteem during unemployment and the associated consequences, i.e. loss of confidence, loss of self-worth and feelings of inadequacy (Fielden and Davidson, 1996). This loss of self-esteem appears to affect the global self-esteem of unemployed female managers, as opposed to just the domain-specific self-esteem associated with employment. Thus, it is anticipated that unemployed female managers may experience substantially greater negative psychological effects than unemployed male managers, resulting from significantly lower levels of self-esteem.

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy has been defined as the belief in one's ability to perform a task, or more specifically to execute a specified behaviour successfully (Bandura, 1982). According to this theory two types of expectancies exert powerful influences on behaviour: outcome expectancy – the belief that certain behaviours will lead to certain outcomes, and self-efficacy expectancy – the belief that one can successfully perform the behaviours in question (Maddux, Sherer and Rogers, 1982). These expectancies influence the choice of activities...
people will engage in, the amount of effort they will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences. Those with a poor sense of self-efficacy will doubt their own capabilities, and as these doubts grow they are likely to reduce their efforts or give up altogether, whereas those with a strong sense of self-efficacy will exert the greatest effort to master the challenges, maintaining high levels of performance (Bandura, 1982). Thus, unemployed managers with low levels of self-efficacy are increasingly less likely to engage in job-search behaviours, and consequently more likely to experience higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem (Wells-Parker, Miller and Topping, 1990).

Wells-Parker, Miller and Topping (1990) found that for women, outcome expectancies were the main predictors of active or passive coping orientations in relation to occupational roles, accounting for 37% of the variance. This may mean that individuals are reluctant to apply for positions which they feel they are unlikely to attain, a situation especially relevant to unemployed female managers who may perceive many job advertisements as male oriented. However, in a similar sized study, Vianen and Keizer (1996) found that outcome expectancy was not predictive of an individual’s intention to pursue a managerial position, in which self-efficacy plays the central role. They suggest that the more experienced a person is in management tasks the greater their self-efficacy and the greater the motivation to secure a management position. In addition, psychological arousal (tension) reduces self-efficacy for management tasks, which prevents an individual from assuming a managerial position. Compared to men, women tend to have less experience of managerial tasks, because their jobs are more task restricted, they receive less verbal support, and experience greater psychological tension (Vianen and Keizer, 1996). As a consequence their self-efficacy and intention to assume a managerial job is lower than that of their male counterparts. This has significant implications for unemployed female managers who may be less likely to apply for managerial positions that they do not feel fully comply with their previous experience.

**Personal control**

The way in which individuals perceive their situation and attribute causes of events is dependent upon the degree of personal control they experience. According to Rotter (1966) people have generalized expectancies regarding whether or not their actions will lead to internal or external control of reinforcements. The generalized expectancy of internal control refers to the perception of events, whether positive or negative, as being a consequence of one’s own action and thereby potentially under personal control. In contrast, the generalized expectancy of external control refers to the perception of positive or negative events as being unrelated to one’s own behaviour and therefore beyond personal control (Lefcourt, 1982). Although people tend to be classified as ‘internals’ or ‘externals’, the concept is not dichotomous but a continuum ranging from highly internal to highly external (Weiten, 1989).

In general, people with an internal locus of control tend to develop fewer psychological disorders than those with an external locus of control (Weiten, 1989). Internals tend to perceive less stress, employ more task-centred coping behaviours and employ fewer emotion-centred behaviours than externals (Anderson, 1977). Previous research has suggested that women are more likely to employ emotion-centred behaviours and report lower levels of internal control, whereas men tend to employ more task-centred behaviours and report higher levels of internal control (Rim, 1987; Vingerhoets and Van Heck, 1990). This may indicate that women will be more likely to suffer from poorer psychological well-being during unemployment. However, Peterson and Seligman (1987) suggest that there are some situations where an external orientation may be more beneficial. Individuals who explain the occurrence of negative events, such as unemployment, in terms of external, unstable and specific causes are less likely to suffer psychological distress than those making internal, stable and global attributions.

