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KWAZULU-NATAL**

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**Discipline of Psychology
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities**

Gender & Leadership: The Perceptions & Experiences of Black women in Senior Leadership.

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree:

Master of Social Science

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation contains my own unaided work, with all citations, references and borrowed ideas being acknowledged. In addition, this dissertation has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination in another university.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the following people:

- First of all, my supervisor Mr. Dean Isaacs, for his commitment and dedication in guiding me throughout the research process. His assistance, support and encouragement are highly appreciated.
- My father and mother, who have given me consistent support throughout the entire period of my study.
- Ntuthuko Dlame and Nqobile Dlame, for their assistance in identifying research participants and organizing a venue for me for the interviews.

Abstract

Women experience the world of work vastly differently than men do. This occurs despite the mandate for equality, empowerment and diversity through various policies and legislation for the advancement of female participation in historically male-dominated occupations. Women continue to be subjected to prejudice and marginalisation in their functioning as leaders in senior roles, occupying positions that have been dominated by the male gender.

Literature on gender and leadership has primarily focused on gender differences between men and women's leadership styles as well as the existence of barriers to the advancement of women. This research has shown that due to these barriers, there is an under-representation of women in leadership positions. This research has been qualitative in nature, focusing on the personal experiences of Black women leaders, as well as their perceptions of gender dynamics within the organisational context. It becomes of interest how some women manage to advance into senior positions, despite research indicating that women continue to be faced with many obstacles in doing so.

This study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of Black South African female senior managers with regard to gender and leadership roles. The objectives of the study were to explore the perceptions of Black South African women based on gender roles and leadership, their experiences in leadership positions, their home and family lives and notions of gender stereotypes and prejudice.

An exploratory qualitative framework and purposive sampling methods were used. Five Black female individuals with at least a year of experience in a leadership position in the private sector who were based in the Kwazulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces of South Africa were part of the study. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used in collecting data and an interview guide containing open-ended questions was used in guiding the interview process.

Braun and Clarke's Six Step Method of Thematic Analysis was used and themes that emerged were coordinated and coded accordingly. Participants identified certain characteristics that they believed are attributed to leaders and were also of the opinion that women and men display different types of leadership styles while at the same time sharing how they approached their

leadership positions. The participants also identified various socio-cultural and organisational barriers that they viewed as preventing women from advancing to leadership positions.

The participants shared anecdotes with regard to work/life balance and the various strategies that they employed in maintaining this. The participants made use of support structures composed of various individuals who provided support. Finally, the participants provided advice and strategies that could be used in advancing women's careers as well as improving the representation of women in leadership positions.

Key words: Marginalisation, gender dynamics, prejudice, barriers, leadership, stereotypes, equality, empowerment

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Historical Context: Women in the Workplace

Throughout several decades, there has been a proliferation of research devoted to women in leadership roles. The majority of this research has focused on gender inequality (England et al., 2020; Ruppannner, 2020), sex segregation (Cech, 2013), gender bias in hiring processes (Yakowicz, 2014), the glass ceiling (Broadridge & Weyer, 2007; Jones & palmer, 2011), career barriers (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013), discrimination (Schwanke, 2013), stereotyping (Naurert, 2011), social justice (Phendla, 2008) and empowerment of women (Alimo-Metcalf, 2010; Duflo, 2011).

The importance of investigating the experiences of women in leadership is evidenced by the number of studies that have been undertaken in various countries such as France and Turkey (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013), Pakistan (Arifeen, 2010), Sweden (Baxter & Wright, 2000), France (Evans, 2010), China (Huang et al., 2010), Kenya (Kirai & Mukulwa, 2012; Odhiambo, 2011), Kenya (Lukaka, 2013), Nigeria (Okoji, 2014), Lebanon (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010), Greece (Mikail, 2006), the U.K. (Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009) and South Africa (Motsa, 2016; Person et al, 2014).

