An exploratory study of the ways in which the print media constructs our perceptions of the organisational phenomenon of stress

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Robyn-Leigh Smith

Supervised by Brandon Pleaner

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University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College Campus)

To Whom It May Concern:

I, Robyn-Leigh Smith, do hereby declare that this work is entirely my own, and where it is not it is accurately referenced.

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Robyn-Leigh Smith

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ABSTRACT

The topic of stress is one that has been explored for many years, as individuals have aimed to understand this phenomenon, as well as provide insight into why stress occurs and how it occurs. Besides the interest in this phenomenon, it becomes apparent when examining literature pertaining to this topic that little or no consensus exists surrounding its definition. However, what these diverse accounts do share is an extremely individualised conceptualisation of stress, which homogenises the stress experience. Hobfoll (1998) critically argues that as much as stress is interpreted and experienced at the level of the individual, the experience and interpretation transpires within a social context, a context that constructs and hence influences the experience itself (Hobfoll, 1998). One particular vehicle that plays a role in constructing one's perceptions regarding the phenomenon of stress is that of the Print Media. This study therefore aims to challenge these individualistic conceptualisations by exploring the ways in which the Print Media constructs our perceptions of the organisational phenomenon of stress. The sample for this research consists of four newspaper groups, namely the Business Day, Sunday Times, Mail and Guardian, as well as all those newspapers that fall under the company title Independent Newspapers. Only articles found between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 2004 are drawn upon. The data is organised and analysed on the 'thematic method of analysis' which consists of both 'theory-led' and 'inductive' thematic analysis. This analysis provides insight into the construction and understandings of organisational stress presented by the Print Media, understandings that tend to, on the whole, construct the stress experience at the level of the individual, independent of the role of the organisation in the process. However, there is a group of articles that move away from these constructions to critically note the role of the organisation and the social in one's understandings of organisational stress, and in the stress experience itself.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

When examining literature pertaining to the topic of stress, with specific reference to Organisational Stress, it becomes apparent that there is no consensus surrounding the definition of this topic. Rather, there are numerous theories and models which attempt to explain this phenomenon. However, what these diverse accounts do share is an extremely individualised conceptualisation of stress, which neglects the role of the social in this process. Hobfoll (1998) critically argues that as much as stress is interpreted and experienced at the level of the individual, the experience and interpretation transpires within a social context; a context that constructs, and hence influences the experience itself (Hobfoll, 1998). One particular vehicle that plays a role in constructing one's perceptions regarding the phenomenon of stress is that of the Print Media. Newton, Handy and Fennimore (1995) note the increasing rate at which stress is being mentioned in the Media. This review is therefore going to examine three main groups of literature: literature pertaining to the phenomenon of stress, the phenomenon of Organisational Stress, and the role of the Print Media in constructing one's perceptions regarding this phenomenon. By examining these three groups, the review aims to highlight the limitations of accounts that attempt to understand the stress experience from an individualised perspective, independent of the role of the social in the process.

This review therefore aims to highlight the social basis and collective nature of perceptions, in this case the perception of stress. It has been argued that individuals are social beings (Marx, as cited in, McLennan, 1975), and thus one's perceptions have a social basis. Similarly, Hobfoll (1998) is extremely critical of the individualism that has

characterised much of the dominant literature and research in Western society. He argues instead for the recognition of a bi-directional relationship between people and society, and the application of this recognition to all human and social phenomena, including stress.

2.2 The 'age of stress'

According to Hobfoll, (1998) contemporary society can be deemed to be living in the 'age of stress'. One can comprehend from this statement that stress is a phenomenon that pervades modern society; a phenomenon experienced by most individuals, as well as a phenomenon that individuals have developed a profound interest in understanding. Hobfoll (1998) contends that, with regards to contemporary, mainly Western society, the topic of stress is one by which individuals are consumed; a topic that is used by society "as a basic exploratory mechanism to describe the underpinnings of what we see as wrong with work, family life, and our society" (Hobfoll, 1998 1). Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) similarly argue that stress has become an essential dimension of the modern condition: "Wherever you turn there are a multiplicity of guides on the nature of stress from psychologists, epidemiologists, therapists, consultants, journalists and so on" (Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995). Fotinatos and Cooper (2005) also refer to the increasing coverage of stress-related incidents and stress-related information in the Media. In such a way, it becomes apparent when examining literature pertaining to the topic of stress, that stress as a phenomenon plays a pervasive role in the shaping of contemporary society.

[W]ork is, by its very nature, about violence – to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath it all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is to triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us (Terkel, 1972, as cited in Cooper, 2000:1).

Besides an increase in research and reference to stress on a Social level, stress on an Organisational level is also on the increase. Stress in the organisational arena has been noted to be the second most reported work-related health problem across Europe (Fotinatos & Cooper, 2005). Jamil (2004) reports that on the whole one in five reported health problems at work stem from stress-related problems, and that seven million working days are lost through stress each year. Hart and Cooper (2001), as well as Goh and Oei (1999), argue that occupational stress is an increasing problem that not only negatively affects individual employees, but has detrimental implications for organisations as a whole. These negative implications, as illustrated in the literature, include low motivation and morale, high turnover, low job satisfaction, accidents, decrease in performance, conflicts and the like (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Byrne (2002) contends that the stress symptoms experienced by the individual not only have negative implications for the organisation in which that individual is found, but also has implications for the broader psycho-social domain. In such a way, the organisational phenomenon of stress can be described as an issue of contemporary importance - a factor of modern life (Fotinatos & Cooper, 2005).

In order to illustrate the dynamics of stress in the context of organisations, a model of work stress is provided hereunder (Figure 1). The first column of the diagram, reading from the left, provides examples of potential stressors for employees. Examples include the culture of the organisation and how it deals with stress (for example, long hours culture); demands, which include exposure to physical hazards and workload; the degree of employee control in the work process; relationships; understandings and management

of change, and employees' understanding regarding their role in the organisation; and finally, the degree of support provided to the employee (Palmer, Cooper & Thomas, 2001). All of these factors provide employees with a potential source of stress in the context of work. According to Cartwright and Cooper (1997) an employee's role in an organisation can become stressful if it is not clearly defined or understood. Similarly, if an employee does not suit the culture of the organisation, does not relate well to their fellow employees, or perceives that they are not provided with enough support, feelings of stress may arise (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997).

Model of Stress
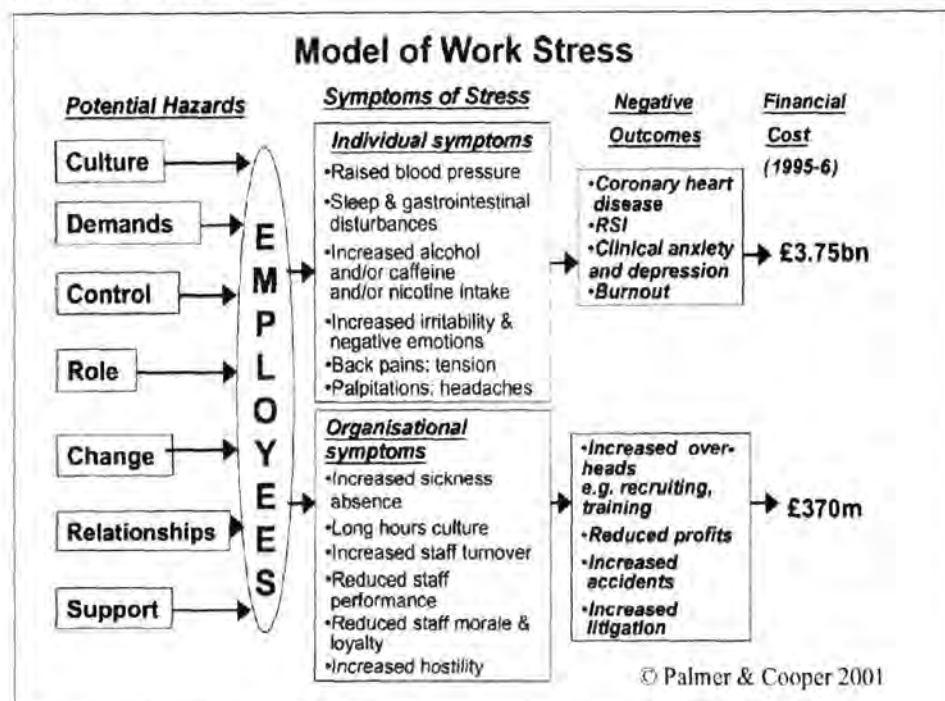
Figure 1: Diagram representing a Model of Work Stress (Palmer & Cooper, 2001, as cited in Palmer, Cooper & Thomas, 2001).

The second part of the diagram includes the potential effects of stress at the level of the individual as well as that of the organisation. For the individual, biological, affective and behavioural problems may arise (Drafke & Kossen 2002). At the organisational level, the possible results of these stressors include high levels of absenteeism, reduced productivity, increased hostility, reduced staff loyalty and morale, as well as increased sickness (Karasek & Theorell, 1990 in Cartwright & Cooper, 1997; Carroll, 1999). The final part of the diagram includes the long term outcomes of stress at both the level of the individual and organisation, and the resultant costs of these outcomes. With regard to the individual, burnout and clinical anxiety are just two examples. On the other hand, reduced profits, increased accidents as well as increased litigation provide examples of the costs of stress at the level of the organisation (Palmer, Cooper & Thomas, 2001).

Even though the above diagram provides a simplistic understanding of the stress process within the context of organisations, it highlights the costs of stress at the level of the individual and organisation. This model therefore serves to confirm literature which notes the costs of stress at both these levels. As argued by Terkel, 1972, as cited in Cooper, 2000) work is about violence and stress.

Moving beyond the level of the organisation to that of the social context, it becomes apparent that "At the turn of the century a confluence of economic, political and sociocultural forces are impacting on our contemporary work arrangements" (Dollard, 2003:1). According to Hart and Cooper (2001) the context in which organisations are found is dynamic and constantly changing. Due to developments in globalisation, time

and space have been compressed, and therefore, as argued by LePine, (2003) in order for organisations to remain competitive and effective in this environment they need to adapt themselves, and therefore change what they do and how they do it. Moorhead and Griffin (1995) and Robbins (1998) contend that as a result of this shrinkage of the global arena and erosion of national boundaries, organisations are now forced to compete on a global scale. Organisations are no longer afforded the 'luxury' of having to compete exclusively with national competition, but now have the pressure of having to be globally competitive and successful. Frese and de Kruif (2000) argue that organisations have to be flexible so as to adapt and meet the challenges set up as a result of innovations that take place in the rest of the global arena. Besides having to manage competition on a global level and accelerated technological development (Moorhead & Griffin, 1995), organisations too have to deal with an increase in diversity pertaining to the workforce. This increase can be argued to be a result of globalisation, as well as of dramatic changes in the socio-political context of South Africa. Robbins (1998) contends that in order to overcome the inequalities of the past Apartheid regime, legislation such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998 and Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995 have been developed. These developments have in turn resulted in a change in the workforce, illustrative of an increase in diversification, a movement away from a mainly skilled white male workforce, to one reflective of South Africa's "rainbow nation".

It can be argued that this need to be competitive, on both a national and global level, provides a major source of stress for organisations in contemporary society (Byrne, 2002). Moorhead and Griffin (1995), and LePine (2003) argue that organisations have to be flexible so as to adapt to and meet the challenges set up as a result of globalisation, technological innovation and the increasing diversification of the workforce. One way in which organisations deal with this pressure is through changing the nature of work. In such a way, it can be argued that the manner in which organisations change is often prescribed by the demands of globalisation and competition. The social context therefore plays an important role in shaping the organisational context and the problems experienced in this area. However, Byrne (2002) more critically contends that this environment itself may be problematic. He contends that those occupational structures and cultures which promote and facilitate competition, may simultaneously frustrate and hinder effective competition. Similarly, Hart and Cooper (2001) contend that this changing nature of work has had positive implications for some employees, with increased mobility and flexibility. However, in most cases these changes have resulted in an increase in occupational stress experienced by employees. This increase in stress, as argued by Hart and Cooper (1991) is due to a decrease in job security, increased work loads and increased responsibility. It can therefore be argued that the world of work is far different from what it was 30 years ago, and as a result, one could argue that the experience of occupational stress may be quite different from what it was in the past (Fotinatos & Cooper, 2005).

2.3 Stress - a definition?

What becomes apparent when examining literature surrounding the topic of stress, and more specifically occupational stress, is the lack of consensus surrounding its definition. Monat and Lazarus (1991) contend that even though the topic of stress is one that has been extensively researched and scrutinised, there seems to be a general lack of agreement on a universal definition of this phenomenon. One could critically argue that this extensive research has in fact played a role in preventing a clear description or definition of this topic from being formulated. Hart and Cooper (2001) state, with specific reference to occupational stress, that this lack of consensus has resulted in a degree of fragmentation with regard to the occupational stress literature. Mason (1975:29) provides an encompassing picture of this current problem, stating:

> Whatever the soundness of logic may be in the various approaches to defining "stress," however, the general picture in the field can still be described as one of confusion. The disenchantment felt by many scientists with the stress field is certainly understandable when one views two decades in which the term "stress" has been used variously to refer to "stimulus" by some workers, "response" by some workers, "interaction" by others, and more comprehensive combinations of the above factors by still other workers.

For the purpose of this review and for definition purposes, the concepts of stress and organisational/occupational stress are going to be examined individually. Literature has shown that the definition of stress deployed depends greatly on the underlying theory, as well as the discipline studying the phenomena (thus we see a difference in the way stress is conceptualised in medicine, engineering, psychology, anthropology, and sociology).

These theories conceptualise stress in terms of three main dimensions or phenomena; namely physiological, sociological, or psychological (Monat & Lazarus, 1991). Even though such diversity of definitions and conceptualisations of this phenomenon exist, Selye (1991) critically argues that due to the reality that only a single term is utilised to describe such differences, commonalty amongst these understandings must and does exist. In light of this, Selye (1991) argues that common to all the theories, be they general stress or organisational-related theories of stress, is the idea of a physiological response that intensifies our arousal and mobilises our physical resources. However, one could critically argue that such an approach is limiting as it positions stress as a scientific phenomenon rather than a social one. One could therefore argue, adopting a more encompassing stance, that stress as a concept encapsulates "the whole area of problems that includes the stimuli producing stress reactions, the reactions themselves, and the various intervening processes" (Lazarus, 1966:27, as cited in Monat & Lazarus, 1991:3). However, one could critically argue that the encompassing nature of this definition is in itself problematic, as its lack of specificity provides further evidence that there is no clear definition of this phenomenon.

Organisational/occupational stress, as the name suggests, focuses on the social-psychological characteristics of work that have negative implications on an employee's health (Beehr, 1989, as cited in Dollard, 2003). It should be noted that the terms work stress, job stress and occupational stress are often used interchangeably in literature. Like the concept of stress, literature suggests that the understanding or definition of organisational stress utilised will depend on the theoretical understanding underpinning

the definition. According to Summers, DeCottis and DeNisi (1995), definitions of job stress can be placed on a continuum, ranging from definitions that focus on the cause of stress - stimulus models, to those that focus on the consequences of job stress - response-based models. Lazarus and Launier (1978, as cited in Summers, DeCottis & DeNisi, 1995) focus on the causes of stress and define it "as any *event* that takes or exceeds normal adaptive responses" (p. 114). Quick and Quick (as cited in Summers, DeCottis & DeNisi, 1995) on the other hand, define job stress as a response or a "generalized, patterned, unconscious mobilization of the body's natural energy resources when confronted with a stressor" (Quick and Quick, as cited in Summers, DeCottis & DeNisi, 1995, p. 114). Finally, Summers, DeCottis and DeNisi (1995) provide a definition of job stress that can be argued to be found in the middle of the continuum. According to Summers, DeCottis and DeNisi (1995) job stress can be defined as the uncomfortable feelings that arise from forces that are found in the workplace. From this perspective, job stress can be argued to only exist if the individual is aware of it. This definition therefore allows for the possibility that a given situation may provoke different degrees of stressfulness from one individual to the next. This theory can thus be argued to be in line with the transactional theory of stress, which highlights the role of perception in the stress experience.

2.4 Theories of stress relating to the individual

According to Singer and Davidson, (1991) understandings of stress fall under two main categories; namely physiological or transactional-based understandings. Under the category of physiology, Selye's response-based understanding of stress becomes relevant. In this case, "Stress has been defined as the reaction of the organism to some sort of outside threat" (Selye, 1936, as cited in Singer & Davidson, 1991:37). Stimulus-based theories on the other hand, define stress as "those environmental factors which stimulate unhealthy, individual reactions" (Grieff, 1974, as cited in De Wolff and Winnubst, 1987:46). Finally transactional theories of stress define stress as "the outcome of interactions between the organism and the environment" (Singer & Davidson, 1991:37).

Response Accounts

Selye's response-based 'physiological' account of stress is one which defines stress as the *"non-specific* (that is, common) *result of any demand upon the body,* be the effect mental or somatic" (p.22). It should be noted that by 'non-specific' it is meant that even though every stressor produces a specific response, it simultaneously produces non-specific responses common to all stressors (Singer & Davidson, 1991). Selye (1991) argues that this theory was developed from observing the objective bodily indicators or changes that arise in the body as a result of demands placed on the subject. The response that results is, as argued by Helman, (2001) a result of a "physiological mechanism which prepares the organism for action, and which comes into play when demands are placed on it" (p.202). This account places much emphasis on the dependent variable - the response regardless of the stressor that elicits the response (Selye, as cited in Helman, 2001, De

Wolff & Winnubst, 1987, Lyon, 2000). Stressors may include any psychological, cognitive, emotional or physiological demand that causes a bodily response. From this perspective, stress is therefore an outcome of an experience that has a physiological effect on the body. In this way, organisms merely automatically react to environmental stimuli.

The process as formulated by Selye (Helman, 2001) whereby an organism, or in this case a human subject, responds to environmental stressors is formally known as the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). Rice (2000) notes that Selye gave this process this specific name for the following reasons: Selye (1976:38, as cited in Rice, 2000) labelled the process "general" because it was 'produced only by agents which have a general effect upon large portions of the body'; "adaptive" because it 'stimulated defence and, thereby, helped in the acquisition and maintenance of a state of inurement,' and "syndrome" because its 'individual manifestations are coordinated and, even partly, dependent on one another' (p.29). This process is divided into three stages. The first stage includes the alarm reaction. At this stage, the subject becomes aware of the 'noxious' stimulus. It should be noted however, that in some instances there is a physiological reaction without awareness of the stimulus, for example stimulants and environmental conditions. Selye (1976, as cited in Rice, 2000) contends that on a physiological level, the automatic nervous system becomes stimulated as a result of the initial shock. This stage can last from a few seconds to as long as 24 hours, depending upon both the concentration of the stressor and the susceptibility of the individual. If the stressor persists or the individual is highly vulnerable, a stage of countershock may arise. This reaction is equivalent to that of a flight or fight reaction. This physiological reaction was developed by Walter Cannon

who argued that "the strength of the feelings and the quickness of the response measure the chances of survival in a struggle where the issues may be life or death" (as cited in Allen, 1995, p. 29). Cannon (as cited in Allen, 1995) contends that regardless of whether the organism fights or flees, a similar physiological reaction transpires; one's brain detects a threat, activates the sympathetic nervous system, and as a result one is able to fight or flee (Allen, 1995).

The next stage is one of resistance or adaptation; in order to meet the demands that the stressor has posed for the subject, the subject enters this stage. During this stage, the subject advances to a level more advanced and adaptive than the subject was at before being stressed. Due to this movement to the stage of resistance, a great reduction in the alarm reaction transpires. The final stage is that of exhaustion. This stage tends to occur when the individual cannot reach a level of homeostasis or equilibrium prior to the alarm reaction, or when the initial stress experience is too overwhelming. The subject, as a result of the continual pressure from the stressor, can no longer maintain a level of equilibrium and, as a result, their physiological resources become depleted. At this stage the individual can be deemed to be stressed (Everly, 1989, Helman, 2001, Rice, 2000).

Criticisms of the response-based model abound. For example, this model has been criticised for not taking into account the complexity of the stress experience, as well as for providing an extremely mechanistic account of the stress process. Mason (1971, as cited in Everly, 1989) argues that this theory has been criticised for its 'global generality' as well as for its lack of sensitivity towards the specificity of the stress response process.

For example, one cannot assume that the same event will result in the same experience for all individuals. Rather, one event has the possibility of being interpreted in many ways and therefore might not even be experienced as stressful by some individuals. In light of this, this theory has been criticised for focussing extensively on the physiological dimensions of stress, whilst ignoring psychological resources, coping strategies, as well as the meanings individuals attach to the experience, which determine whether the occurrence is perceived negatively or positively (Helman, 2001). This theory has in turn provided a universal view of the stress response, and therefore does not provide insight into the diversity of possible responses, as well as the complexity of the stress experience (Moerdyk, 1983).