Unemployment is often seen as representing an uncontrollable state of affairs and, given the fact that most managers lose their jobs primarily because of factors beyond their control, an external orientation following job loss may protect individuals from the initial effects of unemployment on well-being. However, the evidence does not appear to support this view. Swinburne (1981) found that those who perceived some degree of control in regard to their job loss experienced fewer negative feelings than those who felt that
they had no control over what had happened to them. Those who felt least personal control over their job loss experienced more distress and were particularly affected by rejection during job search – they tended to have lower self-confidence and a decreased receptivity to employment (Baubion-Broye, Megemont and Sellinger, 1989). In contrast, internal locus of control is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression, and higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Cvetanovski and Jex, 1994). Previous research has shown that, in general, individuals employed in supervisory and management positions score higher on internal locus of control than those working in non-supervisory positions (Kapalka and Lachenmeyer, 1988; Mellinger and Erdwins, 1985; St-Yves et al., 1989). Thus, it may be anticipated that unemployed managers will perceive relatively higher degrees of personal control and, as a result, will be more intrinsically motivated in their job search, although they may verbalize external causes to explain or defend themselves against actual or expected failures during job search (Rotter, 1966).

Coping strategies

Coping is generally defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage the internal and external demands of transactions that tax or exceed a person’s resources (Latack, Kinicki and Prussia, 1995). Coping with job loss and unemployment, therefore, refers to cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage the demands faced by an individual as a result of their situation. The process of coping with stressful events, such as unemployment, is complex and highly dynamic and is directed toward moderating the impact of such events on an individual’s physical, social and emotional functioning. The coping strategies adopted by an individual are determined by a number of factors including: personality variables (e.g. personal control and type-A behaviour patterns), demographic factors (e.g. age and gender), socio-demographic factors (e.g. education and income) and availability of coping resources (e.g. self-esteem and experience) (Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Holahan and Moos, 1987).

Vingerhoets and Van Heck (1990) found that men are more inclined to use active problem-focused coping strategies, accounting for 49% of the variance in reported stress levels; they plan and rationalize their actions, they engage in positive thinking, perseverance, self-adaptation and personal growth. In contrast, women prefer emotional-focused solutions, accounting for 44% of the variance in stress levels; they engage in self-blame and wishful thinking, they seek social support and a forum for the expression of their emotions. However, women are more likely to engage in active-behavioural coping than men, i.e. they attempt to deal directly with the problem and its effects by taking positive action (Astor-Dubin and Hammen, 1984). Thus, although unemployed female managers may suffer from increased psychological and psychosomatic symptoms, they are more likely to deal with the problems of unemployment and job search than their male counterparts. Women are more likely to engage in behaviours that involve external recognition, allowing others to label and offer help with their problems, whereas men tend to deal with their problems internally (Astor-Dubin and Hammen, 1984). Unemployed female managers, who are most likely to employ emotional-focused coping strategies, will have to deal with expectations and goals of significant others in conjunction with their own objectives. Conflict may arise where these approaches differ and significant others are perceived as unsupportive (Ratcliff and Brogden, 1988). If unemployed female managers can not successfully deal with this conflict they may be unable to find an effective means of coping with their situation, resulting in poorer psychological well-being, lower self-confidence and lower self-esteem (Holahan and Moos, 1987; Oakland and Ostell, 1996).

Type-A behaviour pattern

Unemployed female managers may not only be faced with different sources of stress from their male counterparts, because of their tendency towards emotional-focused coping behaviours, but research suggests that their ability to cope with stress may also be adversely affected by their tendency toward type-A behaviour patterns (Greenglass, 1993b). Type-A behaviour refers to the overall style of behaviour that is observed in people who are excessively time-conscious, aggressive, competitive, ambitious and hard-driving, and has been found to be a significant predictor of stress-related illness (Edwards, Baglioni and Cooper, 1990; Greenglass, 1993b). It has been
reported that type-A behaviour patterns are often elicited by environmental stressors or challenges. Type-A individuals are particularly challenged by situations in which their control is threatened, and their primary response in such situations is to struggle to aggressively exert and maintain control over their environment (Caplan, 1983). This struggle may be exacerbated by unsuccessful job search, which prevents the individual from regaining control of their employment situation. Thus, individuals who display type-A behaviour patterns may experience high levels of stress following job loss, which continue to increase as the length of time they are unemployed increases.