Due to the pervasiveness of women's under-representation, it is not surprising to note that research has been conducted to determine how women experience challenges in leadership roles. These locales range from accounting (Hinson et al., 2006), banking (Mathur-Helm, 2006), corporate boardrooms (Amidu & Abor, 2006; April et al., 2006), the civil service (Omar & Ogenyi, 2004), the public sector (Maseko, 2013), higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; de Klerk & Radloff, 2010; Herbst & Conradie, 2011; Machika, 2014) and within the telecommunications industry (Shangase & Proches, 2014).

In spite of the South African Government introducing various labour laws, legislation and policies post- democracy, gender inequality continues to prevail in corporate organizations, with an increasing number of female leaders leaving their roles as leaders for more 'feminine' roles. According to Mathur- Helm (2016), only twenty nine percent of senior roles in South Africa are filled by women and one in five local businesses continue to have no women working within senior positions. Therefore, this study intends to highlight the lived experiences of Black

female senior managers and the drawbacks that they may face in a male-dominated private industry, within the South African context.

Empirical research is significant to understand the prevailing issues that perpetuate gender inequality in various occupations. For the purpose of this study, the experiences of Black female senior managers were explored to uncover the narratives, perceptions and lived experiences of female leaders and the ways in which they achieve professional growth in an industry that propagates gender inequality. It is fundamental that Black women and the private business sector are studied to unravel the reasons why Black women are in the minority within the business world. With that being noted, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge that attempts to address gender inequality within the male-dominated private sector. Therefore, the focus of this study was to unpack the narratives and experiences of female senior managers in order to understand their experiences of leadership in corporate roles. Despite the considerable progress that Africa has made in raising women's representation at high level management positions, African governments and companies continue to lack the full benefits of gender-diverse leadership teams (Bornman, 2019).

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of Black female senior managers concerning gender and leadership. The research sought to identify and emphasise the challenges that Black women in senior management encounter with regard to advancing to leadership positions which will ultimately provide a comprehensive understanding of the contributing factors that lead to the under-representation of women in senior positions. This will be emphasised through the lens of intersectionality as the theoretical framework.

The inclusion of Black women in leadership and positions of power in the private sector was motivated by the notion that corporate organizations play an instrumental role in driving sustainable inclusive growth (Dillard, 2018). In this vein, private companies hold themselves socially accountable for creating social transformation through the business model that they adopt. With that being said, the study sought to understand the inhibiting factors faced by those companies that have not completely succeeded in advancing Black women into leadership roles (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018).

Although numerous research studies on gender and leadership exist (Ndinda & Ndhlovu, 2018), this research sought to yield a contemporary account of the perceptions and experiences of female leaders, due to this being a dynamic, constantly evolving phenomenon. This study

sought to gain a meaningful understanding of approaches adopted by female leaders categorised as falling in the 'Black' demographic, that have advanced into senior leadership in the context of gender dynamics. The study additionally sought to explore the forces that inhibit the progression of Black women into senior leadership. The researcher wished to render data that would appeal to change agents and developers of policy with the aim of redressing the status quo, within the South African context.

1.2 Research Questions

The study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- What are the prevailing perceptions regarding gender and leadership?
- How do systemic factors influence the career experiences of Black women leaders?
- How do Black women in leadership navigate through barriers into leadership roles?

1.3 Research objectives

One of the major objectives of the study is to uncover the key challenges that Black women in senior management encounter in advancing to senior leadership positions, resulting in the underrepresentation of Black women in senior positions. In addition, the study surfaced new insights into how private organizations have progressed Black women into senior leadership roles. The study established new insights into how private organizations can facilitate the advancement of Black women into senior leadership positions. The researcher firmly believes that this study is needed for increased social advancement within the private business sector, given South Africa's history of inequality and exclusion. The objectives of the research were as follows:

- Obtain a Black (African, Coloured & Indian) female perspective with regards to what being a leader entails.
- Explore the extent to which private organizations have progressed towards the advancement of Black women into senior and leadership positions.