Stimulus Accounts

Stimulus-based models on the other hand, emphasise the differing types of environmental, physical, and psychological stressors that have the potential to induce the stress response. Unlike response-based theories, "Stress is that which happens to the man, not that which happens in him, it is a set of causes not a set of symptoms" (Corlett & Richardson, 1981:97). In such a way, stress can be defined in relation to those events to which an individual responds (Lyon, 2000). Subsequently, stress is transformed into an independent variable, unlike in the case of response-based theories. It is therefore seen as a force or factor external to the individual that results in changes in the individual (Lyon, 2000). According to Greiff (1974, as cited in De Wolff & Winnubst, 1987:46) stress can therefore be defined as "those environmental factors which stimulate unhealthy, individual reactions." A common example of the

stimulus-based approach is illustrated by the Holmes and Rahe *Life Events Scale*. This views critical life changes as objective experiences that disrupt or threaten to disrupt an individual's usual activities, forcing a major readjustment in that individual's behaviour. It should be noted that this scale was the first attempt to consider the role of the social in determining that which is stressful - that is, the events on the scale were socially determined to elicit stress. However, the event simultaneously determined the experience of stress, as their existence on a list meant that any individual experiencing the event would be stressed and could be expected to be stressed (Thoits, 1983).

De Wolff and Winnubst (1987) contend that this theory can be conceptualised as complementary to the above response-based account, in that it provides a different perspective of how the environment influences the individual or subject. Nevertheless, this theory of stress also has its own shortcomings. Most significantly, this theory does not account for the wide range of responses that may become apparent in the stress experience, and that may differ according to the intensity and familiarity of the stressor. By normalising life changes and universalising their effects on individuals, the complexity of the stress experience is lost; Namely, the theory tends to assume that all individuals respond to the same events in a similar manner (Lyon, 2000). The failure of this model can therefore be argued to be the assumption that a particular event will elicit the stress response regardless of social, cultural or individual differences. This theory also tends to focus on stimulus events that are typically traumatic or significant. Importantly, the events individuals respond or react to are themselves socially determined and defined, thus affirming stress as both an individual

and social experience. However, perhaps the biggest criticism of both of the aforementioned theories is their conceptualisation of the individual as a passive entity in the elicitation of the stress response (Fontana, 1989).

Transactional Accounts

In light of these shortcomings, the transactional model of stress was developed. Corlett and Richardson (1981) note that this model has been actively constructed over time, emerging out of both the contributions and the criticisms of earlier models. In this sense, an understanding of the phenomenon of stress has developed over time, and may continue to evolve as research continues to inform and transform our understandings of this complex phenomenon. Hart and Cooper (2001) contend that what distinguishes the transactional model of stress from the previously mentioned uni-directional theories is the nature of the relationship between individuals and their environments. This model focuses on the dynamic relationship between the individual and their environment (Hart & Cooper, 2001). Accordingly, instead of viewing the individual as a passive recipient, by focussing on the relationship between the stimulus, response and intervening variables, the individual is transformed into an agent within the complex network of the stress experience (De Wolff & Winnubst, 1987). This model of stress has therefore been argued to provide the most holistic and effective account of the stress experience to date (Monat & Lazarus, 1991).

The transactional model of stress therefore views the relationship between the individual and their environment from a specific perspective. Lazarus (1967, as cited in Lyon, 2000)

contends that "stress does not exist in the "event" but rather is a result of a transaction between a person and his or her environment" (p.9). Therefore, a stressor can be understood as any event in the environment that has the potential of being a threat. By potential, it is meant that no event can be independently perceived as a stressor, and through the cognitive process of appraisal, the stimulus is defined as either threatening or non-threatening. In light of this, "any stimulus, no matter how noxious or how pleasant, can be viewed as either desired, interesting, nonthreatening, or nonharmful and, if it is so appraised, it will not be considered a stressor" (Lazarus, 1966, as cited in Singer & Davidson, 1991:42). In such a way, the hiatus between the stimulus and response is narrowed through the process of appraisal.

The defining and fundamental feature of this approach is its focus on the cognitive aspects of the stress experience (Hobfoll, 1998). Thus, the process of cognitive appraisal as formulated by Lazarus, plays a key role in determining the extent to which a stimulus is perceived as harmful or not. According to Hart and Cooper (2001), appraisal can be defined as "a cognitive process through which people constantly monitor the conditions in their environment to determine whether these conditions are likely to have consequences for their well-being (referred to as *primary appraisal*), and if so, what can be done about it (referred to as *secondary appraisal*)" (Hart & Cooper, 2001:97). Primary appraisal therefore, includes the process by which the individual evaluates the potential stressor. Lazarus (2000) argues that the degree to which the stressor is deemed threatening or non-threatening is to a large extent dependent upon the individual's values, beliefs, goals, situational intentions and previous experiences.

Finally, it should be noted that, although it is rarely acknowledged, this stage holds a social component; that is, one's values, beliefs, goals and the like are in most cases socially influenced and determined. It should also be noted that the transaction with the environment is a transaction with a social environment.

Based on this initial appraisal, the process of secondary appraisal follows. This process includes assessing "what can be done about a troubled person-environment relationship" (Lazarus, 2000:200). The process therefore focuses on the coping resources of the individual, as well as those social and intra-psychic constraints that may inhibit effective coping. Coping processes include those cognitive or behavioural resources that individuals utilise and draw upon with the aim of changing their environment, or assisting them in dealing with their emotions effectively (Hart & Cooper, 2001). Obviously, the perception of being able to cope will result in a far milder stress response than that of the incapacity to do so. Thus, depending on these initial cognitive processes, a specific stress response may or may not be elicited. It should be noted that both primary and secondary appraisal are necessary components of the appraisal process. Lazarus (2000) suggests that they work together interchangeably, providing a total picture and understanding of the individual's current stress experience. Finally, a process of re-appraisal follows, whereby the consequences of the stress process are evaluated and fed back into one's cognitive functioning. In the case that the situation is resolved, the process of coping is ceased. However, if unresolved, the process of psychological and physiological strain persists (Dollard, 2003). By strain it is meant those reactions that arise to the condition of stress. According to Dollard (1995), these reactions may be transitory or of a short-term nature,

leading to potentially long-term effects. In such a way, the outcomes of previous appraisal processes will provide a fundamental contribution to future transactions (Corlett and Richardson, 1981).

Hobfoll (1998) critically contends that due to the encompassing nature of this model, taking into account the 'objective' environment in which the appraisal of the stress experience takes place, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) were able to avert criticism. Nevertheless, with its emphasis on the appraisal process, "objective elements, emotions, and resources play second stage as handmaidens to cognitions" (Hobfoll, 1998:15-16). Consequently, even though this theory has managed to provide greater insight into the complexity of the stress experience, moving beyond simplistic stimulus and response-based conceptualisations, by excluding the role of the social in influencing the appraisal process, the theory has been unable to tap into the true complexity of the stress experience (Hobfoll, 1998).

2.5 Organisational stress theories

When examining literature pertaining to the topic of organisational stress, it becomes apparent that workplace theories can be divided roughly into two main categories. According to Cox, (2000, as cited in Dollard, 2003) workplace theories can be classified as either interactional or transactional theories. In the former case, the structural features of the individual's interaction with their work environment is focussed on, whilst in the latter case, the emphasis is on how the individual cognitively and emotionally responds to their interactions with the environment. Interactional models also use correlations to demonstrate the existence of a relationship between two variables, (usually a stressor and a response) whereas transactional models imply a relationship without necessarily demonstrating the existence of the relationship statistically. With regard to the latter category, being able to separate neatly individual theories from organisational stress theories becomes impossible. Similarly, it is difficult to differentiate interactional and transactional theories from one another. One can therefore argue that issues pertaining to the transactional conceptualisation of the stress experience can be effectively applied at both an individual and organisational level.

Job Demand-Control Model (DCM)

Karasek's (1979, as cited in Dollard, 2003) Job Demand-Control model contends that the source of work stress arises from the structural features of the work environment. In this case, the individual's interaction with the work environment provides a source of stress, rather than the attributes of the individual, or other demographic factors. Strain can therefore be argued as resulting from the combined effect of work factors as well as the

moderating effects of the environment. By this it is meant that in the case that an individual is working in an environment in which great demands are placed on them, while simultaneously experiencing little control over the situation, strain will result (Dollard, 2003). However, it can be argued that the experience of little control is an individual attribute. Hence, while the environment may limit which decision one makes, control is a function of the extent to which one feels one is in control. De Jonge and Dormann (2003) argue that this model is founded on two psycho-social job characteristics, namely 'psychological job demands' and 'job decision latitude'. According to Karasek (1990, as cited in De Jonge & Dormann, 2003) the former includes those psychological stressors present in the work environment, for example fast working pace, difficult and mentally challenging work, and the like. Job decision latitude encompasses two main areas; namely the degree to which the individual has authority over their work-related decisions, as well as the breadth of skill required of the individual on the job (De Jonge & Dormann, 2003).

Spector (2002) argues that the degree to which an individual experiences stress on the job is influenced by the relationship between control and demand. It should be noted that "*Stress* in these models refers to the intermediate state of arousal between the objective stressor and strain" (Dollard, 2003:12). For example, in the case that the individual experiences high demand while simultaneously experiencing low decision latitude, psychological job strain will result. In the case that the individual experiences high demand and high decision latitude, active work in which the individual experiences increase in job satisfaction; motivation, learning, challenge and performance will result.

Thirdly, in the instance when the individual experiences low demand and low decision latitude, passive work will follow. Finally, a low demand work environment with high decision latitude will result in low strain work (Dollard, 2003). In such a way, control mediates the extent to which the work situation is stressful, therefore when an individuals' working environment is extremely demanding, the effects of these demands are compensated by the degree of job control latitude (Spector, 2002). In light of this, Karasek (as cited in Dollard, 2003) contends that high demand jobs produce a state of normal arousal that is necessary for the body to respond effectively to work demands. However, in the case that there is an environmental constraint, for example low job control, the arousal response is prevented from being challenged effectively, in turn resulting in unresolved strain. Thus, the individual is not able to effectively deal with the stressful situation, and therefore has to endure the effects of the unresolved situation. In such a way, one can argue that "strain results from the joint effects of the demands of the work situations (stressors) and environmental moderators of stress, particularly the range of decision making freedom (control) available to the worker facing those demands" (Karasek, 1981, as cited in Dollard and De Jonge, 2003:76)
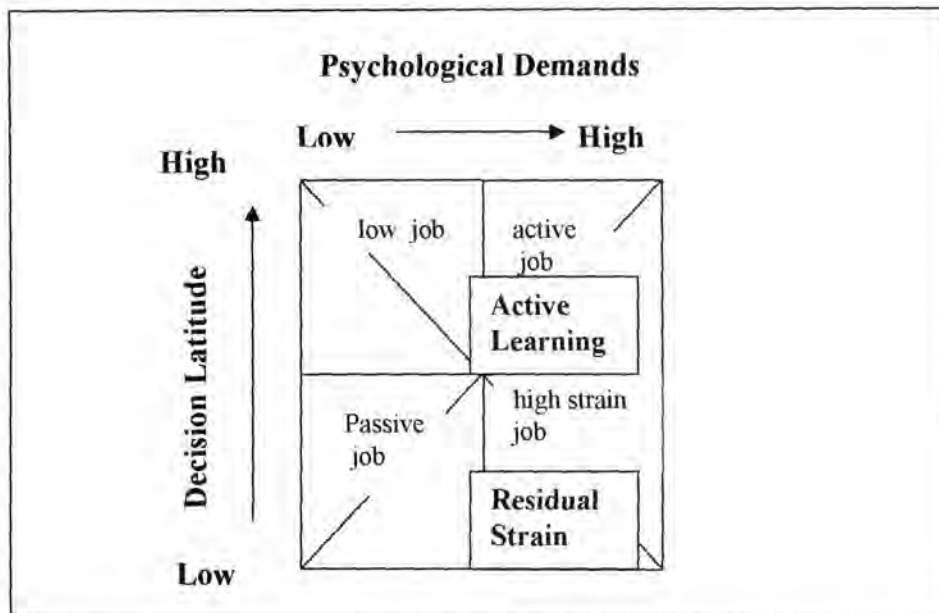
Figure 2: Diagram Job Demand-Control model (Dollard, 1995, p.13)

De Jonge and Dormann (2003) and Dollard (2003) argue that this model has been extensively supported by empirical research, and is used extensively within the context of organisation. The reason that this model has dominated much of occupational stress research is due to the relatively simple way in which research pertaining to the dimensions of the model can be put into practice (Dollard, 2003). However, little research has been found to support the causal relationship between degree of control and strain (Spector, 2002). The model has also been criticised for its simplistic view of the stress experience, as well as its exclusion or lack of attention to psychological processes evident in the process. Dollard (2003) notes that this exclusion of psychological processes does not mean that Karasek denies their role in the stress process, but rather that Karasek does not view their role as of much significance. It should be noted that the model also appears to argue that the individual, despite being influenced by the extent to

which they have control, is actually a passive recipient of control rather than an active agent. By focusing on the structural demands of an individual's work environment, the model unfortunately does not take into account the emotional demands the individual has to endure. Finally, this model has the potential of homogenising the stress experience. For example; some individuals may enjoy high demands with low decision making, experiencing such instances as fulfilling rather than stressful.

Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model

Siegrist's (1996, 1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003) Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model moves away from the above interactional conceptualisations of organisational stress to focus its attention on and examine the "interaction between environmental constraints or threats and individual coping resources" (Siegrist, 1996, 1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003:17). It focuses on the issue of reward rather than the control structure of the work the individual performs (De Jonge & Dormann, 2003). This theory is based on the premise that when individuals engage in some form of work there is an expectation that some form of reward will result. In the case that this expectation is not met, work strain results. It therefore assumes that the "work role in adult life provides a crucial link between self-regulatory functions such as self-esteem and self-efficacy and the social opportunity structure" (Siegrist, 1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003:18).

This theory is based on two main characteristics; namely the degree of effort one makes at work, and the occupational rewards one receives (De Jonge and Dormann, 2003). These efforts include both extrinsic and intrinsic efforts. The former includes the degree

to which the individual can cope with potentially negative external stimuli they encounter in the work environment, for example the workload and physical exertion. Intrinsic efforts on the other hand, encompass the individuals' personal attributes and copying styles; that is, "a pattern of excessive striving in combination with a strong desire of being approved and esteemed" (Dollard, 2003:18). In the case of occupational rewards, concerns surrounding earnings, benefits, job security, promotion prospects, self-esteem, respect and support become relevant. The model argues that in the instance that there is a lack of reciprocity between 'costs' and 'gains' or effort and reward, a state of emotional distress will result. Working in an environment in which an individual has a demanding job, with low control, high effort and low reward causes a great source of stress. However, more specifically in the case that an individual's effort is one of 'over commitment', their focus on effort rather than reward also has the potential to exacerbate the stressful situation. Critically, Karasek (as cited in Dollard, 2003) argues that one cannot ignore the possibly that this individual variable is a result of the work environment.
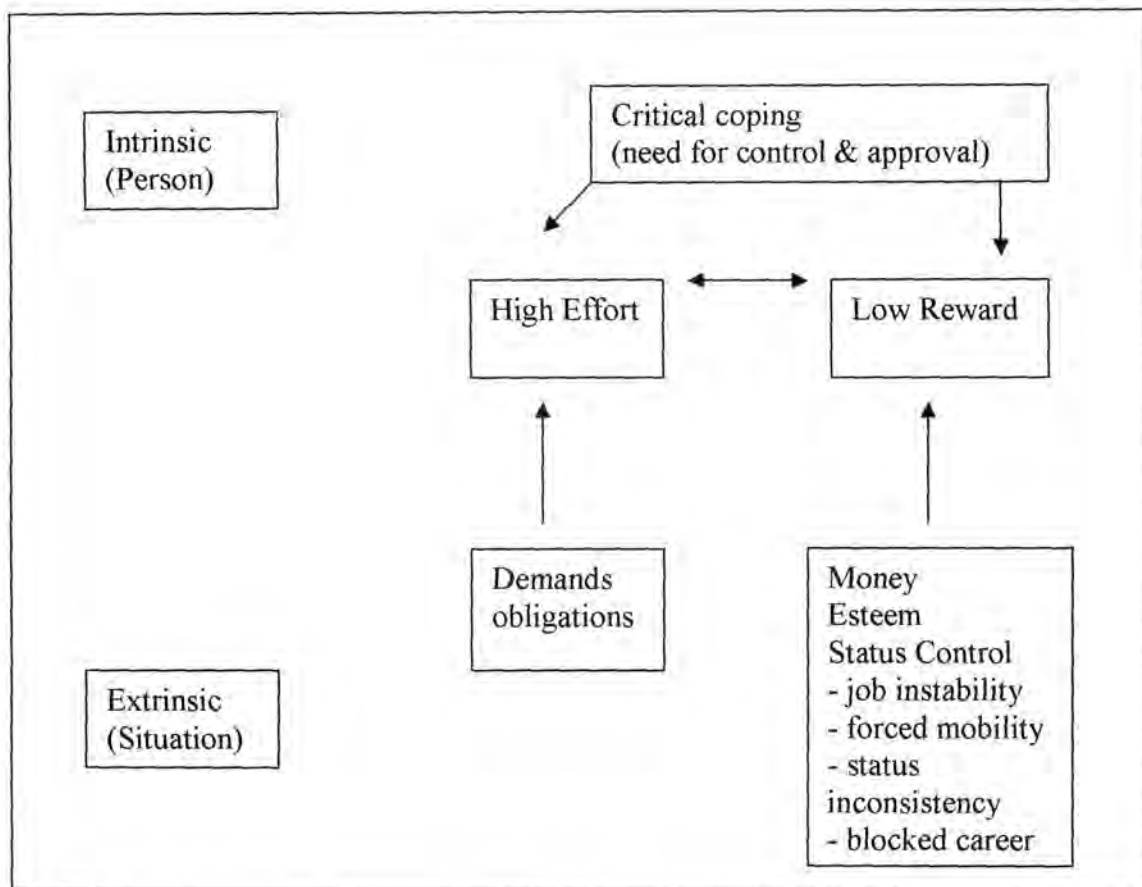
Figure 3: Diagram of Effort-Reward Imbalance model (Dollard, 1995, p.18)

Research has indicated that, as much as both the Job Demand Control and Effort-Reward Imbalance models have contributed to the development of a comprehensive understanding of the organisational stress experience, in combination these models can provide an even greater and more meaningful understanding. Both Kasl (1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003) and Theorell (1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003) argue that by drawing on their differences and complementary properties this objective will be achieved. According to Theorell, (1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003) the relationship between the two models can be understood as "the DCS embedded contextually within the ERI model" (Dollard, 2003:20). Thus, in order for one to develop a truly comprehensive

understanding of the work environment, one should include the health-promoting aspects of both models; that is rewards, control and support, and those other variables relevant to the particular organisational context.

Person-Environment Fit Theory

The Person-Environment Fit theory of stress stemmed from acknowledging the importance of both the person and environment in determining the stress experience. According to Edwards, Caplan and van Harrison (2000) "The core premise of the P-E fit theory is that stress arises not from the person or the environment separately, but rather by their fit or congruence with one another" (p.28). Drawing on the original work of French (French & Kaplan, 1962, as cited in Edwards, Caplan & van Harrison, 2000) this model can be divided along three main distinctions. Firstly, it is essential that one can distinguish between the individual and the environment. Secondly, one needs to distinguish between the objective and subjective representations of both the person and the environment (see Figure 1). The objective person or environment refers to the attributes or characteristics of the person or environment as they exist, independent of the individual's perception. The subjective person or environment represents the individual's self perception or self identity, as well as those environmental events experienced and perceived by the individual, respectively. It should be noted that the relationship between the objective and subjective person and environment is of an imperfect nature due to both individual perceptual limitations, as well as organisational structures that prevent the individual from assessing objective information. The final distinction includes the actual fit between the individual and the environment. This fit can either be based on the

demands of the environment in relation to the abilities of the individual; or the needs of the individual in relation to the supplies in the environment regarding those needs. Demands include both quantitative and qualitative job requirements, role expectations and organisational norms. Needs on the other hand, encompass both physiological and psychological requirements, values and motives. Finally, supplies represent intrinsic and extrinsic resources that have the potential of fulfilling the needs of the person such as money, food, social interaction and achievement opportunities (Edwards, Caplan & van Harrison, 2000).
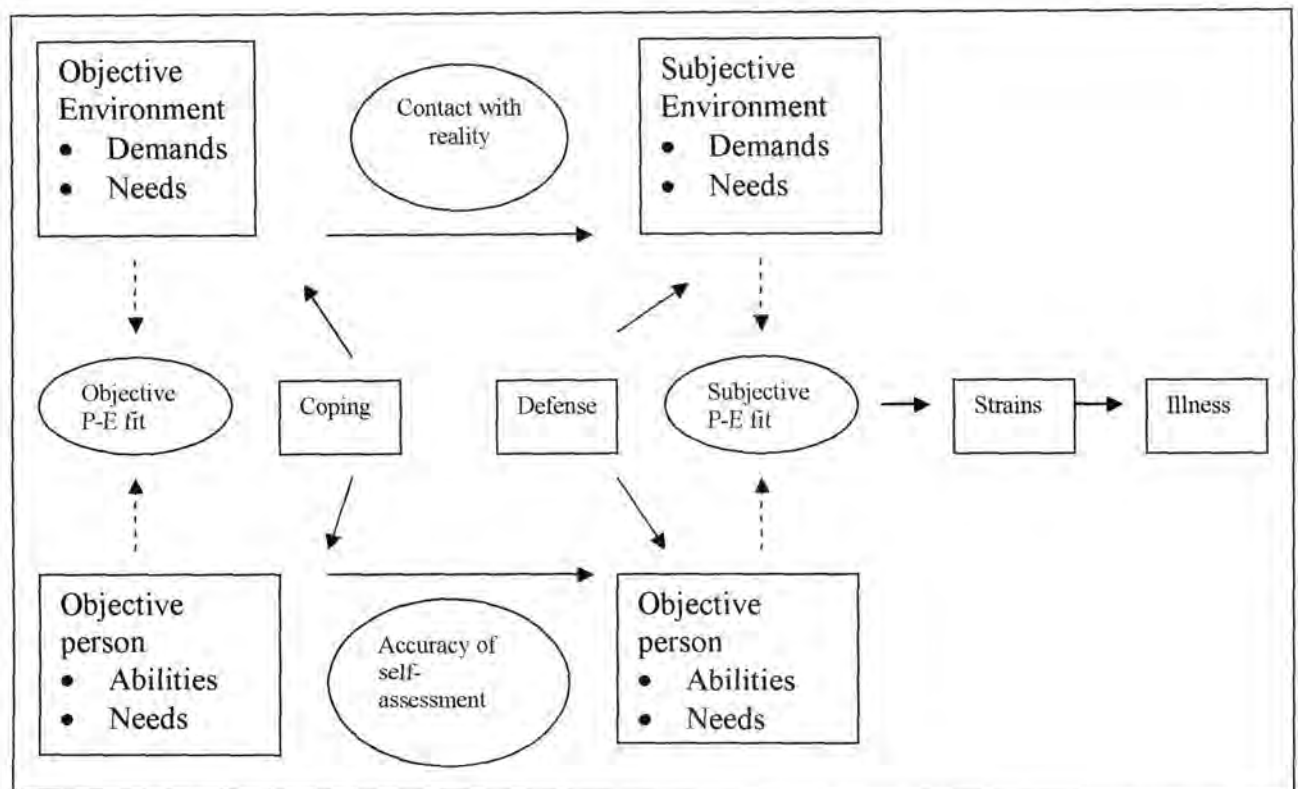
Figure 4: Diagram of Person-Environment Model

From this perspective, stress or strain arises when "(1) the environment does not provide adequate supplies to meet the person's needs; or (2) the abilities of the person fall short of demands that are prerequisite to receiving supplies" (Edwards, Caplan & van Harrison, 2000:31). Stress is therefore defined in relation to the degree of misfit between the person and the environment. Importantly, this theory postulates that the misfit is not enough to induce a stress experience. Rather, stress is only experienced if meeting demands is required to achieve one's needed supplies, and if demands have been internalised as objectives. Stress from this perspective is viewed as a subjective rather than objective disjuncture between the person and environment (French, Caplan & Harrison, 1982).