The effect of type-A behaviour patterns on psychological and psychosomatic symptoms is strongly influenced by the type of coping strategy employed, accounting for over 10% of the variance (Edwards, Baglioni and Cooper, 1990). Problem-focused coping in conjunction with type-A behaviour results in a decrease in symptoms, whereas emotional-focused coping in conjunction with type-A behaviour results in an increase in symptoms. Although not all studies have found significant gender differences in type-A behaviour, a number of studies have revealed that women managers tend to display higher levels of type-A behaviour than their male counterparts (Davidson and Cooper, 1987; Rees and Cooper, 1992). This behavioural characteristic may mean that unemployed female managers will suffer poorer mental and physical well-being than unemployed male managers, even if they both engage in problem-focused coping strategies.

Stress outcomes: gender similarities and differences in psychological, physical and behavioural stress outcomes

It is widely recognized that the stress of unemployment results in impaired psychological and physical well-being in both men and women, although there is a great deal of conflict in the literature regarding the extent of this impairment experienced by women. This conflict arises from outdated stereotypical views and a lack of understanding surrounding the importance of gender in explaining differences in stress outcomes (Walters, 1993). Jick and Mitz (1985) suggest that women experience psychological stress (e.g. depression, emotional discomfort) more frequently than men, whereas men experience physiological stress (e.g. coronary heart disease) more frequently than women. However, recent large-scale research has indicated that this latter belief is unfounded, and the evidence suggests that the links between stress and heart disease are now major concerns for both men and women (Elliott, 1995; Kritz-Silverstein, Wingard and Barrett-Connor, 1992).

One of the most consistent results in mental-health surveys is that women report significantly more symptoms than men (Tousignant, Brosseau and Tremblay, 1987). The evidence suggests that this difference may arise for one or more of the following reasons:

1. women are more willing to tell their symptoms to others, either because of greater social acceptance of sickness among women or greater concern for health among women;
2. the ‘vocabulary of illness’ differs from men and women, women elaborate more about their symptoms often discussing the psychological effects of their symptoms not just the physical outcomes;
3. women genuinely experience poorer mental health than men (Tousignant, Brosseau and Tremblay, 1987; Verbrugge, 1985).

Gender differences have frequently been reported in relation to occupational stress, and previous research has indicated that female managers react differently to male managers in terms of reported stress outcomes (Davidson, Cooper and Baldini, 1995). Stress-related illness tends to manifest itself in terms of physical ill-health for male executives, whereas for female executives it is more likely to develop into mental ill-health (Cooper and Melhuish, 1984).

The deleterious behavioural consequences of stress, in terms of smoking and drinking, also differ between men and women. In general, women are more likely to smoke than men regardless of employment status and, whilst unemployment is associated with an overall increase in the smoking levels of both men and women, the increase in the smoking levels of women is significantly higher than that of men during unemployment (Hammarstrom and Janlert, 1994). In contrast, health problems due to drink are more frequently reported amongst unemployed men than their employed counterparts, whereas unemployed women report fewer drinking problems than their
employed counterparts (Lahelma, Kangas and Manderbacka, 1995).

**Stress outcomes and unemployed men**

Previous research has consistently identified negative mental and physical outcomes resulting from unemployment. Following job loss, individuals frequently experience shame, anger, fear of the future, frustration and disillusionment. Viinamaki et al. (1994) found that continuing unemployment represents a significant risk to mental health, and unemployed people are frequently found to experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and distress, in conjunction with lower self-esteem and confidence (DeFrank and Ivancevich, 1986; Warr, Jackson and Banks, 1988). Several studies have found that the prevalence of depressive illness is significantly higher in unemployed men than the general population (Eales, 1988; Melville et al., 1985). In some cases this decline in mental well-being is substantial, and the rates of suicide and parasuicide have been found to be higher in unemployed men (Moser, Fox and Jones, 1984; Platt and Kreitman, 1984).

The effects of chronic stress experienced due to job loss and continuing unemployment, along with symptoms of somatization and minor psychiatric disturbances, frequently lead to a decline in physical well-being (Fleming et al., 1984). Unemployed men have been found to make significantly more visits to their doctor, increase their use of medical drugs and spend more days confined to bed through sickness than employed men (Layton, 1986; Linn, Sandifer and Stein, 1985). The types of problem presented, e.g. colds, rashes, respiratory problems and gastrointestinal complaints support the belief that the illnesses experienced are emotionally derived via the stress response, rather than having an identifiable physical basis (Linn, Sandifer and Stein, 1985).