- Identify the key factors that obstruct the advancement of Black women into leadership roles and understand the attitudes of Black female leaders towards these inhibiting factors
- Investigate the benefits of endorsing gender-balanced leadership and the ramifications of not promoting gender-balanced leadership

Definition of terms

The terms below are defined in the context of the current study:

Barrier: a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress (Oxford Dictionary). In the context of this study we refer to barriers as obstacles that prevent Black women from holding or being promoted to senior management roles.

Bias: Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair (Oxford Dictionary).

Career advancement: Refers to the upwards progression during an individual's career journey. It can also refer to an employee getting more responsibility from his or her employer.

Challenge: a task or situation that test someone's ability (Oxford Dictionary). In the next chapters the researcher will refer to challenges as difficulties that female employees face during their career journey and advancement to higher positions.

Concrete ceiling: those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management level positions (Kiaye & Singh, 2013).

Femininity: Character traits linked with softness, affectionate, gentle and sympathetic, and predominantly associated with the female sex (McDermott, 2016).

Gender: Refers to masculinity and femininity. The qualities and characteristics that society ascribes to each sex. It is the social attributes and opportunities associated with sex and the relationships between women and men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context (United Nations, 2011).

Gender inequality: This occurs when women and men do not enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and entitlements in all facets of life.

Gender roles: Behaviours, tasks and responsibilities that society deems appropriate for men, women, boys and girls (United Nations, 2011).

Glass ceiling: Refers to an impenetrable yet invisible barrier that keeps qualified individuals, who are part of a race or gender minority, from ascending to higher level positions in companies and organizations of all shapes and sizes, simply because of their race or gender (Kiaye & Singh, 2013).

Leadership: In this study, leadership will be defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal

Masculinity: Character traits associated with strength, assertiveness, rigour, and independence that are predominantly associated with the male sex (McDermott, 2016).

Organizational culture: Pattern of beliefs, values, and learned ways of coping with experience that have developed during the course of an organisation's history, and which tend to manifest in its material arrangements and in the behaviours of its members.

Previously disadvantaged groups: People who were predominantly marginalised from accessing human rights and liberties, such as black people, all women and people with disabilities.

Transformation: Substantive changes in an organisation that reflect a true representation of men and women, that is fair and equal.

Underrepresented groups: Race and/or gender groups who, are not sufficiently represented, their numbers is below the required target in a specific occupational level.

Women's empowerment: The ability of women to control their own destiny, that is to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance for and to themselves and their families (Luckeath-Rovers, 2013).

1.8 Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides the framework and overview of the research paper. It also provides the significance and rationale of the study. serves as an introduction to the thesis. It consists of background to and the objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and previous empirical evidence to support the research study. The literature examines topics such as the glass ceiling, the challenges women are faced with, motivating factors that help women persevere in a male-dominant industry, as well as the issues impacting the advancement of women into senior management roles.

Chapter 3 This chapter focuses on the implemented methodology in the study. The methodological framework, study participants, data collection, procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 Presents the research findings and key themes. In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed. An in depth analysis of the identified thematic categories, primary themes and related secondary themes will be provided.

Chapter 5 Presents the limitations and conclusions of the overall research. Furthermore, recommendations for future research are provided.

The final section contains the referencing or list of sources, appendices, tables, and figures.

1.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 1 looked at the background to the research study. The chapter consisted of the research problem, the research aim/rationale, the research questions, the research objectives and the division of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The South African Constitution grants women a multitude of rights. Most importantly, the Bill of Rights gives women the right to equality. The Equality Clause declares that no person may be discriminated against on a number of grounds, including things like their sex and gender (Berry, 2003). Equality between men and women is one of the most important aims of the Constitution. The Constitution also created a Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) to act as an overseer to ensure that women are not discriminated against (Aschman, 2014). The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) was additionally developed within the Constitution to assist individuals who have been discriminated against (Klaaren, 2005).