One particular review or extension of this theory that becomes relevant for this review includes the relationship between Person-Environment Fit and organisational effectiveness. According to Harrison, (1985, as cited in Edwards, Caplan & van Harrison, 2000) "just as the person's functioning and survival depend on the fulfilment of needs, the effectiveness and survival of an organisation depend on the fulfilment of the demands it places on its employees" (p.38). From this perspective, organisational demands represent the needs of the organisation, whereas the abilities of the employees reflect the supplies through which the needs of the organisation can be achieved.

However, from a critical perspective, as much as this theory has provided insight into how person and environmental constraints relate to form stress, and how coping and defences may act to resolve the disjuncture between person and environment, this theory does have its limitations. Firstly, this theory tends to be of a process nature, in turn

neglecting the content dimension. By focusing on the process by which the person and environment produce strain, this theory neglects the actual content of the person and environment, that is the specific details of each constituent. Secondly, the theory only provides potential relationships between Person-Environment Fit and strain. This theory has not been able to predict specific relationships. Thirdly, the theory does not focus a great deal of attention on coping styles and defence patterns. For example, the theory does not specify how individuals select which methods of coping styles they perceive as most effective (Edwards, Caplan & van Harrison, 2000).

Dollard (2003) critically argues that no comprehensive theory regarding organisational stress exists. He contends that theories that adopt a work environment approach are flawed in that they depict a passive representation of the individual. The psychological approach argues against such conceptualisations, focussing its attention on the role of cognitive processes in mediating the stress experience. However, the work environment approach has maintains that by focussing attention on individual perception in isolation from the broader organisational context, the stress experience is restricted to an individual problem. In such a way the individual is expected to adapt to the context, in turn preventing organisational change from occurring (Dollard, 2003).

What therefore becomes apparent when examining literature regarding theories of stress, be they of an individual or organisational nature, is their individualised nature. These theories, by neglecting or under-emphasising the social dimension of the stress

experience, have in turn been unable to tap into the true complexity of the stress experience (Hobfoll, 1998).

2.6 Social Basis of the stress experience

When examining dominant stress research and unpacking general and organisational-related stress theories, it becomes apparent that understandings of this phenomenon have stemmed from asking individuals for their appraisal of stress experiences. Most studies have carried the assumption that one needs to ask individuals what is stressful to them, in order to form a theory of stress. This focus at the level of the individual could be argued to maintain a western emphasis on the individual as 'master of their senses', rather than examining their existence as a social being. In turn, this assumes an infinite array of stressful situations linked to infinite individuality and difference. However, such an infinite array may not be the case, as by situating these experiences in locations, cultures and classes that most people share, this infinite array has the potential of becoming finite. Thus it can be argued that by focussing on the individual experiences of stress, with the exclusion of the external social and cultural context, the contemporary conceptualisations of stress fail to acknowledge the true complexity of the stress process. They also neglect to take into account the social forces that play a role in shaping one's individuality. In such a way, an extremely 'mechanistic', 'individualistic' and 'internal' understanding of this phenomenon has resulted (Hobfoll, 1998).

According to Hobfoll, (1998) one therefore needs to 'de-psychologise' stress, moving away from purely cognitive and individualistic based conceptualisations, to those that take into account the social and cultural context. He argues that as much as stress is interpreted and experienced at the level of the individual, the experience and interpretation transpires within a social context; a context that constructs and hence,

influences the experience itself (Hobfoll, 1998). Hobfoll (1998) is therefore extremely critical of conceptualisations of stress, arguing that they are far too individualistic and mechanistic. He contends that when one attempts to comprehend individuals' experiences of stress by analysing their appraisals of the situation, one will only develop a surface-level understanding. He views perception as an iceberg, which only provides insight into individual interpretation. By merely examining this level, one's understanding of this experience becomes confined to surface level manifestations, ignoring the role of deeper forces in shaping these interpretations. By deeper forces, those social, cultural, situational and familial factors that mediate and moderate the individual's experience of the stress phenomenon is implied. In order to go below this surface level, one needs to broaden one's investigation to other dimensions; that is familial, group and cultural factors.

Social Stress

When examining literature surrounding the topic of stress, it becomes apparent that the majority of research and theories that have been developed tend to place much emphasis at the level of the individual. The greater social context and relationships that have the potential of mediating the stressful experience, are in most cases ignored. This reality is interesting, in that it illuminates a contradiction in dominant stress literature. For example, even though the transactional approach to stress focuses on the dynamic relationship between the individual and the environment, with its emphasis on the process of cognitive appraisal, this theory has provided a one-sided individualistic view of the stress experience. However, simultaneously this theory,, with its emphasis on the role of values and beliefs in influencing the process of cognitive appraisal, possesses a social component. Therefore, beliefs and values are intrinsically related to such evaluation, which as contemporary theory has shown, are often internalised social constructs (Tajfel, 1981; Augoustinous & Walker, 1995). Despite an emphasis on individualism, it becomes apparent that one cannot neglect the presence of collective cognition, especially if attempting to provide a truly holistic account of the phenomenon of stress.

Moving away from purely individualistic and one-dimensional conceptualisations of this phenomenon, Hobfoll (1998) focuses specifically on the social dimension of stress with his emphasis on social stress. Similarly, House (1981) perceives social stress to encompass the role that social, psychological and behavioural factors play in mediating one's experience of the phenomenon of stress, and one's ability to cope with the experience. Psycho-social stress on the other hand, "refers to the socially derived,

conditioned, and situated psychological processes that stimulate any or all of the many manifestations of dysphoric affect falling under the rubric of subjective distress" (Kaplan, 1983:196). This statement highlights the intricate relationship between one's psychological well-being and those social relationships in which one find himself. Hobfoll (1998), on the other hand, looks at stress as a product of the inter-relationship between individuals and the social context in which they reside. From this perspective, stress is perceived as being a result of objective, social circumstances, rather than the result of the sole process of individual perception. Therefore, stress not only emerges from context, but so too do people's perceptions of their experience. In other words, perceptions have a social basis and are collectively shared. In particular, Hobfoll (1998) argues for the recognition of a bi-directional relationship between individuals and society, and the application of this recognition to all human and social phenomena, including stress.

The social basis of individual perceptions

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx, as cited in, McLennan, 1975:40).

Drawing on the philosophy of Marx, Hamber, Masilela and Terre Blanche (2001) attempt to criticise and move beyond mainstream psychological conceptualisations. Traditional psychological theories viewed the self as, "a bounded autonomous entity: it is defined in terms of its internal attributes such as thoughts and emotions, independently of social and contextual factors" (Mkhize, 2004:26). From this perspective, the role of the greater social, cultural and political context in constructing the identity and perspectives of individuals is neglected. McLennan (1975) and Hamber, Masilela and Terre Blanche (2001) drawing on the work of Marx, argue for the social basis of individuals' identities, beliefs, ideas, morals and perspectives. Marx developed the theoretical understanding of 'historical materialism' to refer to the role that economic and social relations play in shaping one's perceptions and understandings (Billington, Hockey & Strawbridge, 1998). What Marx is arguing is that our identities, value systems and means of perceiving the world are shaped and moulded by the social, political, cultural and more importantly, economic context in which we are found. However, for Marx, arguing in relation to capitalist society, it was the economic relations or dimension of society that laid the foundation for all the other aspects of society, legal, political and societal.

These economic relations tend to consist mainly of relations between the capitalists and the working class. Due to the power hiatus between the minority bourgeoisie, who own the 'means of production', and the majority proletariat, the former have an immense hold over the fates of the latter. The latter, working class, holds a pitiful place in society, being forced to sell their labour and themselves for survival. Their position is further exacerbated as a result of the disjuncture between the money value of the product and the compensation labourers receive. A surplus-value (profit) results making the rich richer and the poor poorer, "within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer" (McLennan, 1975:54). What becomes clear in light of the above is the economic conflict between these two classes in society, a conflict between the capitalists who want to milk the proletariat for all their worth, and the working class who aim to sell their labour to the highest bidder (McLennan, 1975).

As unnatural and inhumane as this state of affairs seems, as a result of the powerful force of the ruling class's ideology, these exploited individuals believe that this reality is the only reality for them. In this way, the ideology of the ruling class acts as a disseminator of "false consciousness" (Reiss, 1997:76) creating the illusion that their exploitation and alienation is a natural experience that should not be altered. By creating this illusion, Althusser (1971, as cited in Hamber, et al, 2001) argued that the ruling class was therefore guaranteed the reproduction of a set of material relations consisting of class domination and used these to their advantage. He expanded on Marx's conceptualisation stating that material relations and ideologies dialectically influence one another, through

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the process of "mutual determinism" (Hamber, et al, 2001:58). In this way, the ideologies are produced to cement the 'naturalness' of exploitation, which in turn lays the foundation for the creation of further ideologies (Hamber, et al, 2001).

Similarly, Tajfel (1981) argues that "[A] collection of individual frustrations is a very different matter from the socially shared conception of the origin of common difficulties, perceived as common because of a notion of collective identity based on criteria of categorisation which are again fully derived from their social context" (Tajfel, 1981: 40). From this, it can be argued that social conduct and behaviour are shared not as a result of a shared frustration, but rather from individuals holding the same theory of social causation. Tajfel (1981) argues against purely individualistic conceptualisations of phenomena, while simultaneously arguing against theories that focus solely on the role of the social in influencing perceptions. Rather, Tajfel (1981) argues for a degree of commonality as well as variety in individual's behaviour. Central to his theory is the notion of the social group, which plays an essential role in shaping one's perceptions and means of making sense. Thus, despite individual differences due to one's group membership, individuals will also possess common understandings. These common understandings stem from the belief structures that emanate from the group in which they are a member. In such a way, individuals can maintain their individuality whilst simultaneously being social beings. Tajfel (1981) therefore, like Hobfoll (1991), argues for the dynamic relationship between individuals and the environment, arguing that individuals both create and are created by society.

On a similar note, "[S]ocial constructionism insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (including ourselves). It invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world" (Burr, 1995:3). Durkeim (1997) argues that this perspective "highlights the social, historical, and collective nature of human consciousness" (p.3). One can conclude from this statement that individuals' understandings of the world have a collective component. Hence, the context in which individuals exist lays the foundation for understandings that all individual's hold by virtue of this context. It can therefore be argued that by acknowledging the role society plays in shaping understandings and experiences, one can therefore be more aware and in turn critical of the naturalness and taken-for-granted sources of such understandings and experiences. One should however note that acknowledgement does not guarantee this critical stance. From this perspective, Burr (1995) contends that one's understandings of the world are located in a specific historical and cultural context. For example, with specific reference to the phenomenon of stress, the way in which one comes to understand and make sense of one's experience, is to a large extent determined by these factors.

Burr (1995) also argues that this knowledge is derived from social interactions. Therefore, one's understandings and perspectives arise from the social processes that individuals continually engage in, rather than from objectively observing the environment in which one is found. Finally, from this perspective, the knowledge that one draws on to

make sense of phenomena determines the way in which one behaves in relation to that phenomena.

These theoretical backgrounds therefore provide one with the ability to move beyond individualistic conceptualisations of the stress phenomenon, to those that encompass its social nature and social construction. Thus, contrary to dominant views of individual perceptions of stress, any attempt towards understanding such a phenomenon cannot be actualised through the use of theoretical foundations that centre on individualistic accounts of self; rather, the complex social existence of the individual must be acknowledged and included.

2.7 Stress in the media

"[T]the discourse of stress, or indeed anything else does not arise in a political or ideological vacuum'" (Mulhall, 1996:456, as cited in Dollard, 2003:9).

According to Gorman and McLean, (2003) the pervasive and influential nature of the media in shaping contemporary society's 'world view' is one that needs to be questioned. One such dimension of the media is that of the Print Media. Fairclough (1995:103-104) contends that "A basic assumption is that media texts do not merely 'mirror realities' as is sometimes naïvely assumed; they constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them." This statement highlights the powerful role the Print Media plays in constructing social reality. According to Demers (2002) due to the powerful and influential role the language of the media plays in moulding contemporary social systems, it is essential that one examines these messages so as to gain insight into these systems. It is important that one notes the dialectical relationship between the media and these social systems. Thus, not only does the media shape these systems, but these systems too shape the media, and the messages that the media presents (Demers, 2002). On a similar note, Fairclough (1995) contends that the messages and discourses set up in the Print Media "reflect the general concerns and interests of those in positions of power. If they didn't, they would have a difficult time surviving" (Fairclough, 1995:110). The media can therefore be argued to exist within a complex network of power relationships, relationships that constrain as well as facilitate the messages that the media provides and disperses throughout society.

Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) note the high representation of stress in all forms of media, namely television, newspaper articles, journals and the like. This increase in the representation of stress has caused these authors to ask two main questions. Namely, how has this increase come about, and secondly, what messages are these discourses feeding to individuals - the subject of the stress discourse. They argue that by examining the representation of stress in the media, one will be provided with greater insight into how these discourses shape one's understandings and sense of oneself (Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995). By discourse, it is meant "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 1995:48). This abstract construct therefore provides a particular picture or version of an event or phenomenon, in turn constructing one's perceptions regarding that phenomenon.

Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) contend that the discourses surrounding the phenomenon of stress provide an individualised picture of the stress experience. By this it is meant that individuals are fed messages that their experiences of stress derive from and are dependent on themselves. These messages create two main outcomes. Firstly, on a positive note; by placing the power at the level of the individual, the individual is provided with more control over his or her existence and experiences. In such a way, individuals are provided with a potentially empowering experience. However, the problem with such an individualised discourse is that it removes any responsibility from the greater social context in which the individual is found. For example, articles pertaining to stress and how one should overcome one's stress symptoms, argue for

intervention at the level of the individual. The reader is provided with actions that one can take to overcome one's stress-related problems. However, these actions are never directed towards the greater context. For example, it is never suggested that one should confront and challenge one's superior regarding one's stress related problems. Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995:11) illustrate this problematic conceptualisation in the following passage:

> In this context the language of stress, with its emphasis on individualism, apoliticism, ahistoricism and so on, can be seen as just one further reflection of a pervasive ideology which glosses over the inequalities of power reflected in existing social structures, and lays the blame primarily on the individual, rather than their position in relation to, say, class, race or gender. People believe in the language of stress partly because they have swallowed capitalist ideology, and the current stress discourse articulates fairly well with this ideology.

The power of the discourses created by the popular media, pertaining to the stress phenomenon, arise from the naturalisation of stress in the media, "Stress is depicted as an inevitable part of the natural world, and within the popular media is seen as a particular malaise of those in high power" (Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995:6). From this perspective it can be argued that one's understandings pertaining to stress can not be understood and made sense of at an individual level, rather these understandings stem from the social context, a context that creates discourses or messages that pervade one's consciousness, and in turn naturalise one's experience. From a Marxist perspective, this naturalisation acts as a means of keeping those who create the discourses in power, that is the ruling class. Thus, by creating a stress subject whose stress is mainly a function of

themselves, the greater social context will remain removed from the stress experience and in turn be blameless (Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995). In light of the powerful role of discourses, and in the case of the stress discourse, it is essential that one is critical of the understandings that one assumes to be 'natural'. Stress, with specific regards to organisational stress, can therefore be argued to be no longer understood merely as a health problem, but rather a social and political issue (Levi, 1990, as cited in Dollard, 2003)

2.8 Moving towards a social conceptualisation of the stress experience

To reiterate; when examining literature pertaining to the topics of stress and more specifically organisational stress, it becomes apparent that the majority of research has focussed on individualistic conceptualisations. These understandings emphasise individual perception at the expense of the social context, that is, the role of the social and cultural environment in constructing one's stress experience is neglected. The dominant transactional model, which can be applied to both the individual and organisational context, optimises this trend with its' focus on cognitive appraisal. From this perspective, an experience is only deemed stressful if one perceives the experience as such. By placing emphasis on individual perception, Hobfoll (1998) contends that the social context is de-emphasised and given secondary importance. However, Hobfoll (1998) and Helman (2001) represent a small group of theorists that have moved away from such limited conceptualisations.

These theorists have aimed to examine the bi-directional relationship between the individual and the environment. Thus the individual *is* constructed as both a product of and a contributor to the social environment, which in turn has profound implications for understandings pertaining to the phenomenon of stress. Stress can therefore be deemed a 'socio-psychological' concept. Hobfoll (1998) aims to move beyond simplistic and one dimensional understandings, in which the stress concept has become so isolated from objective events that the social and cultural context seem to play no role in its shaping. Rather, he aims to emphasise the important role the social context plays. Thus, instead of simplifying the stress experience to the level of the individual, Hobfoll (1998) argues for

the commonality of the stress experience. One can therefore argue that the experience of stress, or the perception of an event as stressful, is informed by the social and cultural context, and not completely a result of the individual subject's perceptions.

Despite our seemingly contradictory recognitions that stress is in the eye of the beholder, we well understand the commonsense meaning of stress in our everyday lives. We know when we and others are stressed. Of course, we may have special, deeper understandings of another person's plight if we have experienced the same stress (Haan, 1993:258, as cited in Hobfoll, 1998:30).

2.8 Conclusion

Stress has been argued in literature to be an essential dimension of the modern condition. One can therefore argue that stress plays a pervasive role in society; not only on a social level but also on an organisational level. Even though an increase in the reporting of stress is evident in contemporary society, and much research has been conducted to understand this phenomenon, there is still little consensus regarding its definition. Rather, there are numerous theories and models which attempt to explain this phenomenon. However, what these diverse accounts do share is an extremely individualised conceptualisation of stress.

This review has attempted to critically engage with literature on the topic of stress by examining the role of the social in influencing the stress experience. In such a way, this review has aimed to illustrate the simplicity and limited nature of understandings of stress that neglect to consider the role of the social in the construction and perception of the stress experience. One can therefore argue that a conceptualisation of stress independent of social influence is unable to tap into the true complexity of the stress experience. Rather, this review has attempted to highlight the importance of understanding the bi-directional relationship between the individual and the social, in an attempt to develop a more complex and holistic understanding of the organisational stress phenomenon. In such a way this review plays a crucial role in answering this project's research questions, namely:

1   How does the media construct the stress experience?

    - With specific relation to stress as an organisational phenomenon.

2.   Is this construction in line with existing models/academic understanding, or is it more ambiguous?

3.   How has the reporting of stress changed?

- Has it changed in relation to changes in the broader socio-political context?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research objectives and questions

The overall aim of this research is to explore the social construction of organisational stress through an analysis of the print media. In such a way, this research aims to look beyond dominant conceptualisations of stress, with specific regard to organisational stress, that tends to place emphasis on the stress experience at the level of the individual. These conceptualisations can be argued to be unintentionally problematic in that they do not take into account the role of the social in the construction of stress perceptions. As such, the research objectives are:

1. To establish an understanding of the way in which stress as an organisational phenomenon is socially constructed.

2. More specifically, to illustrate the role the media (print media) plays in shaping this understanding.

3. To examine the way in which the construction of stress has changed with changes in South Africa's socio-political context.