The physical repercussions of unemployment may not necessarily be of significance during the period of unemployment, with individuals experiencing merely feelings of being unwell rather than experiencing serious illness. Westcott (1984) found that although significantly more unemployed men reported illness than employed men, their symptoms were not severe enough to warrant seeking medical advice. However, this lack of apparent illness may be disturbingly deceptive as demonstrated by the findings of the extensive British Regional Heart Study (Shaper and Cook, 1984). This study showed that, regardless of whether or not an individual considered themselves well, unemployed males showed evidence of excessive rates of chronic respiratory disease and ischaemic heart disease. These findings are concurrent with other studies which have found elevated levels of catecholamines in unemployed men. These levels, which increase with the length of unemployment, are linked with interior blood vessel damage, cardiovascular disorders, increased blood pressure and decreases in immune functioning (Fleming et al., 1984).

**Stress outcomes and unemployed women**

Some studies have proposed that women will be less affected by the impact of unemployment than men, as women are better able to cope with being without paid employment (Kasl and Cobb, 1979). However, the limited research that has been conducted does not provide support for these stereotypical views. Several studies have found housewives to experience higher levels of psychological distress than employed women who are unable to maintain their mental well-being through domestic roles (Cleary and Mechanic, 1983; Elliott and Huppert, 1991). Schwartzberg and Dytell (1989) found that although work overload did predict poorer psychological well-being for both employed and non-employed women, the interaction between work overload and the lack of challenge perceived by non-employed women in their roles as housewife and/or mother, had a significant impact on their well-being (p < 0.001). Without the challenges experienced by female managers in their work roles they may be deprived of ‘hardiness’, a syndrome of personal beliefs and qualities that influence behaviour, which may protect them from other sources of stress, such as role overload (Kobasa, 1979). Thus, if employment is removed, through job loss, women may find themselves exposed to additional sources of stress at a time when their ability to cope with those stressors is eroded. This could have a serious effect on women’s physical and psychological well-being in addition to the effects of unemployment experienced by men. In addition, the findings of a longitudinal study by Kirtz-Silverstein et al. (1992) suggest that unemployed women suffer poorer physical health and have more unfavourable heart-disease risk factors.
than employed women. Moreover, the impact of unemployment on women appears to be so severe that even after re-employment the symptoms of depression do not disappear as they do in men (Dew, Bromet and Penkower, 1992; Warr and Jackson, 1987). Job loss initiates a distress that is fuelled by uncertainty and insecurity that, for women, can not be relieved by simply obtaining a new job. Dew, Bromet and Penkower (1992) concluded that the experience of job loss not only leads to feelings of depression, apathy and withdrawal in women, it is also more devastating for women than for men. Thus, even though many of the assumptions made about the impact of unemployment on women have no factual basis, they continue to be used to devalue women's experiences of unemployment and have successfully contributed to the under-researching into the experiences of unemployed women.

Comparative stress effects of unemployment on men and women

Few studies have compared the impact of unemployment upon males and females. Those that have are mostly confined to the consequences of unemployment, in terms of physical and psychological well-being, rather than exploring the experiences of men and women during unemployment in terms of the sources of stress they encounter and how they deal with those stressors. A few relatively small studies claim that unemployment has a significantly greater impact on the well-being of men, who experience higher levels of depressive affect and anxiety than women (Perrucci et al., 1985; Shamir, 1985). Overall findings are inconsistent, with many studies reporting no significant differences in the overall effects of unemployment on the mental and physical well-being of men and women. However, in the past decade, a growing body of literature has acknowledged that certain aspects of unemployment are experienced differently by each sex (Ensminger and Celentano, 1990; Leana and Feldman, 1991; Stokes and Cochrane, 1984). For example, loneliness and disadvantageous consequences are important mediators in the mental health of men, accounting for 25% of the explained variance, whereas network factors are more important for the psychological well-being of women, accounting for 24% of the explained variance (Ensminger and Celentano, 1990; Leeflang, Klien-Hesselink and Spruit, 1992; Winefeld and Tiggemann, 1985). In addition, men and women differ in the way in which they are affected by financial worries. Men tend to be more affected by the indirect consequences of financial deprivation, e.g. loss of income status, whereas women are most affected by the direct consequences of financial deprivation, e.g. paying bills (Leeflang, Klien-Hesselink and Spruit, 1992).