The South African Constitution encompasses the right to equality and non-prejudice. It is also signatory to a number of protocols that aim to redress inequalities, and ultimately achieve gender equality, which the state is obliged to implement. Despite this, women have not advanced as rapidly in terms of socioeconomic empowerment and gender equality. The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP), which is a strategic effort to mitigate exclusion and inequality in South Africa by 2030, identifies women as the most affected by inequality and exclusion and strives to ameliorate this (Mwagiru, 2019).

Within the business context, women have faced an uphill battle of having to prove their competence and proficiency on the basis of male standards, which is primarily characterised as aggressive rather than being emotional (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Important to note is that the challenge of women advancing and excelling in senior leadership is further obstructed by the notion that males are 'born leaders' (Dosunmu & Dichaba, 2019). This accounts for why Black women are steadily concentrated in positions with reduced decision-making power and authority in comparison to men. There are fewer women within the workplace that occupy higher level management positions (Doubell & Struwig, 2014). This contradicts the principles of corporate responsibility which are that of organisations to strive to make positive and valuable contributions in all aspects of society including socioeconomic empowerment. (Dlanjwa, 2018).

The advancement of Black women is widely regarded as a result of the new political dispensation introduced in 1994, which brought the rights of women to the forefront of the workplace. The new democratic South Africa which is dubbed as a South Africa for all of those

who live in it regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, culture and religion, endorses the ideals of equality, equity, non-discrimination as well as non-prejudice within the workplace and in broader society (Ndinda & Ndhlovu, 2018). The abolishment of apartheid meant that previously disadvantaged groups such as women and Blacks (African, Indian & Coloured) were accommodated through legislation such as the Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998 (EEA) and Affirmative Action in order to redress the injustices of the apartheid regime (Samuel & Mokoaleli, 2017).

Although the implementation of the EEA and Affirmative Action policy in post-apartheid South Africa has resulted in an increase of Black women participating in the labour market, progress is unsatisfactory. This is due to the presence of a small-scale of Black women in leadership and senior management positions within the current corporate context (Bosch, van der Linde & Barit, 2020). “In the corporate sector in 2020, there were 39831 people in top management. Of these, 29880 were white males whilst 9951 were black males. There were 12221 women in top management, and of these 5109 were black and 7112 were white. There were 77444 males in senior management positions. Of these, white males constituted 48741 and black males constituted 28703. There were 40256 women in senior management positions, of whom 16901 were black and 23355 were white” (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021, p5). The aforementioned statistics illustrate the under-representation of Black women in senior leadership roles. This indicated that the objectives of the post-apartheid government, which are to promote fair treatment and equal opportunity in the labour force, are yet to be achieved.

In other instances, women are more qualified and credible for a senior management position in comparison to their male counterparts but are less likely to be appointed to a leadership position due to a high proportion of men being the gatekeepers into the senior management domain regardless of policy and legislation (Viviers, Mans-Kemp & Fawcett, 2017). It could be argued that those women that manage to break through the ‘glass-ceiling’, occupying a leadership role such as senior management are solely occupying leadership positions due to strict adherence to labour law and policy (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

The influence of Queen Bee Syndrome within the workplace

The ‘queen bee syndrome’ is a term that has been used to make reference to women who are actively opposed to any changes in traditional sex roles (Zandria, Junior & Hennie, 2020). The

queen bee syndrome continues to feature in the workplace whereby women are unwilling to create opportunities for each other (Braun et al, 2017) and not creating internal networks among themselves to assist each other with climbing up the corporate ladder. A study by Brinded (2017), found that female employees generally would prefer to work with a male manager due to the negative characteristics of competitiveness, emotionality and jealousy that are associated with the female leaders they have worked with. Therefore, the researcher argues that women hinder their own development within the workplace with regard to occupying senior-level positions which thus serves to promote and propel the development of men within these roles.

Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) conducted a study of the 'queen bee syndrome' in South Africa. The core findings of the study indicated that the reluctance of executive women to promote other women in the workplace did indeed exist. The executive women who were interviewed in the study by Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) felt that their role in the organisation involved delivering on targets and that women occupying positions in middle management would need to work their way up to senior management - just as they had done so. The consequences of the existence of the 'queen bee syndrome' were that women occupying middle management positions were unable to find mentors within their organisations and the possibility of forming a 'girls' network' whereby women empowerment could be promoted, was reduced (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011). The researcher avers that this could provide an explanation as to why Black women continue to be underrepresented within leadership positions. Zandria, Junior & Hennie (2020) highlights that in the South African context, the 'Queen Bee Syndrome' is described as the manner in which women knowingly act to hinder the promotion of female subordinates. This occurs by means of analysing their female subordinate's performance more critically than that of their male subordinates (Molatseli-Tsiane, 2018). The impact of the 'queen bee syndrome' should not be taken lightly, as it has the potential to impede national and organisational gender equality progress. It is important for women to know and understand the different types of women who impede their advancement and success, and act strategically with this knowledge in mind. Although women fight for gender equality, it is them too who are guilty of discrimination against other women. Females in the workplace should view working together as a collaboration rather than a competition.

The importance of women in leadership

According to Bosch, van der Linde & Barit (2020), female leaders may be more adept than male leaders to be able to cope with the demands of leading high performance and cross-functional teams that are highly specialised, goal-oriented and innovative so as to increase productivity via means of promoting teamwork and co-operation amongst staff. Bornman (2019) indicated that women as leaders possessed characteristics that are connected to their identity and self-construct, whereby they have the inherent ability to facilitate participative communication and cooperative learning amongst the teams that they are responsible for.

Instituting more women at higher levels of leadership introduces diverse perspectives and new ways to manage problems, in addition to contributing to promoting gender equality and inclusivity within the workplace. Diversity is integral for the development and management of a successful organisation. Furthermore, diversity permits companies and public entities to tap into the entire talent pool. This means that diversity would uncover male and female individuals that possess specific skill sets to benefit the organisation. According to (Borisova & Sterkhova, 2012, p1) “women in high- level positions positively influence the company’s performance. Organizations that institute appropriate measures and assist skilled women with climbing up the corporate ladder will gain a decisive competitive edge”. Thus, the researcher argues that the skills of women should not be ignored in respect of their gender, in favour of promoting men, as this would result in a disservice to the organisation as a whole.

The manner in which employees work in the twenty- first century is evolving at a rapid pace due to the digitization of the workplace in which communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing across the organization are imperative for high performance (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Executives of many organisations have begun to understand that gender diversity in business management is crucial for achieving high performance. However, ensuring gender diversity in high-level management rarely becomes a strategic priority of a company. Research suggests that many African organizations do not take gender issues seriously enough, with only one in three companies in the private sector citing gender diversity as a priority for appointing a CEO (Viviers et al., 2017). The female leaders of the modern day that have progressed to senior leadership may have advanced through a combination of opportunity and drive rather than through a coordinated corporate effort to promote gender diversity.

Johansen (2007) conducted a study on the effect of strategic female managers on organisational performance. The study defined strategic approaches that women tend to adopt as either defensive or reactive. Defenders work at ensuring that the product (or service) being delivered is done in the most efficient manner, whereas reactors will act only when there is pressure on them to effect a change. The extent to which women can positively impact performance is strongly dependent on the strategy that they select. The results of Johansen's study show that women have a positive influence on organisational performance. This impact is viewed where the defender strategy (which is concerned mainly with the improvement of processes) is employed. Paying attention to this process is a strength that many women add to organisations. Women are also successful in using the prospecting strategy and were more effective at it than the men in the study (Rosette, de Leon, Koval & Harrison, 2018). However, the researcher considers that men could possibly possess characteristics of a similar nature and this cannot be discounted in regard to this study. Thus, a gnawing question is proposed, "would men be unfairly discriminated against for the purpose of increased gender inclusivity of women?"