The research questions are:

1. How does the media construct the stress experience?

   - With specific relation to stress as an organisational phenomenon.

2. Is this construction in line with existing models/academic understanding or is it more ambiguous?

3. How has the reporting of stress changed?

   - Has it changed in relation to changes in the broader socio-political context?

3.2 Sample

According to Boyatzis (1998) sampling decisions play an important role in determining the consistency and the reliability of the findings. Boyatzis (1998) contends that "[T]he adequacy and appropriateness of the sample as regards the larger population, whether of individuals, organizations, cultures, or events, is in the hands, heart, and mind of the researcher before collecting information" (p.55). It is therefore essential that careful consideration is taken to ensure that the sample is as representative of the population under study as possible. In order to ensure that this objective was achieved, four newspapers, namely the *Business Day, Sunday Times, Mail and Guardian*, as well as all those newspapers that fall under the company title *Independent Newspapers* were selected. It should be noted that these newspapers were selected through the use of a purposive sampling method (Van Vuuren & Maree, 1999). By this it is meant that the sample was not selected randomly, but rather the newspapers were specifically selected with the aim of ensuring that the readership of the newspapers was, as much as possible, reflective of the South African population.

For the purpose of this study, this selection is appropriate as the selected newspaper groups cover a wide span of sectors, with specific sections designated to business and workplace affairs. Table 1, below, reflects the readership figures of the *Business Day, Sunday Times, Mail and Guardian*, and all those newspapers that fall under the title of the *Independent Newspapers*. The figures were obtained from readership surveys conducted by the relevant newspaper groups (Mail and Guardian, 2002; Sunday Times, 2004; Business Day, 2004; Independent Newspapers, 2004).

	Bus Day %	Sunday Times %	Mail & Guardian %	Independent Newspaper Group				
				The Mercury %	Daily News %	Ind on Sat %	Sunday Tribune %	Post %
GENDER								
Men	75.4	60	54.24	62	56	57	50	47
Women	24.6	40	47.26	38	44	43	50	53
AGE								
16-24	8.7	18	12.23	13	21	18	18	18
25-34	30.1	31	33.93	26	26	27	23	25
35-49	44.1	30	39.45	33	25	28	31	31
50+	17.1	22	17.55	28	28	27	28	26
RACE								
Blacks	35	52	43.2	24	22	19	24	14
Coloureds	10.3	8	7.1	4	6	6	5	1
Indians	3.5	9	3.35	30	48	40	44	80
Whites	51.2	31	45.36	42	24	35	27	5

Table 1: Readership of newspaper groups with regard to gender, age and race

When examining Table 1, it therefore becomes apparent that with regard to gender, in most cases there tends to be an equal percentage of males and females reading the newspapers.. The age group that tends to hold the highest readership across all the newspaper groups is between 35-49, except for the *Daily News*, which attracts the 50-year-and-above age group. Finally, in relation to race, it was found that in the case of the *Business Day, Sunday Times*, and *Mail and Guardian*, that both the black and white race groups constituted the largest portion of the overall readership. The coloured race group on the other hand, constituted the smallest percentage of readers for all the newspaper groups. With regard to all those newspapers that fall under the *Independent Newspaper Group* title, the Indian race group comprised the highest percentage of readers. In light of these findings, one could argue that the newspaper groups selected for this research cover

a broad range of race groups, and thus can be argued to be relatively representative of the South African population.

However, it should be noted that even though the readership of the above four newspapers is indicated to be reflective of the general South African population, the aim of this research is not to examine the way in which organisational stress is represented with specific regard to each newspaper. Therefore, the degree to which the newspapers are representative of the South African population is not essential. Rather, on a more general and encompassing level, the objective of this research is to explore the manner in which organisational stress is represented in the print media, and how this representation has changed over time.

According to Miles and Huberman, (1994) sampling in qualitative research involves two steps. The first involves the establishment of boundaries with the aim of defining "aspects of your case(s) that you can study within the limits of your time and means, that connect directly with your research questions, and that probably will include examples of what you want to study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:27). Thus, in order to focus the sample, only articles found between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 2004 were collected. This specific timeframe was chosen, bearing in mind the third objective of this research project, that is to examine the way in which the construction of stress has changed with changes in South Africa's socio-political context. Robyn-Leigh, not sure what you were trying to get across in this last sentence – please clarify

Secondly, sampling in qualitative research involves the creation of a frame to assist the researcher in exploring, confirming or qualifying the basic constructs or processes that underpin one's study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In such a way, to ensure the most appropriate newspaper articles were accessed, as well as to ensure consistency in the search criteria, the following search terms were utilised:

- "occupational stress"

- "organisational stress"

- "stress + work"

- "stress + workplace"

By utilising these search terms a sample of 267 newspaper articles was gathered. However, when commencing the analysis stage of the project, it became apparent that only 139 articles were relevant for the objective of this research.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The most important ethical issue pertaining to this research was obtaining informed consent from all the relevant newspaper groups to access their archives, as well as to use their stress-related newspaper articles in this research project. It should be noted that in all cases the researcher telephonically obtained the required permission, and was hereby able to gather the relevant data. Furthermore, the newspaper groups were informed of the nature of the research, as well as its aims and objectives. In such a way they were provided with information that would facilitate an understanding of this research. With regard to issues of anonymity all the newspaper groups provided the researcher with consent to disclose their names within the results and discussions sections of this research. However, only the names of the newspaper group, the year of publication, and the title of the article will be provided in this research. It was also communicated to the newspapers that they were free to withdraw from participation at any stage of the research process. Finally, on completion of the research, each newspaper will receive a copy of this research.

3.4 Description of the sample

For the purpose of this research four newspaper groups were selected namely the *Mail and Guardian; Sunday Times; Business Day* and those newspapers that fall under the title the *Independent Newspaper Group*.

The *Mail and Guardian* was originally known as the *Weekly Mail* and was launched in early 1985 by a group of journalists who had been retrenched after the closure of two of South Africa's leading liberal newspapers: the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express*. During the eighties, the *Weekly Mail* built up an international reputation as an apartheid critic, leading to a number of clashes with the government that culminated in the paper's suspension in 1988. In 1991, the *Weekly Mail*, together with *The Guardian* in London, broke the "Inkathagate" scandal which described how police funds were being secretly channeled to Inkatha to block the ANC. This scandal in turn facilitated the commencement of a closer relationship between the *Weekly Mail* and *The Guardian*, resulting in the formation of the presently known *Mail and Guardian*. The newspaper has demonstrated it is capable of being no less critical of the new dispensation than the old, without deviating from its former humanist philosophy. The paper is now well known for its investigative reporting, particularly into corruption (www.mg.co.za).

Both the *Sunday Times* and the *Business Day* are national newspapers. As depicted by the name, the *Sunday Times* is a Sunday newspaper, providing the reader with developments taking place in South Africa and the rest of the world. This newspaper includes sections such as the news, sport, business, entertainment, education, motoring and the like. This

newspaper covers and provides the reader with information pertaining to all aspects of South African society, as well as providing the reader with information pertaining to international events and developments (www.sundaytimes.co.za). The *Business Day*, on the other hand, is a newspaper whose main focus is on business issues and the South African economy. The newspaper also has sections dedicated to economy and business, companies, global developments, the markets, as well as sport, mining and personal finances. This newspaper can therefore be argued to provide the reader with an array of information pertaining to South African society, simultaneously keeping its focus on business (www.businessday.co.za).

The *Independent Newspaper Group* is located within the KwaZulu-Natal province, and thus provides local readers with insight into local, national and global issues. For the purpose of this research, the newspapers that became relevant under this title include the *Mercury*, the *Daily News*, the *Sunday Tribune*, the *Independent on Saturday*, as well as the *Post*. "The Mercury is an aspirational newspaper positioned to appeal to decision-makers and achievers" (Independent Newspapers, 2004:3). According to the Editor of the *Mercury*, Canning, (2005) this newspaper has played an integral role in KwaZulu-Natal for the past 150 years. The newspaper provides up-to-date information pertaining to global, local and business developments (Canning, 2005). The *Daily News* is another newspaper group located in KwaZulu-Natal. According to the Editor of the *Daily News*, Pather (2005), this newspaper concentrates on news that is both local and topical. Besides focusing on news issues, the paper also contains an entertainment section. It should be noted that the *Daily News* aims to be connected to its community, raising and presenting issues that reflect this objective (Pather, 2005).

The *Sunday Tribune* is a weekly newspaper, also located in KwaZulu-Natal and has the biggest readership of any newspaper in the Durban metropolis (Independent Newspapers, 2004). Dunn (2005), the acting Editor of the *Sunday Tribune*, contends that this newspaper aims to provide its readers with current information regarding South Africa and the global context, as well as information specific and relevant to the people of KwaZulu-Natal (Dunn, 2005). It should be noted that this newspaper also provides its readers with an opportunity and platform to speak for themselves (Independent Newspapers, 2004). The *Independent on Saturday* is a weekend newspaper that provides readers with an array of current information pertaining to news, sports and entertainment (Independent Newspapers, 2004). Finally, the *Post* provides a comprehensive package of news, perspectives and entertainment targeted specifically at the Indian race group (Ramguthee, 2005). In such a way, this newspaper is able to support the interests of the Indian community, whilst providing their readers with insight into their roots, religions and cultures (Independent Newspapers, 2004).

3.5 Procedure

The first step in the research process involved a decision regarding which newspapers would be selected for analysis. Due to time constraints and the limited nature of this research project, as well as the extensive amount of newspaper articles on the topic of stress, the Research Supervisor and I decided that four newspaper groups would be sufficient to provide valuable insight into the topic under exploration. Deciding on which particular newspapers would be drawn upon, was facilitated by conducting research on the readerships of the four selected newspapers, namely the *Business Day, Sunday Times, Mail and Guardian,* as well as the *Independent Newspaper Group.* Thus, even though the aim of the research is not to explore how each newspaper independently conceptualises the phenomenon of organisational stress, by conducting the required research it became apparent that on the whole, the selected newspapers' readerships are representative of the South African population.

Once the newspapers were decided upon, the next step involved accessing the necessary newspaper library archives. In all cases, the newspapers were telephonically contacted, the aims and objectives of the research were provided, and permission to access the archives was granted. One difficulty became apparent at this initial stage of the research process with regard to finances. Even though my Research Supervisor wrote a letter on my behalf pertaining to the research, none of the newspaper groups agreed on free access to the archives. Another financial-related problem arose with regard to the location of the *Business Day* and *Sunday Times*' newspaper library archives. Due to the archives being situated in Johnnic Communications in Johannesburg, I was expected to travel to

Johannesburg. However, in the case of the *Independent Newspaper Group*, as well as the *Mail and Guardian*, accessing the newspaper library archives was far easier. Due to the Independent Newspaper's archive being situated in Durban, as well as the newspaper articles for the *Mail and Guardian* being located on the internet, the accessing of these newspaper articles was far less stressful and time consuming.

With regard to accessing the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper articles, all that I was required to do was log onto the *Mail and Guardian* website, www.mg.co.za, and select the appropriate newspaper articles. It should be noted that on the whole, the actual process of collecting the newspapers ran smoothly. However, the disadvantage of the decided-upon sample was its time-consuming nature. In the case of the *Business Day* and *Sunday Times*, it took me two days to collect all the relevant newspaper articles. Even though the accessing of the *Mail and Guardian*, and those newspapers that fall under the *Independent Newspaper Group* was far more convenient in certain respects, the time taken to go through all the articles and to select all the appropriate ones, was also an extremely lengthy process. In order to ensure that the most relevant newspaper articles were selected, I had to constantly monitor my concentration levels throughout the data collection process.

Besides the time consuming nature of the data collection process, the process of having to organise, read, select and transform the articles into Word documents was even more time consuming. At times, I became frustrated with the process, and had to pause so as to prevent the neglect or the overlooking of relevant and important newspaper articles. In

total, as previously mentioned, 267 newspaper articles were collected and read through; however only 139 became relevant for the purpose of this research. The 139 articles were then transformed into Word documents, separated into the four newspaper groups, and finally ordered in ascending order of date.

The next step involved the qualitative analysis of the articles. In such a way, the articles were analysed through the process of 'theory-led' and 'inductive thematic analysis' (Hayes, 2000). The aim of this analysis was to examine the extent to which the newspaper articles reflected popular conceptualisations of organisational stress, as well as allowing for the emergence of new themes and conceptualisations.

3.6 Data Analysis

It was decided for the purpose of this qualitative study, that thematic analysis of the data would be most appropriate. This form of analysis involves the sorting or 'encoding' of information into themes (Hayes, 2000; Boyatzis, 1998). A theme as argued by Boyatzis (1998:vii) "is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon." According to Hayes (2000), themes can be developed in two ways. Firstly, 'theory-led' thematic analysis includes the use of predetermined themes (which are formed by drawing on already existing literature around the topic). 'Inductive' thematic analysis on the other hand, includes emergent themes (those that are newly generated during the course of data collection) (Hayes, 2000). For the purpose of this research, both forms of analysis were drawn upon.

Due to the extensive amount of research already conducted at the level of the individual, it was possible to draw up a set of predetermined themes. The identification of such themes within the data will therefore signify accuracy in terms of the current understanding of stress. However, a central aim of this project was to challenge certain aspects of this understanding, and so in many ways it hinged on the presence of emergent themes. Included hereunder is a list of those predetermined themes developed by myself with the aim of structuring the research process:

- Stress at the level of the individual
- Stress at the level of the organisation

- Conceptualisations of stress either as a stimulus, response or transaction

- Conceptualisations of stress in line with organisational theories of stress

- Stress as an increasing problem within contemporary society, and more specifically in contemporary organisations; The Age of Stress

- Stress as a result of the changing organisational and social environment

- The costs versus the benefits of stress

- How the representation of stress has changed over time, from 1994 to 2004

According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a "way of seeing" (p. 1). By this it is meant that thematic analysis is a subjective process, and in such a way, often what one individual sees through the process of thematic analysis is not observed by others. Due to the subjective nature of this form of analysis it is essential that as a researcher one practices reflexivity. Reflexivity, as argued by Mauthner and Doucet (1998:121) "means reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents." In attempting to practice reflexivity as a qualitative researcher, it can be argued that it would be futile to attempt to conduct research in a totally neutral manner. As a researcher, it should therefore be acknowledged that by analysing and interpreting the data through a thematic, as well as a critical and social constructionist lens, the manner in which I interpreted the data was influenced. Due to the subjective nature of the thematic analysis process, as well as the particular objectives that provide the foundation of my research, as a researcher I am vigilant for the following:

- Whether the articles provide accounts of stress and organisational stress as depicted in the literature

- Whether the articles provide a more holistic account of the organisational stress experience, in turn moving beyond the individualised accounts most often presented in the literature

- Whether the accounts provide a critical perspective of the manner in which organisational stress has been constructed

In light of the above, it can thus be argued that the manner in which the data was analysed was informed by a particular framework and therefore, to ensure that my analysis was as accurate as possible, I took the following steps:

Firstly, I was vigilant for those theory-led themes that had previously been developed before the initial analysis took place, as well as being constantly critical of the underlying meanings presented by the data. I was most importantly aware that this lens could prevent me from acknowledging data that was relevant and would be helpful in this research. I therefore attempted to not only analyse the data from the aforementioned perspective, but was also vigilant for any themes and insight that could provide me with a new perspective on my research.

Stages of thematic analysis

The first stage involved the development of initial themes based on current and dominant understanding of stress, and those topics related to this project. The aim of these 'predetermined' themes was to guide and focus the initial reading and analysis of the newspaper articles. In such a way, the analysis "was driven by pre-existing theory, reflecting the theoretical context of the research." (Hayes, 1997). The next step involved the preparation of the data for analysis. Due to the nature of the data collected, that is newspaper articles, the main tasks involved first systematically organising the articles according to year of publication, in ascending order from 1994 to 2004. The second task involved scanning and transforming the newspaper articles into Word documents. In this case, sections of the articles that were relevant to this research project were selected and transformed into Word documents.

Once the data had been transformed and organised chronologically for each separate newspaper, an initial thematic analysis of the data was undertaken. In this case, I was guided by the pre-determined themes, however I was simultaneously attentive to the occurrence of emerging themes. According to Boyatzis, (1998) it is essential when commencing the process of thematic analysis that as a researcher one is able to effectively 'sense themes'. By this it is meant that even though one may have developed a set of pre-determined themes, it is important that one is open to all information. In such a way, as a researcher the potential of disregarding seemingly irrelevant information may be minimised. In order to assist in the analysis, different colours were designated to the pre-determined and emerging, themes (Appendix A). It

should be noted that at this stage no concrete themes had yet been decided upon, but, information that appeared to be relevant to the research was noted (Hayes, 2000). This stage included the sorting of these various bits of data and information into what Hayes (2000) defines as a 'proto-theme.' By sorting the information in a coherent manner, initial themes began to emerge.

From this initial analysis, three main themes emerged, namely

1. Individual conceptualisations of stress

2. Social/Organisational conceptualisations of stress

3. Changing representations of stress

With these three themes in mind, each newspaper article was re-read to see if it contained anything which was relevant to the theme which that was being explored. It should be noted that this is an important aspect of the research process as individual perception is selective, and thus it is easy to overlook information. From this initial general analysis, further related themes became apparent. However, what emerged when analysing the newspaper articles was a theme that was not initially accounted for. By being reflective and vigilant as a researcher, I became aware of this theme and therefore decided to include it. The theme, 'A critical stance – a move away from the norm' provided a summary of newspaper articles that were critical of the dominant conceptualisations of the organisational stress phenomenon and thus became a vital dimension of my research. I therefore decided to remove the third predetermined theme to include the more critical theme. *Figure 4* (page 79) provides an outline of these general themes, their related themes, and a critical analysis of the themes.

Finally, due to the attention taken when analysing the articles and the process of selecting the above themes, it can be argued that the research appears to have a high degree of face validity. According to Anastasi (1988:144) "Face validity pertains to whether the test "looks valid" to the examinees who take it, the administrative personnel who decide on its use, and other technically untrained observers." By this it is meant that if a test, or in this case research, appears on the surface, or at face value, to test what it supposed to be testing, then the test or research can be deemed to be valid. In light of this, it can be argued that this research appears to be researching what it aims to be exploring - the social construction of the organisational phenomenon of stress, and thus can be argued to be valid. However, as previously noted, qualitative analysis is a subjective process, and as a researcher I am acknowledging that a degree of error is possible.

Obstacles

Boyatzis (1998) contends that three major obstacles to thematic analysis exist; namely projection, sampling, as well as mood and style. Projection, with regard to the research process, can be defined as the process which involves "'reading into' or 'attributing to' another person something that is your own characteristic, emotion value and such" (Boyatzis, 1998:13). In this case, the subject is not a person, but rather a series of newspaper articles. This tendency to project one's own theory onto the subject tends to transpire with ambiguous qualitative information, and occurs when the researcher is extremely committed to his or her own theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under question. In order to minimise the occurrence of projection, it is essential that as a researcher one develops an explicit code or set of themes to guide one's research; that one applies these themes consistently; and finally, that one remains familiar with the raw data when developing the themes.

Another obstacle is that of sampling. According to Boyatzis (1998:15) "When you are using thematic analysis with any form of qualitative analysis, the law of "garbage in, garbage out" applies." By this it is meant that the quality of one's analysis is dependent on the quality of one's sample. In order to ensure that the sample is representative and is as free from contamination as possible, Boyatzis (1998) contends that the researcher should review and clarify her unit of analysis, or what one is observing. One should also take steps to select the most appropriate sampling method, as well as develop a guide for information collection. It can therefore be argued that by taking steps to develop a sound research design, good qualitative research will result.

Finally, issues pertaining to mood and style represent the last of the three obstacles to effective thematic analysis. Boyatzis (1998) argues that qualitative research is a subjective process. Due to its subjective nature, many factors such as distractions, frustration, loss of concentration and the like can negatively impact the research process. Besides, the researcher's mood and research style will also affect their ability to analyse effectively. For example, one's tolerance or lack of tolerance of ambiguity will affect the degree of openness one has towards one's data. In order to lessen or prevent errors related to one's mood and style as a researcher, one should be rested, develop a clear set of themes, have the self-control to stop analysing when one is exhausted, as well as suspend one's analytic framework and 'go with' the raw data (Boyatzis, 1998).