The main difference found between men and women in their reactions to unemployment has been linked to their domestic circumstances (Daniel, 1990). The greatest disparity found in the impact of unemployment on psychological well-being is between single men and women, with single women suffering poorer mental health than single men, although they find jobs more quickly. This contrast with the reaction of women who had dependent children who took longer to find work, a situation often attributed to a lack of interest or commitment to work. However, as many women take larger pay cuts in order to return to work, this time delay is more likely to be a product of poor child-care provision provided by employers, the cost and lack of external child-care and the lack of flexible working patterns offered by employers (Daniel, 1990).

The evidence suggests that there may be some differences in the reaction of men and women to unemployment, which arise from differences in their role configuration rather than from intrinsic gender differences (Ensminger and Celentano, 1990). Further support for this belief comes from research into the impact of job loss on self-concept. Stokes and Cochrane (1984) found that the adverse psychological effects of unemployment were not restricted to a component of self-concept that was solely dependent upon employment status for evaluation, but precipitate a generalized perception of the self. The impact of unemployment on this generalization appears to be much greater for women than it does for men. Employed women hold more positive reflected appraisals than men, whereas unemployed women hold significantly poorer reflected appraisals than unemployed men, believing that other people's views of them are generally negative (Sheeran and Abraham, 1994). This disparity in reflected appraisals may lead to the expectation that unemployed women would experience significantly poorer mental well-being than employed women, whereas a lesser effect would be expected between
employed and unemployed men. However, findings contrary to these expectations have been produced by several studies (Perrucci et al., 1985; Snyder and Nowak, 1984). These studies have shown that employed men have lower levels of distress than unemployed men, but there is no significant difference in the levels of distress experienced by employed and unemployed women. These results show that, although the interaction between employment status and psychological well-being may produce the same overall effect, the experience of unemployment is definitely not the same for men and women. These experiences are influenced by factors which have differential effects related to gender, and it is only by exploring these factors and their effects that we can understand the true impact of unemployment on both men and women.

Conclusions

This literature review has identified many potential sources of stress that male and female managers may face during unemployment and from these findings a research model has been formulated, which will provide a basis for future study (Figure 1). The research model illustrates the main sources of stress, moderators of stress and stress outcomes identified by the literature review and indicates areas in which gender differences may be anticipated.

Job loss deprives individuals of both the latent and manifest consequences of work, adversely affecting physical and mental health. This deprivation can lead to reactions on several levels: emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological, and unemployed people have consistently been found to experience higher levels of depression, anxiety and general distress, together with lower self-esteem and confidence. The degree to which unemployment is experienced as a negative event is dependent on a number of factors, including previous experience of unemployment, the relationship between occupational identity and self-identity, perceived stigmatization resulting from interpersonal and intrapersonal comparisons and perceived responsibility for job loss. It is anticipated that unemployed female managers will experience greater stigmatization and self-blame than their male counterparts, as they are more likely to perceive themselves as unique or exceptional because of their comparatively small numbers.

The financial deprivation experienced during unemployment frequently affects many aspects of an individual’s life-style, including future planning and the performance of roles. Women tend to be affected by the direct consequences of financial deprivation, whereas men tend to be affected by the indirect consequences such as loss of status and their inability to fulfil their perceived role as ‘breadwinner’. This inability is thought to have a substantial effect on self-esteem and for some is the aspect of unemployment which has the single greatest impact on well-being. Thus, economic deprivation is likely to have a greater effect on the psychological and physical health of unemployed male managers than on their female counterparts.

Employment is an important source of social support, especially for women, and the loss of this manifest consequence of work through unemployment can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. During unemployment men tend to receive emotional support from their partners, whereas women tend to find their partners are ‘unsupportive’ or they provide only instrumental support, i.e. financial or informational. Women tend to rely on their families for emotional support during unemployment and their reliance on family members is maintained throughout their period of unemployment. In contrast, men are more likely to seek support from their friends than from close relations, as they prefer to keep family and work roles separate.

The loss of employment also means a loss of daily structure and enforced activity, and the inability to replace that structure and level of meaningful activity can lead to apathy and depression. Activity maintains mental alertness, wards off fears and doubts and provides a sense of achievement, yet keeping active after job loss becomes increasingly difficult. Several studies have demonstrated the importance of activity levels during unemployment – those who feel their time is fully occupied experience better mental health and are more likely to be successful in their search for work. Although the activity levels of men and women tend to be similar, the type of activity they engage in is gender oriented. Men are more likely to pursue problem-focused activities, i.e. behaviours that attempt to directly eliminate the source of stress, whereas women are more likely to engage in emotional-focused activities, i.e. behaviours
that attempt to eliminate the symptoms of unemployment.