Positioning women within senior level functions that they have earned on the basis of merit can deter business issues such as talent and skill capitalisation opportunity loss, negative employee views on company culture and values, and a lack of mentors for women working within lower level positions throughout the organisation (Hoobler et al., 2011). The appointment of women as high-level leaders within their organisation displays social responsibility, power legitimacy, equal representation, and business advantages, such as financial gain, innovation, high productivity, and improvements in decision making (Visser, 2011). The researcher thus avers that the appointment of women to high-level positions within organisations would create an organisation that blooms with diversity and one that encourages productivity and collaboration. This means that increasing the number of women within the workforce as a whole, with specific reference to appointing female leaders would positively contribute to organisations within South Africa and boost the economic development of the country as a whole. The researcher argues that the aforementioned positive cyclical effect of sorts could only become a reality with the collaboration and co-operation of both males and females within the workplace, upon the basis of mutual respect.

Organisations possess a social responsibility which they are obligated to maintain, this means that these organisations have a duty to commit to and operate within a manner that is honourable, provides good employee working conditions, encourages diversity, promotes sustainable development, as well as social and environmental protection, and provides support

to philanthropic endeavours within their local communities (Calkin, 2016; Gamble et al., 2019). Permitting women to ascend into deserved senior level positions encourages the necessary diversity required to comply with social responsibility in regard to organisations. In recent years, companies have taken notice to the need to increase their social responsibility, and how important shareholder and employee interests are (Visser, 2011). With this realization, it is also realized that companies have become more susceptible to public judgement and scrutiny when they do not adhere to their social duties. Creating clear and consistent policies that encourage the promotion of women into senior leadership creates opportunities for companies to fulfill their social responsibilities (Visser, 2011).

The concept of women as part of senior leadership is strengthened by the principle that there is legitimacy behind decision making within the current society when there are equal parts that make up the decision making group (Visser, 2011). This indicates that in order for corporate decisions to be legitimate, both men and women should be equally represented within the group of decision-making bodies during the decision-making processes. It is theorized that, with this dynamic, the decisions are more likely to be accepted by the affecting peers if there is equal representation in the group of individuals behind the made decisions (Visser, 2011). Decision making groups that contain diverse members are more effective, accurate, and ethical than individual judgement or groups that lack diversity, providing access to diverse external stakeholders and more channels for information (Yang et al., 2017).

The Concrete-Ceiling Effect

In comparison to the glass ceiling, which can be understood as an invisible barrier that prevents women from advancing upwards within organisations, the concrete ceiling is described as a more difficult barrier for black female professionals to break through (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). In comparison to their white and male counterparts, Black women encounter challenges associated with both race and gender throughout their careers (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Some have referred to this phenomenon as ‘double jeopardy’ whereby Black women experience negative stereotypes because they are neither white nor male (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). This form of double jeopardy is referred to as gendered racism (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). Consequently, this particular group of females are likely to experience a double outsider status as they are neither share gender nor colour with the majority of their colleagues (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). The dual identity of being both black and female often

results in black female professionals becoming somewhat invisible within the organisation. Nevertheless, this invisibility or lack of individualism results in black female professionals' voices falling on deaf ears and results in these individuals becoming increasingly marginalised relative to their white female and black male counterparts (Glass & Cook, 2016).