Table 4: Diagram representing thematic analysis overview

Critical Analysis o

THEME 1
Individualistic conceptualisations of stress

1. 1 Stress as a response

1.2 Stress as a stimulus

1.3 Stress as a transaction

1.4 Costs vs. Benefits of Stress

Stress is constructed a
- Out there- indepe individual
- Inevitable
- Uncontrollable
- The problem of s individual one – off context
- Homogenisation experience - simp
- The pathologisati

1.5 The homogenisation of the stress experience

1.6 Change at the level of the individual

THEME 2
Social/Organisational Conceptualisations of stress

2.1 Organisational Theories of stress

2.2 The Age of Stress

2.3 Increasing Rates of Stress

2.4 The changing Org & Social context

Stress is constructed a
- A result of the or
- A result of chang social/org context
- Increasing and the inevitable
- The pathologisati
- The problem of st organisational on beyond individua

2.5 Cost vs. benefits of stress

2.6 Change at the level of the organisation

2.7 Stress as inevitable & desired

2.8 Stress as problematic

2.9 The justification of stress

THEME 3
A critical stance – a move away from the norm

The organisational str experience and its sou questioned and critical
- Provides a critical of the first two the

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In order to provide a rich account of the qualitative data collected, the analysis and discussion sections of this project have been combined. In such a way, the findings will be presented in conjunction with literature on this topic. This literature will act as a means of providing the reader with greater insight into the findings, and may even at times be refuted by the research findings. It should be noted that the discussion will be informed by the objectives of the research project: that is to establish an understanding of the way in which stress as an organisational phenomenon is socially constructed, to illustrate the role of the Print Media in shaping this understanding, and finally, to examine the way in which the construction of stress has altered with changes in South Africa's socio-political context

In order to make sense of the data, this discussion is divided into three main sections derived from the three dominant and encompassing themes that arose through the process of thematic analysis, namely:

1. Individualistic Conceptualisations of Stress

2. Organisational/Social Conceptualisations of Stress

3. A critical stance – a move away from the norm

It should be noted that within these overarching themes, sub-themes exist, and will be organised for each theme in relation to the thematic categories of pre-determined and emergent themes. Finally, due to the large amount of data collected, only sections of the newspaper articles that I feel are most appropriate and that contribute the most to

establishing the objectives of this research will be drawn upon. In all cases, an attempt

will be made to select examples from all four newspaper groups that were accessed

4. 2 Individualistic Conceptualisations of Stress

When reading literature on the topic of stress and analysing the newspaper articles, one of the dominant themes that became apparent was the construction of the stress experience at the level of the individual. The stress experience tended to be simplified to the level of either a stimulus or response, in which the individual was constructed as a victim of stress. For example, an article taken from the Sunday Times provided a very passive description of the individuals who have to 'suffer' the consequences of working too hard. "An unrelenting work pattern leads to chronic high blood pressure which can cause a sudden fatal stroke or heart attack" (Sunday Times, 1997, Stressed Out? It Can Cost You Your Life). Another example of this simplistic and individualistic understanding of stress was taken from The Post, a newspaper under the title Independent Newspapers, "Stress occurs when a person responds to everyday activities in a tense manner. This tense response provokes a flood of adrenalin-related hormones to invade the bodily tissues including the vital organs" (Post, 1995, Overcoming Stress Will Improve The Quality Of Your Life).

The construction of the individual as a victim is powerfully depicted in an article taken from the Sunday Times. "'Stress stalks its victims in the kindergarten, the school and in the home,'" he says 'Neither age, occupation, or gender, provides any immunity'" (Sunday Times, 1997, Stressed Out? It Can Cost You Your Life). In such a way, one could argue that organisational stress, with specific regard to the newspaper articles, is constructed as something out there, independent of the individual and thus inevitable and uncontrollable. This finding is consistent with the dominant conceptualisations of stress

found in the literature (Corlett & Richardson, 1981; De Wolff & Winnubst, 1987; Lyon, 2000; Selye, 1991; Singer & Davidson, 1991). Hobfoll (1998) critically contends that by limiting understandings of stress to the level of the individual, independent of the role of the social, an extremely 'mechanistic', 'individualistic' and 'internal' understanding of this phenomenon has resulted. When examining literature on the role of the Print Media in the construction of individual perceptions, Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) contend that these individualistic conceptualisations promote and perpetuate the naturalisation and inevitability of the stress experience.

Similarly, one could critically argue that by simplifying the stress experience in such a way and making it the responsibility of the individual, the role of the social and organisational context of the stress experience is negated. One could further argue that the negation of the responsibility of the organisation in determining and/or influencing the stress experience serves the purpose of the organisation, and on a more general level, society as a whole. By negating their role in the stress process, the focus remains at the level of the individual, and thus the cause and management of the stress experience remains solely the responsibility of the individual. Therefore, it is not the organisation or society, but the individual who is the problem and needs to change and adapt to suit the organisational and social context. This finding is congruent with the majority of accounts of stress found in the literature on the topic, which provide an extremely individualised and homogenised understanding of the stress experience.

This conceptualisation is problematic in two ways. Firstly, as argued by Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) this conceptualisation feeds individuals messages that their experiences of stress derive from and are dependent on themselves (unclear here – is the message dependent upon itself, or the experience of stress?). These messages create two main outcomes. Firstly, on a positive note, by placing the power at the level of the individual, the individual is provided with more control over his or her existence and experiences (Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995). It should be noted though, that in many instances the manner in which the articles are written, that is in an accusatory fashion, render the individual as powerless to control this thing called stress. For example an article taken from the Mail and Guardian argued that "Stress Can Kill You" (1999, Heralding The New Age). The problem with such an individualised discourse is that it removes any responsibility from the greater social context in which the individual is found. That is, it is the individual who is required to change, and is not provided with any information on how to manage the problem (Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995).

The majority of the newspaper articles provided readers with advice on how to manage and deal with stress; for example, an article found in the Sunday Times stated that one must "'Recognise the danger signals of stress. Discuss them fully with your general practitioner. Listen to his advice and rely on the help of family and friends so that you can find a solution,' advises Serebro" (Sunday Times, 1997, Stressed Out? It Can Cost You Your Life). However, on a more critical note, this advice tended to be of a more generalised and insensitive nature. For example, an article found in the

Sunday Times argued that one must "Adapt or die" (Sunday Tribune, 1998, Stressed? Learn To Manage Your Life!).

On the other hand, by providing a homogenised understanding, the complexity and the diversity of the stress experience is neglected. The individual's unique experiences of stress are ignored, and are replaced by gross generalisations and assumptions. On an important note, one needs to critically question whose objectives this homogenisation serves. As mentioned in literature about the role of the media in constructing perceptions of stress, the media is argued to be found within a complex network of power relations. According to Fairclough (1995), in order to ensure the survival of the media, in this case the Print Media, the articles written and the messages provided tend to reflect the interests of those who are in power. These power relationships can therefore be argued to constrain, as well as facilitate, what information the media provides and disperses throughout society. Firstly, it means that all individuals can be treated (and exploited) equally. Hence, individuals are viewed simply as a means of production rather than as a unique human being (Reiss, 1997). Secondly, it drives a very particular industry – if all people experience stress equally, they can be treated in the same way; this is the fundamental assumption of all the self-help books that examine stress.

4.2.1 Stress as a Response (theory-led)

One dominant conceptualisation of the stress experience is that of stress as a response. Selye's response-based 'physiological' account of stress is one which defines stress as the "*non-specific* (that is, common) *result of any demand upon the body,* be the effect mental or somatic" (p.22). It should be noted that by 'non-specific', it is meant that every stressor produces a specific response, while also producing non-specific responses common to all stressors (Singer & Davidson, 1991). This account places much emphasis on the dependent variable - the response, regardless of the stressor, that elicits the response (Selye, as cited in Helman, 2001, De Wolff & Winnubst, 1987, Lyon, 2000). From this perspective, stress is therefore an outcome of an experience that has a physiological effect on the body. In this way, organisms merely automatically react to environmental stimuli.

When examining the newspaper articles it became apparent that the majority of the accounts were in line with this dominant response-based conceptualisation of stress. Stress tended to be understood and constructed as the physiological response to certain environmental stimuli. An extract taken from an article in the Sunday Times provided an extremely physiological understanding of the stress response "*The Complete South African Health Guide* describes stress as a state of arousal in which psychological, physiological and biochemical changes are provoked by specific stressors" (Sunday Times, 1999, Stress Comes Under Spotlight). A large majority of the articles, across all the newspaper groups, also provided explanations of the experience from the perspective of the one-dimensional stress response. For example, "Stress occurs when a person responds

to everyday activities in a tense manner. This tense response provokes a flood of adrenalin-related hormones to invade the bodily tissues including the vital organs (Post, 1995, Overcoming Stress Will Improve The Quality Of Your Life). Some articles drew on the theory of Selye to conceptualise the stress experience "Selye's hypothesis is now the accepted view: that when coping with stress the body responds by eased production of certain hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol, which affect heart rate, blood pressure and metabolism. However, at a certain level and under continued exposure to stress, these physiological affect a person's ability to cope and possibly cause damage to vital organs. In some susceptible individuals, this may trigger disease" (Sunday Times, 1995, That Illness May Be Incubating At The Office). A definition of stress was found in an article in the Mercury which again reinforced this response-based understanding of the stress experience: "Stress can broadly be defined as people's psychological, behavioural and physiological reactions when they attempt to adapt to internal and external pressures and demands they can not cope with" (The Mercury, 1996, It's Modern, It's Hi-Tech, It's Stressful).

When examining this conceptualisation of the stress experience, a seemingly one-dimensional view of stress becomes apparent. Therefore, this uni-directional understanding of the stress experience tends to neglect the complexity of the stress experience. By conceptualising the relationship between the individual and the environment (in this case the organisation) as uni-directional, an extremely mechanistic account of the stress process is provided. In such a way, the individual is constructed as a passive entity who merely responds to environmental and organisational pressures.

Mason (1971, as cited in Everly, 1989) argues that this theory has been criticised for its 'global generality' as well as for its lack of sensitivity towards the specificity of the stress response process. For example, one cannot assume that the same event will result in the same experience for all individuals. That is, no two individuals will respond in the exact same way to an event. An article found in the Business Day acknowledged this individuality by stating that "reactions to the pressures are different for every individual. Reactions to stress are likely to involve palpitations, shallow or fast breathing, tingling in the limbs, sweating, tension in the shoulders or back, dizziness and dryness in the throat (Business Day, 2001, There Is Skill Involved In Thriving Under Pressure). However, by listing examples of physiological responses, the account this article provides still remains extremely simplistic.

Rather, one event has the possibility of being interpreted in many ways and therefore might not even be experienced as stressful by some individuals. Similarly, literature contends that this conceptualisation has been criticised for focussing extensively on the physiological dimensions of stress, while ignoring psychological resources, coping strategies as well as the meanings individuals attach to the experience, which determine whether the occurrence is perceived negatively or positively (Helman, 2001). However, many of the articles do appear to take cognisance of the range of responses that are available, thus affirming existing criticisms. It can therefore be argued that due to a large portion of the newspaper articles providing a response-based conceptualisation of stress experience, two main implications arise: that a universal view of the stress response is

provided, and as a result there is a diversity of possible responses, and the complexity of

the stress experience is ignored and unacknowledged.

4.2.2 Stress as a Stimulus (theory-led)

Another dominant conceptualisation of the stress experience found in the literature on the topic, is that of stress as a stimulus. Stimulus-based models tend to emphasise the differing types of environmental, physical, and psychological stressors that have the potential of inducing the stress response. Unlike response-based theories, "Stress is that which happens to the man, not that which happens in him, it is a set of causes not a set of symptoms" (Corlett & Richardson, 1981:97). In such a way, stress can be defined in relation to those events to which an individual responds (Lyon, 2000). Subsequently, stress is transformed into an independent variable, unlike in the case of response-based theories, a force or factor external to the individual that results in changes in the individual (Lyon, 2000).

When analysing the newspaper articles, it became obvious that organisational stress tends to be predominantly conceptualised in this manner. The newspaper articles presented and conceptualised organisational stress as a stimulus; that is, the stress experience tended to be constructed as arising from certain stimuli within the organisational and social environment. For example, an article taken from the Mail and Guardian listed examples of stimuli in the organisational context that provide a source of stress to individuals "The major stress problems in the workplace - heavy workloads, inflexible hours, job insecurity and the problems of balancing work and home are alleged to take a terrible toll (Mail and Guardian, 1998, Learning To Love Stress). With regard to the newspaper articles, stress was also argued to arise from work itself, "Work is the major cause of stress, a survey of more than 5 000 office workers in 16 countries has shown" (Sunday

Times, 1994, Job Stress A Growing Problem Worldwide); and "Work is a dangerous business. Every year, millions of people suffer ill health that is directly caused by, or made worse by, their jobs (Mail and Guardian, 1996, Why Working Is Bad For Your Health). Stress was also argued to arise from one's inability to adapt to changes in the social and organisational contexts "Stress is caused by an initial inability to adapt to life events such as promotion, marriage, birth and divorce (Natal Witness, 1994, Stress Is A Big Problem For Business). Besides these conceptualisations, some articles provided detailed stimulus-based accounts of the stress experience "Stress is considered to be anything that stimulates you and increases your alertness. Life without stimuli would be incredibly dull and boring. Life with too much stimuli becomes unpleasant and tiring, and may ultimately damage your health and well-being" (Post, 1998, Don't Let Stress Overcome You) and "A stressor is any force, change or event that calls upon a person's coping skills (Sunday Times, 1999, Stress Comes Under Spotlight).

On a more critical note, one could argue that this conceptualisation of stress is extremely simplistic. As noted in literature, this theory does not account for the wide range of responses that may become apparent in the stress experience, and that may differ according to the intensity and familiarity of the stressor (Lyon, 2000). Secondly, by normalising life changes and universalising their effects on individuals, the complexity of the stress experience is lost. As made apparent when analysing the newspaper articles, the stress experience tends to conceptualised on a simplistic level, that is, stress is constructed as merely a result of certain stimuli. In such a way the complexity of the stress experience and the individual's unique response to the stimulus is neglected (Lyon, 2000). Another major problem arising from this conceptualisation of stress, as

supported by literature, is the construction of the individual as a passive entity in the elicitation of the stress response (Fontana, 1989). By constructing stress as resulting from certain stimulus, such as one's work, working conditions and the like, the active role of the individual is neglected. One could further argue that this portrayal of the individual as passive serves to legitimise and normalise the stress experience. Therefore, if stress is constructed as beyond the control of the individual, it in turn becomes unstoppable and justifiable. And if organisational stress is unstoppable and justifiable it remains protected from criticism. This conceptualisation thus serves to legitimate the organisational stress experience, in turn preventing the organisational and social context from being questioned and from having to change.

4.2.3 Stress as a transaction (theory-led)

One other dominant conceptualisation or theory of stress at the level of the individual is the transactional theory of stress. This model is unlike the above response and stimulus accounts with its focus on the dynamic relationship between the individual and their environment (Hart & Cooper, 2001). Thus instead of viewing the individual as a passive recipient, by focussing on the relationship between the stimulus, response and intervening variables, the individual is transformed into an agent within the complex network of the stress experience (De Wolff & Winnubst, 1987). Lazarus' cognitive transactional model centres on the individual and more specifically on his/her perception of a potential stressor. Thus, the model places strong emphasis on the individual as having a degree of control over the stress experience (Monat and Lazarus, 1991). Closely tied to individual control is the idea of perception or appraisal. In this case, how an individual perceives a potential stressor ultimately determines whether stress is experienced (Monat and Lazarus, 1991). Lazarus (1967, as cited in Lyon, 2000) contends that "stress does not exist in the 'event' but rather is a result of a transaction between a person and his or her environment" (p.9). Therefore, a stressor can be understood as any event in the environment that has the potential of being a threat. By potential, it is meant that no event can be independently perceived as a stressor, and through the cognitive process of appraisal the stimulus is defined as either threatening or non-threatening

Besides the dominant conceptualisations of organisational stress in the newspapers being of a uni-directional and simplistic nature, there were a few articles that conceptualised stress in line with the transactional account of stress. There were

approximately 30 articles that constructed stress as a response; approximately 50 articles that constructed stress as a stimulus; and only 5 that accounted for the role of perception in the stress experience. It should be noted that there were no articles in the Mail and Guardian or Business Day that moved beyond the uni-directional relationship between stress and the individual. Those articles that did however argue for a more complex understanding of the stress experience, provide an example of a move away from the norm. Thus, instead of stress being constructed as a mere response or stimulus, these conceptualisations took into account and acknowledged the role of perception in the stress experience. For example, an article taken from the Natal Witness argued that "At the root of stress is a person's perception of a situation. It is this which determines a person's ability to adapt" (Natal Witness, 1994, Stress Is A Big Problem For Business). Another article found in the Sunday Times noted that "Stress is harmful only if the events or situations causing it are perceived as burdensome and if the body cannot adapt to the demands made upon it" (Sunday Times, 1999, Stress Comes Under Spotlight).

However, on a more critical note, even though this theory of stress has been argued to move beyond the uni-directional stimulus and response accounts of stress, it too has been criticised for placing emphasis on the role of cognitive appraisal, at the exclusion of the role of the social in the influencing of this appraisal process. According to Hobfoll, (1998) by excluding the role of the social in influencing the appraisal process, the theory has been unable to tap into the true complexity of the stress experience. Thus, even though a few accounts exist in the newspapers that focus on the process of perception in the stress experience, by excluding the origin of these perceptions, the stress experience is

again constructed as an individual experience, independent of social influence. However, by arguing for the role of individual perception in determining the stress experience, these accounts argue against understandings of stress as homogenous. Hence, stress is no longer understood as a generalised response or stimulus, but rather as a unique experience. This move away from the norm provides evidence for a more complex understanding of the stress experience.

4.2.4 Costs vs. Benefits of Stress (theory-led)

When examining literature on the topic of stress, with specific regard to organisational stress, a great deal of focus surrounds the costs and benefits of stress at both the level of the individual and the organisation. According to Hart and Cooper (2001), and Goh and Oei (1999), occupational stress is an increasing problem that not only negatively affects individual employees, but has detrimental implications for organisations as a whole. These negative implications, as illustrated in the literature, include low motivation and morale, high turnover, low job satisfaction, accidents, decrease in performance, conflicts and the like (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005:160). Besides the negative effect of stress on the behaviour of individuals, stress also has negative physiological and psychological implications. For example, research has shown that if the effects of negative stimuli or events are prolonged or are of a high intensity, negative consequences in the form of high blood pressure will result. This form of stress is known as distress, which is harmful or disease-producing stress (Drafke & Kossen, 2002; Greenberg, 1996; Patel, 1989). However, it should be noted that stress is not always harmful and in fact, individuals require a certain level of stress to survive. This form of stress is the opposite of distress, and is known as eustress, or beneficial and necessary stress (Drafke & Kossen 2002).

When analysing the newspaper articles in line with this theme, it became apparent that the majority of articles noted and explained both the costs and benefits of organisational stress at the level of the individual. Some articles explained how stress is an important and necessary factor for effective functioning: "Stress is healthy. As a basic reaction to challenges – of the near-death or looming deadline variety – it is a prime motivator.

Responding to it is a natural instinct enabling people to give their best, survive and flourish (Business Day, 2001, There Is Skill Involved In Thriving Under Pressure). Besides noting the importance of stress, a large percentage of the articles also noted the detrimental physiological and psychological effects of long term stress: "Unhealthy stress can have far-reaching consequences psychologically and physically, if not dealt with (The Mercury, 1996, It's Modern, It's Hi-Tech, It's Stressful); "The Professor described how stress causes a constant level of arousal, an overloaded immune system and increases potential for mental or physical breakdown (The Daily News, 1996, Workaholics) and "Stress Can Kill You" (Mail and Guardian, 1999, Heralding the New Age).

In addition to highlighting the positive and negative effects of stress at the level of the individual, some articles explained the transition from stress as a positive and integral dimension, to stress as detrimental and hazardous to the human condition. As noted in an article taken from the Business Day, stress "is regarded as an integral part of life and is essential for personal growth and development... However, the spokesman says when stress becomes a hindrance and restricts normal living and peace of mind, it is considered severe" (Business Day, 1994, Effective Management Of Stress). Another article taken from the Sunday Times also presented this particular understanding of the effects of stress: "Everyday stress, which all individuals' experience, can be beneficial and healthy. It is only when stress levels become excessive that problems set in" (Sunday Times, 1995, South Africans Up There With The Shakiest In High-Stress Stakes).

As mentioned in literature on the topic of stress, and more specifically organisational stress, the stress experience has both costs and benefits for the individual. When analysing the newspaper articles, it became evident that literature on this topic is congruent with the findings. However, from a critical perspective, one needs to question the implications of these findings on one's understandings of the stress experience. For example, one could argue that by highlighting the benefits of stress and arguing that it is a necessary ingredient of life, the stress experience is constructed as a good thing, and in such a way is justified. Hence, one needs to question the objectives behind such a conceptualisation. At the very least, one could argue that it allows organisations to avoid responsibility for the problem of organisational stress, maintaining it as a concern of each individual employee.

What also became significant when analysing the articles was the proportion of articles that focused on the negative effects of stress as opposed to its positive implications for the individual. Approximately 40 articles focused on the costs of stress, whereas approximately only 10 articles noted its benefits. One could critically argue that by focusing on the costs of stress and arguing that it can, for example, kill you, organisational stress as a phenomenon is both problematised and pathologised. This pathologisation can be argued to serve the objectives of organisations. For example, by pathologising stress and constantly highlighting its negative implications for the individual, the phenomenon of stress is reduced from a psychological problem to a physiological one. Therefore, stress is presented as any other disease and thus will be understood to be treated with medication and at the level of the individual. In turn, if

organisational stress is normalised as having a 'physiological' cost to the individual employee, it will remain unquestioned and the problem of the individual.