It has been suggested that women will be less affected by unemployment than men because they are more influenced by personal rather than financial needs (Warr and Parry, 1982). This view has led to the assumption that women are not as committed to work as men and it has been proposed that, because of the multiple roles women have to deal with, unemployment will actually lead to a reduction in the stress experienced by women. However, it appears to be the quality rather than the quantity of roles that is important in determining psychological distress. Thus, compared to their non-managerial counterparts, the removal of the work is likely to increase the psychological distress experienced by unemployed female managers, for whom work may be one of their most rewarding roles (Arber, Gilbert and Dale, 1985).

In addition, women potentially face discrimination at all stages of the recruitment process, and even though the number of women managers is rising, management is still seen as a male-dominated profession in which women are marginalized by a masculine model of the successful manager. Occupational stereotypes, in conjunction with limited access to formal and informal business networks, mean that female managers are restricted in the number of positions available to them. This also means that they are less likely to obtain a salary commensurate with their previous experience and education. As managers tend to view work as a major component of their self-concept the impact of these barriers upon psychological well-being may be devastating (Fielden and Davidson, 1996).

The effects of unemployment on physical and mental well-being are moderated by a number of factors, including social support, locus of control, demographics, activity levels, job search experiences and coping strategies. These intervening variables are experienced differently by men and women and, although the majority of studies have found no significant difference in the stress outcomes of unemployed men and women, the evidence does suggest that unemployed female managers are more likely to encounter negative factors than their male counterparts (Fielden and Davidson, 1996). For example, women are more likely to receive social support from their parents and their spouse or friends, but the importance of work in the lives of women is often denied resulting in non-supportive social ‘support’. Where work is central to an individual’s self-image, as it is for many female managers, the effects of this denial on psychological well-being can be traumatic, undermining self-confidence and self-worth.

The effect of unemployment on an individual’s well-being is strongly influenced by their reaction to job loss and continuing unemployment. A number of gender differences have been identified in the reactions of men and women to their situation, and the strategies that they employ in order to cope with the sources of stress they encounter. The self-esteem of male managers does not appear to be affected by unemployment, whereas it is anticipated that unemployed female managers will suffer a significant decrease in self-esteem and self-worth. This decrease arises partly from a perceived loss of personal control, lower self-efficacy and poorer outcome expectancy in terms of job search, and from the tendency by women to use negative emotional-focused coping strategies compared to the more positive problem-focused coping strategies generally used by men.

The predictors of mental and physical ill-health are often dissimilar for men and women and unemployed female managers are likely to be at a greater risk from mental and physical ill-health as a result of the unique stressors they are faced with (e.g. Billing and Alvesson, 1993; Pittman and Orthner, 1988). Previous research has also suggested that male and female managers react differently in terms of stress outcomes, with stress-related illness being manifest in terms of physical ill-health in men and in terms of mental ill-health in women. However, recent studies have suggested that the long-term physical effects of unemployment on the physical well-being of female managers may be greater than those experienced by unemployed male managers.

Gender differences have also been identified in the behavioural consequences of stress, in terms of smoking and drinking. Unemployment is associated with a rise in smoking levels, but this increase is significantly higher for women than for men. In contrast, men are more likely to report drink-related problems during unemployment than their employed counterparts, whereas women tend to report fewer drinking problems than their employed counterparts.

However, the proposed research model is limited in its application to unemployed male and
female managers, as the current literature focuses mainly on the experiences of unemployed male blue-collar workers. The relationship between stressors, intervening variables and stress outcomes is a complex one and the literature provides a confusing picture, from which few concrete conclusions can be drawn in relation to the possible effects of unemployment on male and female managers. Unfortunately, there is little research to date which explores the comparative effects of unemployment upon male and female managers, thus the only conclusions which can be drawn are those which can be summarized from the literature. Further investigation is needed if this relationship is to be fully understood, although work currently being conducted by the authors would suggest that the proposed model has some validity as a tentative analysis of managerial unemployment for both men and women.

References