According to Reynolds–Dobbs, Thomas and Harrison (2008), the ‘superwoman’ is a status that is often given to black females who successfully manage to break through the concrete ceiling. This creates an expectation within black female professionals to work twice as hard as their male and female counterparts and often results in the need to excessively overachieve (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Consequently, they tend to struggle with establishing boundaries when it comes to additional work and doubt their abilities and talents when they are not able to meet these unrealistic goals (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The researcher argues that this is a double-edged sword of sorts as the pursuit of leadership positions by females could result in stress, burnout and a diminished sense of self-esteem. This in turn could negatively affect the performance of Black women within the workplace, thereby negating the positive effects that these individuals were hired to promote and further achieve success within the organisation. The researcher proposes a pertinent question, “how could the effects of this double-edged sword be avoided within the organisation whilst considering both female employees, male employees and the prosperity of the organisation as a whole?” This argument is explicated upon below.

Active Encouragement and Support

Women executives that do not receive support and encouragement are more likely to experience interpersonal stress and conflict, placing them in a position to fail and fall over the glass cliff (Sabharwal, 2015). According to Kossek & Buzzanell (2018), women who receive support additionally receive power, self-efficacy, and the confidence needed to turn negative stereotypical threats into that of an ‘I will prove you wrong’ mindset (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Support creates confidence in leadership abilities, which situates women in favourable positions so as to disconfirm with gender leadership stereotypes – therefore creating motivation, better performance, and empowerment (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

Empowerment is the core goal of achieving equality as opposed to power and control (Sabharwal, 2015). Organisations become increasingly successful when women executives feel empowered, valued for their contributions, a sense of personal belonging, and that they are given the opportunity to reach their full potential (Sabharwal, 2015). Research (Samuel & Mokoaleli, 2017) has shown that empowerment has a significant impact on job performance, employee turnover, and job satisfaction (Sabharwal, 2015). Surawicz (2016) further suggested that companies encourage empowerment by developing programs that include the mentoring of women and the encouragement of open dialogue with one another and networking. The researcher argues that this would reduce the occurrence and/or development of 'Queen Bee Syndrome' that was explored within a prior section of this review. Thus, women would empower, guide and comfort each other within the workplace so as to promote harmony amongst themselves and command the respect and co-operation of men within the organisation. The researcher avers that this would serve to level the playing field in terms of gender inequality within organisations.

Tokenism

Black women who successfully reach senior leadership positions are likely to experience tokenism (Glass & Cook, 2016). Tokenism is the practice of making a symbolic action by hiring a small number of individuals from under-represented groups to create an appearance of racial or gender equality within the workplace so as to create the appearance of equality within the workplace (Lafuente & Vaillant, 2019). Typically, because of their minority status in most organisations, black women tend to occupy an outsider-within stance (Jones, Hwang, & Bustamante, 2015). As a result, they are likely to experience heightened levels of visibility, scrutiny and performance pressures (Glass & Cook, 2016). Kanter (1977) conducted a study in a United States -based industrial corporation that had a salesforce of 300 staff, 20 of whom were women. A theoretical framework was developed that considered the perception tendencies that determine the interaction dynamics between dominants and tokens and the latter's response to these. The findings of the aforementioned scholar were that tokenism has negative personal consequences for the tokens in that the tokens are highly visible and easily recognised. Their heightened or exaggerated visibility exerts pressure on these women to perform well. The differences between the dominants and tokens are exaggerated, a phenomenon also known as polarisation. The tokens feel isolated from informal social and professional networks and they feel that they are stereotyped into their roles due to their gender.

The Work-Life Balance Roles of Women

Work-life balance speaks to the intersection of work and personal life and the two are intertwined in both a positive and a negative light (Greenhaus et al, 2010). If not well managed, work responsibilities can interfere with family life. Literature on gender and leadership argues that Black women in senior and leadership roles feel as though they are ‘suffocated’ in positions of power that have historically been occupied by white males because their role as leaders compels them to delay having children and seek to become married at a later stage of life. This group of women are more likely to become divorced as they feel as though they have to choose and concentrate on their careers as opposed to their personal lives. According to Viviers et al. (2017), some women surrender their careers as leaders to focus on raising their children. This strongly suggests that there is a widespread and global issue of work-life balance (Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2018). However, this is not always the case and many women are able to manage a work-life balance effectively (Basuil, Manegold & Casper, 2016).