Drawing upon the arguments of Marx, one could argue that maintaining the stress experience as problematic allows for the exploitation of the working class, while simultaneously ensuring that "If then the social agents experience capitalist society as something other than it really is, this is fundamentally because capitalist society presents itself as something other than it really is... It is not the subject that deceives himself [sic], but reality that deceives him [sic]" (Geras, 1989:79, as cited in Hamber, et al, 2001:52). Thus, by presenting the stress experience as naturally problematic, the individual or worker will uncritically accept this reality and this exploitation. Secondly, as previously mentioned, this pathologisation constructs stress as a physiological rather than a psychological problem. This conceptualisation can also be argued to serve the interests of a particular health-care industry. By developing hype surrounding the detrimental effects of stress, individuals will be more alert to their symptoms, and will be more motivated to visit a healthcare professional. The main implication of such a conceptualisation is that it once again reduces the phenomenon of stress to the level of the individual; a problem that individuals need to manage.

4.2.5 Change at the level of the individual (Emergent)

Literature on the role of the Print Media in the construction of individual perceptions notes its pervasive and powerful role in this process. With regard to the phenomenon of stress, and with specific regard to organisational stress, what becomes apparent is the individualised conceptualisation of the stress experience that is presented. The problem with such an individualised discourse is that it removes any responsibility from the greater social context in which the individual is found, for example, articles pertaining to stress and how one should overcome one's stress symptoms. The reader is provided with actions that one can take to overcome one's stress-related problems, even though in most cases the articles highlighted the problem rather than possible solutions. However, these actions are never directed towards the greater context (Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995). With regard to the newspaper articles, the majority of the articles highlighted the problem and the need for change, but did not examine possible solutions in detail. In such a way, it is the individual who is forced to change, allowing the social or organisational context to maintain its status quo. Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995:11) illustrate this problematic conceptualisation in the following passage:

> In this context the language of stress, with its emphasis on individualism, apoliticism, ahistoricism and so on, can be seen as just one further reflection of a pervasive ideology which glosses over the inequalities of power reflected in existing social structures, and lays the blame primarily on the individual, rather than their position in relation to, say, class, race or gender. People believe in the language of stress partly because they have swallowed capitalist ideology, and the current stress discourse articulates fairly well with this ideology.

According to Marx, (as cited in Reiss, 1997) the ideology of the ruling class acts as a disseminator of "false consciousness", (Reiss, 1997:76) creating the illusion that the working class' exploitation and alienation is a natural experience that should not be altered. The illusion that becomes apparent in the stress discourse, as argued by Newton, Handy and Finnemore, 1995, is the separation of race, gender and power from the stress equation. In such a way, the centre of the stress experience is located primarily in the individual. It is the individual who is to blame, not the social context in which he or she is found.

Whilst analysing the newspaper articles, it became apparent that the majority of the articles supported and upheld this individualised ideology. The majority of the articles constructed the problem and management of stress at the level of the individual. What therefore emerged was a theme in which it became the individual's responsibility to change and adapt to cope with stress: "Since stress is a necessary ingredient of life, the answer is to manage it and let it work for you instead of against you. The first step is to recognise what needs to be done to restore equilibrium and peace of mind. Determine the cause, evaluate whether it can be changed and whether it is self-inflicted, then decide how to alleviate the problem" (Business Day, 1994, Effective Management Of Stress).

Even though the articles provided the reader with steps and guides to manage their stress levels, most of this advice tended to be of an extremely vague nature. For example, an article taken from the Daily News argued that "Knowing your limits,

knowing what is causing the stress and making active attempts to deal with theses causes are important steps to take in dealing with stress" (The Daily News, 1996, Workaholics). Other articles merely highlighted the need to manage one's stress, but neglected to include practical and constructive steps to take to ensure that this objective is achieved: "Preventive action against the bad effects of stress is, then, largely up to the individual, by learning how to reduce or manage their stress levels" (Sunday Times, 1995, That Illness May Be Incubating At The Office); and "[S]tress is an individual and ongoing reaction, and people need to learn what factors cause them to feel stress and develop a lifelong strategic approach to stress management" (Business Day, 2004, Stress Strategies Vital).

Besides those articles that stressed the importance of effective stress management, there were some articles that were not very sensitive to the needs of the individual. For example, some articles abruptly commented that the individual must "pull up your socks: learn to love stress" (Mail and Guardian, 1998, Learning To Love Stress), and "Adapt or die" (Sunday Tribune, 1998, Stressed? Learn To Manage Your Life!). These articles can critically be argued to once again justify the experience and occurrence of organisational stress. By stressing the need for the individual to adapt or suffer death, these articles are reinforcing the conceptualisation that stress is an individual problem. Hence, organisational stress is constructed as inevitable, and thus it is the individual who has to manage and, more appropriately, 'pull up their socks'.

4.2.6 The Homogenisation of the stress experience (emergent)

When analysing the articles, a homogenised account of the stress experience emerged. Firstly, even though the articles were aimed at a South African audience, and stemmed from South African newspapers, a large portion of the articles provided information pertaining to experiences of stress at a global level. Many of the newspaper articles provided facts and numbers that reflected stress rates in overseas countries. This finding can be argued to hold several implications. Firstly, it potentially indicates that there is a lack of stress-related research in South Africa, and as a result newspapers have to draw on overseas statistics. Secondly, and more importantly, the utilisation of findings from other countries provides an extremely homogenised and generalised conceptualisation of the stress experience. That is, by generalising findings across different regions it is assumed that all people experience stress in the same way, and all countries have to deal with the same stress-related organisational problems. This has implications for driving a global economy; by utilising international standards, the newspapers attempt to bring South Africa in line with global trends, thereby pushing the global capitalist agenda.

For example, an article taken from the Sunday Times noted the problem of stress in Japan "Work-associated stress, coupled with long hours on the job, is killing thousands of people in Japan" (Sunday Times, 1997, Stressed Out? It Can Cost You Your Life). Another article highlighted this homogenised (what?) by arguing that "Workplace stress is a worldwide phenomenon" (Business Day, 1996, Transcendental Meditation 'Helps Beat Stress'). From a critical perspective, one could argue that this homogenised construction

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provides an extremely simplistic conceptualisation of the stress experience; a conceptualisation that is in line with dominant understandings of stress that this project aims to move beyond.

In opposition to this homogenised account, Burr (1995) contends that one's understandings of the world are located in specific historical and cultural contexts. For example, with specific reference to the phenomenon of stress, the way in which one comes to understand and make sense of one's experience is to a large extent determined by these factors. Similarly, Hobfoll (1998) contends that as much as the stress experience is experienced at the level of the individual, this experience is informed by the social context in which that individual is found. Hobfoll (1998) is therefore arguing against a theory that fails to consider the implications of culture in understanding stress. Like Tajfel, (1981) Hobfoll (1998) is arguing that due to individuals being social beings and existing in social groups, a degree of similarity amongst stress experiences must exist. However, this degree of similarity must not be generalised and homogenised. In such a way it would be incorrect to provide a purely individualised account, or a purely homogenised account of stress. Rather, the experience must be acknowledged to hold some common features, whilst simultaneously being experienced in unique ways by different individuals. In such a way this conceptualisation will account for the true complexity of the organisational stress experience.

4.2 Organisational/Social Conceptualisations of stress

Another dominant theme that emerged when reading literature on the topic of stress, as well as when analysing the newspaper articles, was a conceptualisation of organisational stress that went beyond the level of the individual to focus on the organisational and social contexts. Literature suggests that stress is a common reality within organisations, and as a result, organisational theories of stress have been developed to make sense of this organisational phenomenon. Besides being a common reality in organisations, literature suggests that the organisational phenomenon of stress is on the increase. This argument that stress is on the increase is an interesting one and is prefaced on the ability to compare historical epochs. This increase in stress can be argued to have arisen from changes in economic, political, social and organisational arenas. According to Hart and Cooper, (2001) the context in which organisations are found is dynamic and constantly changing. LePine (2003) contends that in order for organisations to remain competitive and effective in this environment, they need to adapt themselves and therefore change what they do and how they do it. This changing internal and external environment can be argued to be a major contributor to the increasing rates of organisational stress as supported by research and reaffirmed by the media. One could critically argue that this position serves to justify stress and its consequences today.

Many newspaper articles noted the increasing rates of organisational stress, and how these increasing rates were attributed to changes in the context of organisations, as well as the sociopolitical context. For example, an article taken from the Sunday Times argued

that "Work is the major cause of stress, a survey of more than 5 000 office workers in 16 countries has shown. More than half of the respondents said stress levels at work had increased over the past two years" (Sunday Times, 1994, Job Stress A Growing Problem Worldwide). An article in the Mail and Guardian noted that "At the root of all this is a changing workplace. Between 1973 and 1993, employment in service sector occupations increased by nearly four million. "Workplace pressures have increased," says Malcolm Harrington, Professor of Occupational Health at the Institute of Occupational Health, Birmingham University. "There are fewer people doing more work and longer hours – this is a macho idea that if you've left the company carpark by 7:30pm you're a wimp. We are living in a short-term contract world and people have a greater sense of job insecurity" (Mail and Guardian, 1996, Why Working Is Bad For Your Health).

Moving beyond the level of the organisation to that of the social context, literature suggests that contemporary society can be deemed the 'age of stress' (Hobfoll, 1998). One can comprehend from this statement that stress is a phenomenon that permeates modern society; a phenomenon experienced by most individuals, as well as a phenomenon that individuals have developed a profound interest in understanding. An article found in the Mail and Guardian highlighted the pervasiveness of the stress experience by arguing that "Stress is everywhere I look" (Mail and Guardian, 2001, Swiftly Vanishing Calm). Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) similarly argue that stress has become an essential dimension of the modern condition "Wherever you turn there is a multiplicity of guides on the nature of stress from psychologists, epidemiologists, therapists, consultants, journalists and so on" (Newton, Handy &

Finnemore, 1995). Literature too suggests that besides an increase in the level of organisational and social stress, there too has been an increase in the representation of stress in the Print Media (Fotinatos & Cooper, 2005; Newton, Handy & Finnemore, 1995). However, Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) contend that one needs to be critical regarding this increase. That is, how has this increase in the representation of stress come about? Whose objectives does this increase serve? This research aims to address these questions. Hence, through an examination of the manner in which the Print Media represents stress, this research aims to question the source of the increasing representation of stress, as well as whose objectives are being served by this increase. One could further argue that these objectives could be those of organisations and capitalist ideology.

Besides the majority of articles noting the increasing rates of stress and the pervasiveness of the stress experience across all aspects of social life, many articles constructed organisational stress as both inevitable and problematic. An article in the Sunday Times noted that "Stress is a normal part of life" (Sunday Times, 2000, Stress Is As Much A Management Issue As It Is A Medical Problem). Another article taken from the Mail and Guardian constructed the stress experience as problematic, "Stress can kill you" (Mail and Guardian, 1999, Heralding the New Age). In such a way, these articles construct the stress experience as a natural dimension of life that should not be questioned but merely accepted.

However, when analysing the articles, themes emerged that moved beyond the level of

the individual and the inevitability of the stress experience, to highlight the responsibility of the organisation in the stress experience. Thus, instead of focussing specifically on stress as an individual problem, some articles noted the importance of organisational intervention and responsibility. For example, an article taken from the Daily News argued that "Leaders of organisations need to work with individuals and organisations to identify and deal with the root causes of stress, develop healthier work-place culture and equip people with up-to-date skills" (The Daily News, 2003, Taking Strain).

4.3.1 Organisational Theories of stress (theory-led)

Moving beyond the level of the individual, it becomes evident when reading literature on the topic of organisational stress, that organisational models of stress also exist. According to Cox, (2000, as cited in Dollard, 2003) workplace theories can be classified as either interactional or transactional theories. In the former case, the structural features of the individual's interaction with their work environment is focussed on, while in the latter case, the emphasis is on how the individual cognitively and emotionally responds to their interactions with the environment.

When analysing the newspaper articles with regard to these organisational theories, it became obvious that most articles noted aspects of the theories, even though they did not explicitly state the theory's name or characteristics. For example, one article in the Sunday Times explains that "In the workplace, stressors often identified are heavy work-loads leading to overwork, unpleasant office politics, badly defined professional roles and having to juggle family and work demands (Sunday Times, 1995, South Africans Up There With The Shakiest In High-Stress Stakes). This example is reflective of the Job Demand-Control Model which conceptualises the experience of strain or stress as stemming from working in an environment in which great demands are placed on one while simultaneously experiencing little control over one's situation (Dollard, 2003). Another similar example was found in the Business Day. In this case, the article noted a list of workplace stressors that are congruent with the Job Demand-Control Model: "Work stressors exist in most offices. They can include lack of clarity about roles, unpredictable hours, boredom, lack of training, taking on other people's problems, poor

relationships and obvious" (Business Day, 2001, Dealing With Damaging Stress In The Workplace). However, it should be noted that even though these extracts provide examples of the demands experienced by employees in the workplace, none of the articles mentioned the degree of control. This aspect of the model implies that in most cases, employees are unable to exert control over these demands. Alternatively, one could critically argue that the newspaper articles strategically tend not to emphasis this dimension. Thus, by focussing on the demands experienced by employees, rather than the control they have over their work, a pessimistic and disempowered view of the individual's role in the stress experience is created. Again, one needs to critically question the source of this construction, as well as whose objectives this construction is serving. For example, one could contend that by constructing the individual's stress experience as disempowering in nature, and neglecting the individual's control of the experience, passive messages will be fed to employees. In such a way employees will perceive the occurrence of high work demands and low work control as the norm. Once again, the role and responsibility of organisations remains unchanged and unquestioned, respectively.

One other dominant organisational theory of stress is that of the person-environment model. This theory acknowledges the importance of both the person and environment in determining the stress experience. From this perspective, one could argue that stress arises, "not from the person or the environment separately, but rather by their fit or congruence with one another" (Edwards, Caplan & van Harrison (2000:28). An example of an understanding of organisational stress based on this model was found in the Sunday

Times which argues that "stress in the workplace often starts when an individual feels he does not fit into his environment, has the perception that he (or she) receives less praise or more criticism than others, is not recognised or promoted, has minimal responsibility and is afraid of retrenchment (Sunday Times, 1997, Stressed Out? It Can Cost You Your Life). However, not only does this extract provide an example of the person-environment fit model, but it also includes an understanding of the effort-reward imbalance theory of stress.

According to Siegerst (1996, 1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003), this model moves away from the interactional conceptualisations of organisational stress to focus its attention on and examine the "interaction between environmental constraints or threats and individual coping resources" (Siegrist, 1996, 1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003:17). By this it is meant that it focuses on the issue of reward rather than the control structure of the work the individual performs (De Jonge & Dormann, 2003). This theory is based on the premise that when individuals engage in some form of work there is an expectation that some reward will result. In the case that this expectation is not met, work strain results (Siegrist, 1998, as cited in Dollard, 2003). As noted in the aforementioned newspaper extract, the perception that an individual receives less praise than another, or feels that he or she is not recognised or promoted, provides examples of instances when the expectation that one will be rewarded for one's effort is not satisfied.

When examining the newspaper articles, it also became obvious that the majority of the articles focused on the structural aspects of work as a potential source of stress, rather than how the individual cognitively and emotionally responds to their interactions with the

environment (Dollard, 2003). This focus can be argued to once again reinforce the one-dimensional and simplified understandings of organisational stress represented in the majority of the newspaper articles. In such a way, these articles are unable to account for the complexity of the stress experience, and the role of individual perception in the process.

4.3.2 The Age of stress (theory-led)

According to Hobfoll (1998), contemporary society can be deemed the 'age of stress'. Hobfoll (1998) contends that, with regard to contemporary, mainly western society, the topic of stress is one by which individuals are consumed, a topic that is used by society "as a basic exploratory mechanism to describe the underpinnings of what we see as wrong with work, family life, and our society" (Hobfoll, 1998:1). From the perspective of Hobfoll (1998), one can argue that stress plays an important role in shaping one's understandings of oneself and society.

It became evident when analysing the articles that the majority of articles acknowledged stress, and more specifically organisational stress, as a feature of the modern condition that plays an ever-present role in social life. For example, an article found in the Business Day argued that "Stress is encountered every day and at every stage of human development. It is regarded as an integral part of life and is essential for personal growth and development" (Business Day, 1994, Effective Management Of Stress). A similar article taken from the Daily News contended that "Whether you're a high powered executive, a harassed employee or a long-suffering housewife with two toddlers in tow, you're probably plagued with stress" (The Daily News, 1994, Give Stress The Boot). The pervasiveness of stress on the workplace was illustrated in an article taken from the Sunday Times, "The world is facing an epidemic of stress at workplaces. According to a report published last month, stress has overtaken the common cold as the main cause of sickness from work (Sunday Times, 1999, Stress Is An Excuse For Not Coping With Life).

Both literature on the topic of organisational stress and the newspaper articles present the stress phenomenon as one that is currently plaguing all aspects of modern society. The articles selected highlight the influential role that stress plays in shaping the experiences and perceptions of individuals.

However, as much as research suggests that stress in on the increase at an individual and organisational level, one needs to critical of the assumption that we are living in an age of stress. In order for one to argue that this assumption is valid, one needs to firstly be able to demonstrate that other generations lived in an age that was not of stress. Due to the difficulty of being able to defend this position, this research does not aim to explore this assumption, but rather aims to critically explore whether we do in fact live in the age of stress, or whether the media plays a role in perpetuating this illusion. According to Fotinatos and Cooper (2005), there has been an increasing coverage of stress-related incidents and stress-related information in the media. Similarly, Newton, Handy and Finnemore (1995) argue that stress has become an essential feature of the modern condition. However, one needs to critically question the benefits of developing the assumption or argument that we are living in an age of stress. One could critically argue that by constructing stress as an increasing and influential feature of the modern condition and organisational life, the stress experience is justified. In such a way, the experience of stress is normalised and remains unquestioned. Again, this construction can be argued to serve the objectives of a particular group, in this case, the organisation. Therefore, if organisational stress is constructed as the norm, then the role of the organisation in the

stress experience is once again negated. Organisational stress is therefore yet again reduced to an individual or worker problem, and not a management one.

4.3.3 Increasing rates of stress (theory-led)

Besides organisational stress being represented in the Print Media as a common feature of the modern condition, the newspaper articles highlighted the increasing rates at which this phenomenon is growing. Literature contends that in addition to an increase in research and reference to stress on a social level, stress on an organisational level is also on the increase. Stress in the organisational arena has been noted to be the second-most reported work-related health problem across Europe (Fotinatos & Cooper, 2005). Jamil (2004) reports that on the whole one in five reported health problems at work stem from stress-related problems, and that seven million working days are lost through stress each year. Similarly, the newspaper articles noted the increasing rates of stress in the context of work: "Work is the major cause of stress, a survey of more than 5 000 office workers in 16 countries has shown. More than half of the respondents said stress levels at work had increased over the past two years" (Sunday Times, 1994, Job Stress A Growing Problem Worldwide). An article taken from the Mail and Guardian stated that "What makes the current situation so alarming, according to Harrington, is that there is virtually no area of work that is unaffected. "It is getting worse," he says" (Mail and Guardian, 1996, Why Working Is Bad For Your Health).

However, what is significant is the way in which the articles assume that experiences of stress are far worse in contemporary society than they were for example one hundred years ago. An article taken from the Sunday Times argued that "I believe we are more stressed than we were 100 years ago, when there were no motor cars, no high technology" (Sunday Times, 1998, Get Off The Career Treadmill Fast And Start Dealing

With The Tension Of Life Before You Suffer From Complete Burnout). One needs to be critical of this assumption and should question what research has been done, and what evidence exists to support this claim. Research has shown that with changes in technology and developments in globalisation, individuals have to endure heightened levels of stress (Hart and Cooper, 1991). Due to the need for organisations to be competitive and up-to-date with global trends, organisational structures have had to shift and become more flexible. With this need for flexibility, what has resulted is a change in work arrangements, in turn resulting in a decrease in job security. According to Hart and Cooper (1991), this change in the nature of work has had positive implications for some employees, with increased mobility and flexibility. However, in most cases these changes have resulted in an increase in occupational stress.

However, the assumption that the experience of stress is far worse in contemporary society is one that needs to be critically explored. Thus articles which contend that "More people are experiencing higher stress levels than ever before" (Sunday Times, 1998, Get Off The Career Treadmill Fast And Start Dealing With The Tension Of Life Before You Suffer From Complete Burnout), and "All the signs are that stress is worsening. A survey of staff at one institution this year by the lecturer's union found that 88% of respondents had suffered from stress-related problems in the past year" (Mail and Guardian, 2001, Swiftly Vanishing Calm) need to be questioned. One also should question the benefits of presenting the experience of stress as far worse than it was one hundred years ago. One possible explanation would be that by presenting stress as far worse, the organisational stress experience is again justified. If the stress experience is presented as worse due to

changes in the organisational and social context, and changes that have resulted due to changes in globalisation, then the increasing rate of stress is legitimised. By blaming these changes on factors such as globalisation and events beyond the control of the organisation, the organisation is once again protected from being criticised.

4.3.4 The changing organisational and social context (theory-led)

One possible explanation for the increasing rate of organisational stress is the dynamic and constantly changing context in which organisations are found (Hart & Cooper, 2001). According to Dollard (2003:1) "[A]t the turn of the century a confluence of economic, political and sociocultural forces are impacting on our contemporary work arrangements" (Dollard, 2003:1). Moorhead and Griffin (1995) and Robbins (1998) contend that as a result of this shrinkage of the global arena and erosion of national boundaries, organisations are now forced to compete on a global scale. Frese and de Kruif (2000) argue that organisations have to be flexible so as to adapt and meet the challenges as a result of innovations that take place in the rest of the global arena. Besides having to manage these demands, organisations too have to adapt to accelerated technological development (Moorhead & Griffin, 1995). Similarly, the newspaper articles provided explanations for the increasing rates of organisational stress.

The articles explained the increasing rates of stress as arising from developments in technology as well as changes in traditional work arrangements. For example, an article found in the Business Day blamed changes in technology for the increasing stress levels in organisations "Technology, we thought would make our lives easier. Machines were expected to do our work for us, leaving us with ever-increasing quantities of time to fritter away on idleness and pleasure. But instead of liberating us, technology has enslaved us" (Business Day, 1999, Old Father Time Becomes A Terror). Another article taken from the Business Day argued that "New technologies and the impact of

globalisation have sparked more stress and depression for workers, according to an International Labour Office report" (Business Day, 2000, Worker Depression).

One needs to be critical of stress being constantly linked to changing technology rather than social developments. Perhaps one could postulate that technology is easier to target as a major cause of stress than, for example, political or social factors. One could also argue that it is far less controversial to discuss the former. In such a way, technology becomes the scapegoat for the stress argument and prevents the contentious questions of class, gender and race from being asked. Finally, one should take into account that only a small percentage of South Africans have access to the kind of technology that these articles argue as the main contributor of stress.

However, even though the majority of the articles highlighted changes in technology as a major trigger of stress, the rapidly changing environment in which organisations are found was also mentioned: "It's a faster world and expectations are so much higher," Moch says" (Sunday Times, 1998, Get Off The Career Treadmill Fast And Start Dealing With The Tension Of Life Before You Suffer From Complete Burnout). An article taken from the Business Day contended that "Employees are exposed to increasing stress in a changing, competitive environment and cost-cutting global economy" (Business Day, 2000, Treating Stress Is Part Of Bottom Line).

Even though a small percentage of articles did note the changing environment as a source of organisational stress, there was an even smaller group of articles that explored and

took account of the role of the changing social and political context in the stress experience. For example, an article found in the Mercury argued that "Rapid changes in the environment, including socio-economic, socio-political, over-population and other factors, are all contributing to rising stress levels" (The Mercury, 1996, It's Modern, It's Hi-Tech, It's Stressful). Focusing specifically on the South African context, there were a group of articles that argued for the role of the changing socio-political context in the stress experience. An article in the Business Day noted that "As they experience major changes in their society, South Africans are experiencing abnormally high levels of stress, say experts" (Business Day, 1994, South Africans Suffer Abnormally High Stress).

Another article found in the Sunday Times, contended that the rapid socio-political changes that have taken place in the South African context have provided a major source of stress: "South Africa has faced diverse challenges and we therefore live under a unique set of circumstances. The rapid changes that have occurred in the past decade have been exciting, but at the same time stressful for all South Africans. Change is a well-known factor in stress. Economic uncertainty and pressures certainly contribute to the high levels of stress in South Africa (Sunday Times, 2000, Stress Takes Its Toll On Angry South Africans). This group of articles can be argued to represent a move away from the majority of accounts that have homogenised and generalised the stress experience. Rather, these articles effectively highlight the main issues of the South African situation and its implications for the stress experience. The articles also highlight and explore the organisational phenomenon of stress beyond the level of the individual, illustrating the role of the context in which the individual has the experience.

4.3.5 Cost vs. Benefits of stress (theory-led)

Organisational stress not only has a negative impact on individuals who work in organisations, but it also has a negative impact on organisations themselves. Hart and Cooper (2001), as well as Goh and Oei (1999), argue that occupational stress is an increasing problem that not only negatively affects individual employees, but also has detrimental implications for organisations as a whole. These negative implications, as illustrated in the literature, include low motivation and morale, high turnover, low job satisfaction, accidents, decrease in performance, conflicts and the like (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005:160). For example, an article in the Mail and Guardian stated that "[S]tress and poor performance are bedfellows" (Mail and Guardian, 1998, Counselling Workers Out Of Stress).

Byrne (2002) contends that the stress symptoms experienced by the individual not only have negative implications for the organisation in which that individual is found, but also have implications for the broader psychosocial domain. This argument highlights the integrated relationship between organisations and society. One could therefore argue that the manner in which stress is constructed by the organisation will have implications for how it is experienced outside the organisation. As such, one can begin to explore the pervasiveness of the organisational context on the remaining dimensions of individuals' lives. For example, economic realities such as the need to survive, create a level of dependency upon organisations. In such a way, individuals' need for survival inhibits criticism of the organisation, and as a result the workplace remains unquestioned.

Most of the articles highlighted the negative implications of organisational stress at an organisational level. It should be noted that the majority of articles stressed the financial cost of organisational stress, highlighting the negative effects of poor performance and absenteeism levels. For example, an article taken from the Business Day contended that "[S]tress-induced absenteeism is costing SA business R1, 5bn annually. Broome, founder of Thinking Skills and Training, says stress-induced absenteeism is the silent scourge of SA business, leading to negativity, "scapegoating" and the bugbear of SA industry, a loss of productivity" (Business Day, 1996, Transcendental Meditation 'Helps Beat Stress'). According to an article taken from the Sunday Times, "About 200-million working days are lost each year worldwide because of employees with depression" (Sunday Times, 2000, Workplace A Nightmare For Many. Stress And Depression Taking A Frightful Toll On Workers Health).

Another article taken from the Sunday Times states that "Work-place violence and stress rob economies of working days and the costs of increased security measures, healthcare and long-term rehabilitation. They also impair the efficiency of work places" (Sunday Times, 2003, Explosion: Job pressures can push workers over the bank). One could argue that by placing the two together, that organisational stress is constructed as being as problematic as workplace violence. Besides being as problematic, this association can be argued to also construct organisational stress as having as grave and serious implications as violence in the workplace. From a critical perspective, one could also argue that by focusing on the financial and productivity costs of organisational stress, the human costs are avoided. Therefore, stress is problematic for organisations only to the extent that it

affects the bottom line. In turn it can be argued, in line with the capitalist stance, that the social productiveness of labour is far more important than the individual labourer (McLennan, 1975). In such a way, the problem of organisational stress is maintained at the level of the individual employee.

However, even though the majority of the articles noted the negative effects of stress on the organisation, some articles noted the positive effects of stress on organisational productivity. For example, an article in the Business Day noted that the "HSBC takes a positive stance to stress in the workplace because it believes that will increase productivity – both in terms of quantity and quality – and reduce sickness and absenteeism, helping recruitment, retaining skilled and experienced staff, and encouraging the progression of employees with caring and other responsibilities" (Business Day, 2000, Stress Is As Much A Management Issue As It Is A Medical Problem). From a critical perspective, the implications of this argument are that it once again justifies the experience of stress in the workplace. Firstly, by arguing for the positive effects of stress on productivity, the economic imperative is upheld, hence the benefits of stress are only equated to increasing productivity levels, and in turn the profitability of the organisation (Marx, as cited in McLennan, 1975). Secondly, by including the positive effects of stress, the costs of stress are downplayed, that is, this message is creating the perception that as much as stress has its failings in the organisation, the benefits are worth the cost. This argument can therefore be argued to hold powerful implications for the justification of organisational stress.

4.3.5 Change at the level of the organisation (emergent)

Even though the majority of articles focussed on change at the level of the individual, what also emerged when analysing the newspaper articles was an acknowledgement of the responsibility of the organisation in the stress experience, as well as the management of the organisational stress phenomenon. Thus, instead of constructing organisational stress as a purely individual problem, these articles argued for the role of the organisation and society in the management of the organisational stress phenomenon. However, even though a small portion of the articles argued for this position, the argument itself indicates a move away from the dominant conceptualisation that provides an individualised and one-dimensional view of the stress phenomenon. For example, an article from the Mail and Guardian argued against "the quick-fix reaction – send the employees on a stress management course or to see a counsellor – will no longer do." The answer, according to Williams, lies in good job design, improved management and a work culture that enables people to admit to, and deal with, stress" (Mail and Guardian, 1996, Why Working Is Bad For Your Health).

An article taken from the Business Day critically contended:,"Companies must overcome the stigma attached to admitting the prevalence of stress in the workplace so that they can start dealing with the symptoms," he said. "It's time for the business community to abandon the macho and heroic image of stress and encourage greater co-operation and support" (Business Day, 1996, Sacking A Serious Cause Of Executive Stress In Britain). One way in which organisations can deal more effectively with stress in the workplace was suggested by an article in the Mail and Guardian: "Cooper says firms need to tackle

the whole culture of overwork" (Mail and Guardian, 1998, Sick And Tired Of The Office). An article in the Business Day also argued against short-term solutions to the problem of stress in the workplace: "A more successful remedy may lie in understanding the problem rather than evading it" (Business Day, 1999, Old Father Time Becomes A Terror).

By acknowledging the role of the organisation, it can be argued that these articles create an understanding of the organisational phenomenon of stress that moves beyond a problem of the individual. Rather, in this case, the individual's experience of stress is acknowledged to be influenced by the organisational and social context in which he or she is found. This conceptualisation is in line with Hobfoll's (1998) recognition of a bi-directional relationship between individuals and society. Hobfoll (1998) argues that stress as a phenomenon is a product of the interrelationship between individuals and the social context in which they reside. From this perspective, stress is perceived as being to a large extent, influenced by social circumstances, rather than the result of the sole process of individual perception. That is, stress not only emerges from the context, but so too do individuals' perceptions of their experiences. Similarly, Marx (as cited in McLennan, 1975) argues for the role of the social in the construction of one's consciousness, understandings or experiences. In such a way, this literature, as well as the articles, acknowledge the role of the social and organisational context in the stress experience.

4.3.6 Stress is socially constructed as inevitable and desired (emergent)

According to Demers (2002), due to the powerful and influential role the language of the Print Media plays in moulding contemporary social systems, it is essential that one examines these messages so as to gain insight into these systems. Similarly, Fairclough (1995) contends that one needs to be critical of the picture of reality that the media constructs. Rather, Fairclough (1995) argues that "A basic assumption is that media texts do not merely 'mirror realities' as is sometimes naïvely assumed; they constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them" (p. 103-104). One particular version of reality or discourse that emerged when analysing the newspaper articles, was the construction of the stress experience as inevitable and desired. Most of the articles presented stress as a necessary ingredient of life, as a normal part of a balanced life, as healthy, and in some cases the stress experience was even presented as being desired. For example, an article in the Business Day argued that "Since stress is a necessary ingredient of life, the answer is to manage it and let it work for you instead of against you (Business Day, 1994, Effective Management Of Stress). Another article found in the Sunday Times stated that stress was a normal part of a balanced life: "We try to ensure employees have a balanced life... Stress is a normal part of life (Sunday Times, 2000, Stress Is As Much A Management Issue As It Is A Medical Problem).

Besides presenting stress as a necessary component of an individual's life, some articles also went on to argue that stress is something wanted and desired. For example, an article found in the Mail and Guardian attempted to justify the stress experience by arguing that:

"Because without stress we would all be very, very, very nice. And stomach-churningly contended. And, in all honesty, who wants to live in a world like that?" (Mail and Guardian, 1998, Learning To Love Stress). Another article found in the Mail and Guardian described the workplace as a stress-free environment as compared to the home "American observers have noticed that in the United States the trend is shifting and the new phenomenon is "Thank God it's Monday" as employees joyfully return to the calm, supportive and user-friendly environments of the workplace after a stressful weekend at home" (Mail and Guardian, 1998, Learning To Love Stress). An article found in the Business Day commented on the phenomenon of stress envy: "It has almost got to the point where there is stress envy. If you are not stressed, you are not succeeding. Everybody wants to have a little bit of stress to show they're an important person (Business Day, 1999, Old Father Time Becomes A Terror).

From a critical perspective, one needs to ask whose needs this version of reality is serving. Demers (2002) and Fairclough (1995) contend that the relationship between the media and the social systems that surround it is of a dialectical relationship. That is, not only does the media shape these systems, but these systems shape the media and the messages that the media presents. In light of this, one could argue that the construction of organisational stress as inevitable and even desired, can be argued to serve a particular purpose. For example, one could postulate that if a phenomenon is constructed as inevitable and wanted, its existence will not be questioned. In such a way, the status quo (or in this instance the organisational context) will remain unquestioned, unchallenged and unchanged. One other implication of the articles that needs to be critically explored is the notion that work is less stressful than home. From a critical perspective, drawing on

the arguments of Marx, one could argue that this claim drives the objectives of capitalism, that is, work more and play less. As argued by Marx (as cited in Reiss, 1997), the ideology of the ruling class acts "as a disseminator of 'false consciousness'" (Reiss, 1997:76). Thus, by feeding employees with the notion that the context of work is less stressful than that of home, the motivation to work will be heightened. In such a way workers will work harder, and the ruling class, or more appropriately organisations, will become more profitable.

Finally, one other concept that needs to be critically investigated is that of stress envy. One could argue that by using stress levels as a measure of success the two become interrelated. In such a way, the idea that success only comes with stress is legitimated. The problem with such an argument is that it motivates and encourages individuals to become stressed. That is, all individuals aim to be successful, and will therefore welcome their stress experiences rather than question their source. This construction of organisational stress as desired once again justifies its occurrence, and prevents the acknowledgement of responsibility at the level of the organisation.

4.3.7 The Pathologisation of the stress experience (emergent)

Another dominant perception of the stress experience that emerged when analysing the newspaper articles was its pathologisation. By this it is meant that the stress experience was constructed as something negative, problematic and unstoppable. This pathologisation also aligns stress with the medical profession and holds the assumption that it can be cured in much the same way one cures disease. Most of the articles equated stress with certain negative symptoms, symptoms that are quantifiable and curable. For example, an article in the Daily News argued that "As the number of people suffering from stress-related problems increases, and the age of those affected decreases, experts are warning people to pay attention to its symptoms, writes Ishani Bechoo (The Daily News, 2000, Watch Out For The Symptoms). However, the problem with focussing on observable symptoms is the reduced and simplified picture of the stress experience it creates. The stress experience is firstly equated with negative outcomes, and secondly, by focusing on symptoms, the less obvious and more subtle aspects of the stress experience are lost. By subtle it is meant those psychological and emotional symptoms that may arise from the stress experience.

Some articles drew on words such as stalks, losing control, kill and the like to describe the stress experience. For example, an article taken from Sunday Times argued that "Stress stalks its victims in the kindergarten, the school and in the home," he says. "Neither age, occupation, or gender, provides any immunity (Sunday Times, 1997, Stressed Out? It Can Cost You Your Life). Another article stated that "Stress Can Kill You" (Mail and Guardian, 1999, Heralding The New Age). An extract taken from the

Mail and Guardian contended that "Stress should be added to the list of human rights violations" said Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) chair Dr Brigalia Bam, to Thabo Mbeki on Wednesday night as counting got under way" (Mail and Guardian, 1999, Verbatim). By aligning stress with crime, and as something that one becomes victim to, stress is constructed as predatory as well as being outside of one's control. This construction can therefore be argued to provide another example of an attempt to justify the stress experience. That is, if stress is perceived as a phenomenon that one becomes victim to, then one's ability to control the experience, as well as the organisation's responsibility, is negated.

4.3.9 The Justification of the stress experience (emergent theme)

According to Gorman and McLean (2003), the pervasive and influential nature of the media in shaping contemporary society's 'world view' is one that needs to be questioned. Similarly, Demers (2002) argues that due to the pervasive influence of the discourses produced by the media, with specific regard to the Print Media, one needs to be critical of their objectivity and neutrality. In light of this, when analysing the newspaper articles, what emerged were messages that aimed to justify the stress experience. For example, an article taken from the Daily News attempted to justify the increasing rates of stress by questioning the stress phenomenon: "Stress has overtaken flu as cause of absenteeism, but is it an illness? "What is this thing called stress? Is there really more at work than there used to be? As a sociologist, I have become sceptical… There is little doubt that millions of people feel ill. The expression "I am stressed out" comes readily and many experience emotional suffering at work. Whether this illness is the result of changing styles of management and work practices is highly debatable (Daily News, 2000, Stress & Propaganda).

Another article argued that stress had become a "buzzword" and that many employees were using it as an excuse to take time off from work "The problem is that it's one of the things that people can fake," he said. Some people ask whether the problem is as great as the publicity suggests, pointing out the questionable validity of the self-reporting statistics as well as confusion between "normal" hours and "actual" hours and varying calculations of recorded and unreported overtime (Sunday Times, 2000, Stressed Or Not, Absent Teachers Won't Get Paid). One article argued

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that courses aimed at assisting individuals with stress management could be a cause for its increase in the workplace: "People pathologise ordinary responses to work, like getting angry or depressed. If you go on a course that says these things are killing you, it could make things worse" (Mail and Guardian, 2001, Report Criticises Stress Managing Programmes).

From a critical perspective, one needs to question the implications of articles that attempt to justify the stress experience. One should also question the effects of arguments that question the validity of stress, reduce the experience to the possibility of faking, and argue that increasing rates of stress are a result of increasing individual's awareness of the phenomenon. These arguments can therefore be argued to provide a means of justifying the stress experience by listing possible reasons for its increasing rates. For example, an article taken from the Sunday Times argued that stress is an excuse for not coping with life: "Professor Simon Wessley ... says that the workplace can affect mental health." However "can" does not mean "does", and work is only one of 3 factors affecting a person's health. It is worth noting that people who are out of work are far more likely to experience stress-related illness than those in employment... It would be wrong to write off this transformation of stress into a disease as mendacious claims encouraged by greedy professionals, but there is little doubt that the professionalising of distress has served as a job creation scheme for the therapy industry" (Sunday Times, 1999, Stress Is An Excuse For Not Coping With Life). This article thus aims to justify the experience of organisational stress by stating that no concrete evidence exists that supports the claim that the workplace is a major cause of stress. In such a way this, and

other arguments like it, provide another attempt at justifying the organisational stress experience and reducing it to the level of the individual. By providing alternatives or reasons why individuals would argue for increasing rates of stress, the individual's stress experience is put under the spotlight. That is, it is the individual who is deemed responsible for faking or pathologising the stress experience, instead of the organisation being perceived as a major cause of stress.

4.4 A critical stance – a move away from the norm

When examining literature on the topic of stress, as well as literature pertaining to the power of the Print Media, the common trend is a presentation of reality that is unquestioned and assumed natural. Stress is assumed in most cases to be a problem of the individual, as well as being simplified to that of a response or stimulus. This perception in turn negates the role of the social, more specifically the organisational context, as well as preventing a more holistic experience of the phenomenon.

Drawing on the theory of social constructionism, it is essential that one takes a critical stance towards the taken-for-granted. According to Burr (1995), social constructionism "invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world" (p. 3). Even though the majority of newspaper articles on the topic of organisational stress tended to promote and uphold dominant individualistic conceptualisations, there were some articles that provided an extremely critical stance of the take-for-granted. These articles questioned the role of the organisation in the stress experience, highlighted the role of the social in the construction of stress perceptions, the motivation behind the use of organisational interventions, and the pathologisation of the stress experience as an individual symptom and not an organisational problem. It can therefore be argued that this group of articles questions the unquestioned and places a critical stance on the organisational stress phenomenon.

One common theme that runs through literature on the topic of stress, and more specifically organisational stress, is the lack of consensus surrounding the understanding and definition of stress. Monat and Lazarus (1991) contend that even though the topic of stress is one that has been extensively researched and scrutinised, there seems to be a general lack of agreement on a universal definition of this phenomenon. One could critically argue that this extensive research has in fact played a role in preventing a clear description or definition of this topic from being formulated, or, more likely, that a lack of definition allows organisations and society to perpetuate the problem. By being unable to reach consensus on a global definition and holistic understanding of stress, individuals are able to get away with a problem that 'may not' exist. One could thus critically argue that those dimensions of the stress phenomenon that serve the needs of the organisation and have negative effects for the individual, remain unquestioned and unchallenged.

Hart and Cooper (2001) state, with specific reference to occupational stress, that this lack of consensus has resulted in a degree of fragmentation with regard to the occupational stress literature. For example, an article found in the Sunday Times addressed this problem by contending that: "The dangers 'of stress are recognised throughout the world, yet surprisingly little is known about the diseases outside the medical profession," he says (Sunday Times, 1997, Stressed Out? It Can Cost You Your Life). What this article alludes to is the limited understanding of stress that has been developed, that is, by reducing the stress experience to the medical field, to the level of stimulus and response, the complexity of the experience is lost. In such a way, emphasis is placed on more generalised and homogenised understandings, for which individuals can be prescribed

medication or undergo treatments to solve the problem. These understandings do not take into account the more individualised and personal aspects of the stress experience. One could argue that the problem of limiting the stress experience to the level of medicine and disease, is that the true complexity of the stress experience will be lost.

One dominant understanding of stress that is found in literature on the topic, as well as in the research findings, is an extremely individualised understanding. In most cases, understandings and experiences of stress were reduced to the level of the individual, as well as to the level of individual responsibility. However, there were some articles that attempted to address the role of the organisation in the stress experience. For example, an article in the Mail and Guardian argued that one reason for the increasing rates of stress is a result of organisations rewarding employees for working long hours as opposed to performance: "Working long hours acts as a proxy for effort," they write. "Firms back-load compensation [promotion and better pay] to elicit higher levels of effort from workers." "Cooper says he is depressed but not surprised at their findings. 'What organisations are doing is seizing on the visible signs of commitment – long hours – and rewarding people for that, not performance" (Mail and Guardian, 1998, Sick And Tired Of The Office).

An article found in the Sunday Times critically argued that one possible reason for organisations utilising counselling as a means of managing stress is the individualised culture that it promotes. That is, it is the individual's responsibility to see a counsellor and manage their stress levels, not the organisations': "Since the '80s, a more

individualised workplace ethos has fostered a climate where problems are readily medicalised as personal ones. For their part, employers are more than happy to buy into the stress industry. One in three employers now provides stress counselling. Why? Perhaps it is because they prefer to interpret workplace troubles as problems of individual distress. It is far cheaper to provide counselling than to transform a working environment. Sadly, almost no one really benefits. After a while the propaganda about stress will have the effect of convincing people that everyday difficulties are ruining their health. Already an inflated sense of injury is encouraging workers to sue one another and their employers (Sunday Times, 1999, Stress Is An Excuse For Not Coping With Life). As mentioned in the article, the problem that arises with this individualisation is that no longterm solutions transpire, and as a result no one benefits. According to Cooper (2001), in most cases, interventions targeting the individual are rarely effective.

An article found in the Business Day argued that the use of counselling services to manage stress is due to their cost effectiveness, not their 'real' effectiveness. That is counselling acts as a means of temporarily solving the problem of stress without requiring long term change at the level of the organisation. As noted in literature on the topic, there are a range of reasons for these types of interventions, including cost benefits, social visibility, practitioners comfort at working with the individual, and time constraints (Byrne, 2002; Corlett & Richardson, 1981; Dollard, 2003). Rather, the article critically argued that: "Instead of subcontracting in this way, companies should concentrate on creating cultures where it is okay to ask for help in the office. Part of the reason for the spread of these services is that they are a cheap way of a company showing it is caring.

As most workers feel the same way about them as me, hardly anyone uses them. If staff called them every time they felt their stress levels rising, companies might not find them so attractive after all" (Business Day, 2000, Helping Hands Can Stay Away From Workplace).

According to another article found in the Business Day, stress has been constructed as a problem at the level of the individual, in turn inhibiting change at the level of the organisation: "Technically, stress is a meaningless term. No one suffers from stress per se, they suffer from anxiety disorders or depression. Stress has been pathologised as the individual's reaction to work rather than as a symptom of problems in the organisation" (Business Day, 2002, Share The Responsibility Of A Happier Workforce). When analysing the newspaper articles, what emerged were issues pertaining to the management of the stress experience. The main issue pertained to what level change and intervention should take place, that is at the level of the individual or the organisation. An article found in the Business Day argued that: "The question remains: who is responsible for controlling stress individuals or managers?" (Business Day, 2002, Share The Responsibility Of A Happier Workforce).

One dominant aim of this research was to move beyond individualistic conceptualisations of stress, to explore the role of the social in understandings and perceptions pertaining to stress. According to Hobfoll (1998), one needs to 'depsychologize' stress, moving away from purely cognitive and individualistic based conceptualisations to ones that take into account the social and cultural context. He views an individual's perceptions of stress as

an iceberg, which only provides insight into individual interpretation. By merely examining this level, one's understandings of this experience become confined to surface level manifestations, ignoring the role of deeper forces in shaping these interpretations. By deeper forces, it is implied those social, cultural, situational and familial-factors that mediate and moderate the individual's experience of the stress phenomenon. In order to go below this surface level, one needs to broaden one's investigation to other dimensions, that is familial, group and cultural factors. Even though the majority of the articles provided an extremely individualised and simplistic understanding of the stress experience, there was one which explicitly argued for the role of the social in determining stress perceptions: "Perceptions of illness are strongly influenced by cultural norms. With so many everyday human encounters interpreted as risky, it is not remarkable to find that the mere fact of feeling uncomfortable due to stress has been recast as a threatening condition. Once this happens it is bound to have a negative effect on people's health (The Daily News, 2000, Stress & Propaganda. Stress Has Overtaken Flu As Cause Of Absenteeism, But Is It An Illness?). This article indicates the development of a more critical and holistic understanding of the stress experience. By highlighting the role of society and specifically 'cultural norms', this article can be argued to provide a new and more encompassing picture of the stress experience. In turn, the article provides a move away from the dominant conceptualisations which have reduced the stress phenomenon to the level of the individual, to include the role of the social context in influencing the stress experience.

4.5 Limitations of this study and suggestions for further research

Although the results of this study play an important role in highlighting the role of the Print Media in constructing our perceptions of the organisational phenomenon of stress, there were also a number of limitations to this study and the findings. The aim of noting the limitations is to indicate and provide areas in which further research can be undertaken to support and reaffirm the findings of this project, as well as to develop further insight into this project.

The overall aim of this research was to explore the social construction of organisational stress through an analysis of the Print Media. One objective that stemmed from this overall aim was to explore whether the reporting of organisational stress had changed in relation to changes in South Africa's socio-political context. However, when analysing the newspaper articles and writing up the final project, it became apparent that this objective could unfortunately not be reached. Firstly, due to the length of this project, the inclusion of the final research question would have been unrealistic. I aimed to provide a rich account of the topic under exploration and therefore did not want to dilute it by attempting to account for too much in too little time. Secondly, when analysing the newspaper articles, another theme emerged that was not accounted for in the initial proposal. I decided that including this theme, the third theme, would provide major insight into the topic under exploration. I also decided to explore this theme as it moved beyond the majority of accounts on organisational stress that are not critical of the accounts of stress and organisational stress that have been developed and lived out in the Print Media. I am in no way arguing that my initial, third research question is inferior to

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the one that emerged, and it is therefore suggested that further research be done to explore the final objective of this project and its implications for understanding the social component of the organisational phenomenon of stress.

When initially deciding on the sample, I selected a sample of newspapers that were assessed as being sufficiently representative for the purpose of the study. By this it is meant that the research aimed to achieve an overall picture of the manner in which the Print Media constructs the organisational phenomenon of stress, and not a comparison of different newspaper's construction of the phenomenon. However, even though research was done to explore the readership statistics for all the newspaper groups, and the selected newspaper groups cover a wide span of sectors, with specific sections designated to business and workplace affairs, it became apparent that a larger study of this phenomenon is required to achieve a more complete picture of the topic under study. Due to the importance of this research in developing one's understanding of the social dimension and social construction of the stress phenomenon, it would be effective to explore every newspaper group in South Africa. It is thus advised that further research be undertaken on this topic in relation to the remaining South African newspaper groups.

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, one limitation to this study was with regard to the analysis of the data. As a researcher, it would be unrealistic to attempt to qualitative analysis (?) objectively and without bias. Due to this subjective dimension, I felt that the use of multiple analyses is required and therefore believe having more than one researcher working on this project would increase the overall validity of the project.

The analysis and discussion/findings was extremely complex and time consuming and thus it would have been more effective to utilise another researcher. One can never eradicate bias completely. However, by working with another individual, new dimensions of the research that one would not have been aware of, would become apparent.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

To reiterate, this research project has three main aims: namely, to establish an understanding of the way in which stress as an organisational phenomenon is socially constructed, more specifically, to illustrate the role the media (Print Media) plays in shaping this understanding, and finally, to examine the way in which the construction of stress has changed with changes in South Africa's socio-political context. Thus it can be argued that the overall objective of this research project is to move beyond the majority of accounts of stress that reduce the stress experience to the level of the individual. In order to explore the role of the Print Media in the social construction of the organisational stress experience, a qualitative analysis of four South African newspaper groups has been conducted. The newspaper groups include the *Mail and Guardian, Sunday Times, Business Day* and all those newspapers that fall under the heading of the *Independent Newspaper Group*. Even though the sample has not covered all the newspaper groups within the South African context, it is sufficiently representative for the purpose of the study, and provides great insight into understanding the social construction of this phenomenon.

When examining literature on the topic of stress, and more specifically organisational stress, what becomes apparent is the pervasive nature of this phenomenon. Hobfoll (1998) contends, with regards to contemporary, mainly western society, that the topic of stress is one by which individuals are consumed. Besides an increase in research and reference to stress on a social level, stress on an organisational level is also on the increase (Fotinatos & Cooper, 2005; Jamil, 2004; Hart & Cooper, 2001). What also emerges when examining literature on the topic of stress is the lack of consensus

surrounding the definition of stress, and more specifically, organisational stress. Monat and Lazarus (1991) contend that even though the topic of stress is one that has been extensively researched and scrutinised, there seems to be a general lack of agreement on a universal definition of this phenomenon. However, even though little consensus exists, theories and models of stress have been developed in an attempt to understand and make sense of this phenomenon. Whether these theories relate to the individual or the organisation, they tend to place the individual at the centre of the stress experience. This focus could be critically argued to maintain a Western emphasis of the individual as 'master of their senses', rather than examining their existence as a social being (Hobfoll, 1998). In such a way, by focusing upon the individual in isolation from the social and cultural context in which the individual is found, the complexity of the stress experience is lost.

Drawing on the understandings of Hobfoll (1998), this research therefore aimed to move beyond these individualistic understandings to explore the bi-directional relationship between the individual and the social context. In such a way, surface level understandings of this phenomenon will be replaced with a deeper comprehension of the cultural, familial and other social factors that mediate and moderate the individual's experience of the stress phenomenon. It should be noted that this research project, like Hobfoll's (1998) argument, is not attempting to completely refute the experience of stress at the level of the individual, but is rather aimed at moving beyond the individual to explore the role of the social context in which the individual is found.

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx, as cited in, McLennan, 1975:40).

According to Marx (as cited in McLennan, 1975), individuals are social beings and therefore their perceptions are constructed by their experiences and the social context in which they are found. In a similar way, the phenomenon of stress, and more specifically organisational stress, is socially constructed. As stress has been acknowledged as a phenomenon, and a growing one within organisations (Dollard, 2003), it becomes important to understand how this growing phenomenon is socially constructed. Gorman and McLean (2003) argue that one needs to question the pervasive and influential nature of the media in shaping contemporary society's 'world view'. One such dimension of the media is that of the Print Media. The purpose of this research is therefore to illustrate the role the Print Media plays in shaping commonly held, everyday perceptions of the growing phenomenon of work-related stress.

The qualitative approach of this study aims to allow for an understanding of the organisational stress experience that moves beyond the level of the individual. This approach involves a thematic analysis of stress-related articles selected from the newspaper groups utilised in this study. In total, 267 newspaper articles have been collected and read through; however, only 139 are relevant for the purpose of this research. In order to make sense of the data, both 'theory-led' and 'inductive' thematic

analysis have been constructed (Hayes, 2000). From this analysis, three overarching themes have emerged, namely:

- Individual conceptualisations of stress

- Social/Organisational conceptualisations

- A critical theme – a move away from the norm

When analysing the articles, what has become apparent is that the majority of the articles provide accounts of organisational stress that are in line with dominant conceptualisations of this phenomenon. That is, the majority of the articles provide an extremely individualistic understanding of the stress experience. The stress experience also tends to be understood in line with stimulus and response based understandings in which the role of individual perception is neglected. In such a way, these understandings have not taken into account the role of the social and cultural context in shaping the individual's stress experience. The stress experience has been constructed as something out there, independent of the individual who is constructed as a passive recipient merely responding to stressful stimuli. Besides locating the stress experience at the level of the individual, the majority of the articles argue for the role of change at the level of the individual. In most cases, the newspaper articles negate the role of the social and organisation in the stress experience. Besides providing understandings of stress at the level of the individual, some articles include aspects of theories of stress that relate to the organisation. However, these understandings once again do not take into account the role of perception and the social in mediating the stress experience.

The organisational stress experience has also been constructed as increasing and inevitable and in turn, is justified. That is, by constructing experience as inevitable, the responsibility of the organisation has once again been negated. What also emerges in the newspaper articles is the pathologisation of the stress experience. By presenting the organisational stress experience as problematic and a disease, its management has been reduced to the level at which one would treat a medical illness. Therefore, the complexity of the stress experience remains the responsibility of the individual. The articles also emphasise the costs and benefits of stress at both the level of the individual and the organisation. What emerges from this construction is an emphasis on the costs of stress rather than the benefits. In the case of the individual, by emphasising the costs of organisational stress, the stress experience is once again problematised, while at the level of the organisation the financial costs of organisational stress are placed above the human costs. When it comes to the benefits of stress at both the level of the individual and organisation, what emerges is an attempt to justify the stress experience.

"Social constructionism insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (including ourselves) (Burr, 1995:3). It can therefore be argued that by acknowledging the role society plays in shaping understandings and experiences, one can therefore be more aware and in turn critical of the naturalness and taken-for-granted source of such understandings and experiences. One should however, note that acknowledgement does not guarantee this critical stance, and, as made evident in the majority of the newspaper articles, the understanding, experience and management of the organisational stress phenomenon is presented as

reality and a normal dimension of organisational life. However, there is a small group of articles that are critical and question this reality. These articles question the role of the organisation in the stress experience, highlight the role of the social context in the construction of individual's perception of stress, the motivation behind the use of organisational interventions, as well as the pathologisation of the stress experience as an individual symptom and not an organisational problem. In such a way, these articles represent a move away from those articles that merely present the organisational stress experience as a reality. These articles provide an extremely powerful opportunity; that is, by being critical of this reality, they provide individuals, employees, the chance to also become critical.

Fairclough (1995) contends that the messages and discourses set up in the Print Media "reflect the general concerns and interests of those in positions of power. If they didn't, they would have a difficult time surviving" (Fairclough, 1995:110). It can therefore be critically argued that the media can therefore be argued to exist within a complex network of power relationships, relationships that constrain as well as facilitate the messages that the media provides and disperses throughout society. This research therefore aims to critically explore the messages that the Print Media provides, pertaining to the organisational phenomenon of stress.

In conclusion, one can argue that this research has been able to explore in some detail the questions posed, that is:

1.   How does the media construct the stress experience?

- With specific relation to stress as an organisational phenomenon.

2. Is this construction in line with existing models/academic understanding, or is it more ambiguous?

However, even though this research was unable to explore the final research question:

3. How has the reporting of stress changed?

- Has it changed in relation to changes in the broader socio-political context?,

it has been able to extensively explore the social dimension of the phenomenon of organisational stress. The research was able to explore the manner in which the print media constructs the organisational phenomenon of stress, and the extent to which this construction is in line with existing models and understandings.

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Appendix A

Example of thematic analysis (pre-determined and emergent themes)

Colour code for pre-determined themes:

Turquoise – Stress as a response

Green – Stress as a stimulus

Orange – Transactional theory of stress

Red – Conceptualisations of stress in line with organisational theories of stress

Pink – Stress as an increasing problem within contemporary society, and more specifically in contemporary organisations; The Age of Stress

Yellow – Stress as a result of the changing organisational and social environment

Teal - The costs versus the benefits of stress

Colour code for emergent themes:

Blue – Intervention at the level of the individual

Red – Intervention at the level of the organisation

Teal – The homogenisation of the stress experience

Green – The pathologisation of the stress experience

Yellow – Stress is socially constructed as inevitable and desired (emergent

Pink – The justification of stress

Turquoise – Critical accounts

Business Day

(25-08-1994) Effective management of stress

"STRESS: is an inescapable part of the executive's daily lifestyle, but it can be healthy if managed effectively, says Cope Foundations spokesperson. "Stress is encountered every day and at every stage of human development. It is regarded as an integral part of life and is essential for personal growth and development". However, the spokesman says when stress becomes a hindrance and restricts normal living and peace of mind, it is considered severe."

-"The type of stress most executives encounter daily are noise, decisions, deadlines, meetings and strained interpersonal relationships. "Many executives also have to handle stressful situations outside the workplace, such as family problems, financial difficulties, divorce and illness." The combined effects can lead to reduction in work performance, insomnia, headaches, anxiety, nausea, depression, skin rashers, hypertension, ulcers and heart disease. "Add to this a feeling of not being able to cope with life, a persistent fear of losing or not being able to produce what is expected or not being successful, and a situation develops where the individual suffers from excessive wear and tear on the body and mind." This eventually leads to frustration, unhappiness and premature ageing, but the damage caused by the stress is dependent on how the executive lets it affect him.

Sunday Times

(19-02-1997) Stressed out? It can cost you your life.

One of South Africa's most respected company directors, Harold Serebro, has embarked on a mission to curtail one of the biggest problems facing South Africans - stress - and virtually ' first line of attack is the workplace.

Aware that intense stress can be a killer he has carefully outlined the danger signals - and those of muscle spasm which goes hand in hand with stress - to provide laymen with an easily understood programme to improve their lives. Serebro is the author of *Stress, and You* -a book which, since its publication late last year, has taken the corporate world by storm. Major companies have ordered copies for distribution among senior and middle management staff.

An unrelenting work pattern leads to chronic high blood pressure which can cause a sudden fatal stroke or heart attack (Org theories of stress). "The dangers of stress are recognised throughout the world, yet surprisingly little is known abut the diseases outside the medical profession," he says. "Work-associated stress, coupled with long hours on the job, is killing thousands of people in Japan". Businessmen and women in South Africa are increasingly suffering from the same "excessive stress" that prompts executives to "snap", losing control totally and finally collapsing mentally.

The current high crime rate, unemployment, the recent spate of retrenchments coupled with the perceived lack of personal safety has caused many South Africans to become stressed out. Research has shown that four in 10 South Africans between the ages of 24 and 64 will die because of their current lifestyles.

"Stress stalks its victims in the kindergarten, the school and in the home," he says. "Neither age, occupation, or gender, provides any immunity.

"Stress in the workplace is a daily reality for many employees," he says. "Senior management must recognise that it is a legitimate complaint and try to minimise it."

"He quotes research which shows that stress in the workplace often starts when an individual feels he does not fit into his environment, has the perception that he (or she) receives less praise or more criticism than others, is not recognised or promoted, has minimal responsibility and is afraid of retrenchment.

"Stress may be the spice of life for some, stimulating them to peak performance, but unrelenting stress can impair an individual's psychological, physical and social functioning."

Some businessmen with a jetset lifestyle may even become addicted to the excitement of stress.

But be warned, they could eventually develop spasm disease, then exhaustion, apathy and an anxiety tension state - and finally prolonged depression which may drive them to commit suicide.

So what to do about the problem? "Recognise the danger signals of stress. Discuss them fully with your general practitioner. Listen to his advice and rely on the help of family and friends so that you can find a solution," advises Serebro.

Mail and Guardian

(25-10-1996) Why working is bad for your health

"Work is a dangerous business. Every year, millions of people suffer ill health that is directly caused by, or made worse by, their jobs. And although hazardous occupations still carry the highest risk of injury, there is now growing evidence that even apparently safe, sedentary occupations may present a significant threat to health.

But as physical wok dangers are reduced – there has been a dramatic drop in the rate of work-related injuries and fatalities over the past two decades – they are more than matched by a growing and more subtle threat: to people's mental health. The European Community's 1992 report on European health and safety at work identified stress and back pain as the most common health problems.

After last year's landmark case, when social worker John Walker successfully sued his employers for his nervous breakdown brought on by stress, the HSE emphasised employer's legal responsibility for the mental as well as the physical health of their staff"- intervention at the level of the organisation

At the root of all this is a changing workplace. Between 1973 and 1993, employment in service sector occupations increased by nearly four million. "Workplace pressures have increased," says Malcolm Harrington, professor of occupational health at the Institute of Occupational Health, Birmingham University. "There are fewer people doing more work and longer hours – this is a macho idea that if you've left the company carpark by 7.30pm you're a wimp. We are living in a short-term contract world and people have a greater sense of job insecurity."

High-tech offices pile on the pressure. "It used to take a day or two for a memo to reach you – now we have instant e-mail, which demands an instant response," says organisational psychologist Dr Stephen Williams. Stimulus

These pressures manifest themselves in any number of ways: depression, anxiety, panic attacks, irritable bowel syndrome, fatigue and headaches. Last month the Institute of Management reported that every day 270 000 people take time off work owing to job-related stress – at an annual cost of $10,9-billion"

The old coping mechanisms – the drinking, the collegiate atmosphere where Bill helped Fred who wasn't managing very well – have gone. Companies have trimmed down, there's no one to take your problems to. The global market means that some people have to be in a high arousal state 24 hours a day."

What makes the current situation so alarming, according to Harrington, is that there is virtually no area of work that is unaffected. "It is getting worse," he says. "And the quick-fix reaction – send the employees on a stress management course or to see a counsellor – will no longer do." The answer, according to Williams, lies in good job design, improved

management and a work culture that enables people to admit to, and deal with, stress.
Critical

Independent Newspaper Group

Natal Witness (07-07-1994) Stress is a big problem for business

A survey of British companies show that a fifth attribute 50% of staff absenteeism to stress-related illnesses, and it costs the country £20 billion a year, says Professor Laurence Schlebusch....

Schlebusch has spent years of extensive study in an effort to help combat stress which destroys the body and the mind. He says there is no outright cure for stress but there are always ways of treating it."

His research has shown that South Africans have "swopped coping skills for pills"

Stress is caused by an initial inability to adapt to life events such as promotion, marriage, birth and divorce. "In modern society people have to stay and face the threat. They can't kill it or run away. This puts an unfair load on our bodies, as stress."

At the root of stress is a person's perception of a situation. It is this which determines a person's ability to adapt.

There are several ways of treating stress starting with self-awareness – what makes a person stress-prone or stress-resistant – and lifestyle management. This can be done by keeping a stress diary, being more assertive, practicing relaxation exercises, aiming for physical fitness, and a proper diet.