Organisations should serve to assist employees with balancing their work commitments and family responsibilities. There are several areas that have been identified whereby organisations could perform an integral role in this. They can provide or assist with dependent care (such as providing childcare facilities at the workplace or nearby) or alternatively assist with the cost of child and elderly care so that employees could leave their dependants in a place where adequate care is provided. Organisations can also provide flexible work arrangements as well as an environment (through family-friendly policies) that promotes an organisational culture that is supportive toward being a committed employee and an equally committed parent or elderly caregiver (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Employees also have a role to play in achieving a work-life balance. Greenhaus et al (2010) identified some of the issues that must be addressed by employees themselves. These include being clear on the extent to which work commitments could impact family life and communicating the boundaries to both the employer and the family. If an employer views that a worker is prepared to work long hours and come in over the weekends, they will assume that the employee has no problems with that kind of arrangement (Abstein and Spieth, 2014).

Employers are not likely to expect that of employees who make their boundaries clear from the start such as at the interview stage. The employee also needs to ensure that the family understands their career expectations and that career prospects and goals are shared, especially with their partners. Should this occur, the family could engage co-operatively so as to support the career aspirants and hold them accountable should they re-negotiate on the initial agreed-upon extent to which work could affect the life of the family. Although gender roles no longer clearly define who is responsible for home care and who is responsible for job duties, some research shows that the conflict between family and work-life appears to be a greater problem for women than for men. According to a study by Oosthuizen, Coetzee & Munro (2016), women were found to be decreasingly satisfied with their career opportunities, with their job, and their work-life balance in general in comparison to their male colleagues - who report higher job and life satisfaction levels and lower work-related stress issues. Usually, women have to work harder than men if they want to reach higher positions (the so-called “glass ceiling” and “gender segregation”). In turn, working harder leads to an increased conflict between work and life, and occupying a senior leadership position can lead to a lower work-life balance. This suggests that work-life balance and career opportunities are linked, in the context of female leaders. Therefore, it is presumable that organizational policies aimed at alleviating the demands of family and work that are aimed at making their employees achieve a good level of work-life balance, should also prioritize the career advancements of women (Mwagiru, 2019).

Straub (2007) conducted a study which aimed to identify the level of involvement that companies within Europe have in the work-life balance of their employees, and then to measure the extent to which these policies have increased the career advancement of women into senior management positions. The findings revealed that companies in Europe have work-family practices such as flexitime, child care services and reduced working hours which are in place to help to eliminate the structural barriers on women’s career advancement (Straub, 2007). As noted by Dreyer (2003), women’s preferences in terms of work differ from men when it comes to their work schedules. Mothers who work are likely to prefer working part-time, telecommuting and having flexible work schedules in order to assist them with accommodating their various family responsibilities (Dreyer, 2003). O’Connor (2005) recommended that organisations need to focus on work-family issues and how inadequate childcare arrangements have a negative impact on the work and family lives of their employees.

Individual Barriers

At an individual level, life stage issues and lower levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy are key factors that affect women aspiring to leadership positions (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2015). Studies have shown that women in general tend to possess lower levels of confidence than men and this occurrence has been referred to as the 'confidence gap' (O'Neil et al., 2015). In fact, men tend to overestimate their capabilities whilst women on the other hand underestimate their abilities (O'Neil et al., 2015). Due to these low levels of self-confidence and efficacy women believe that they would have to outperform their male counterparts in order to be successful (O'Neil et al., 2015). This often leads to stress, burnout and ultimately job dissatisfaction (Nakazwe-Masiya, Price, & Hofmeyr, 2017). Furthermore, women are likely to have an enhanced sense of accountability and often attribute a lack of confidence or career challenges to deficiencies within themselves instead of considering the impact of other factors such as organisational factors (O'Neil et al., 2015).

The imposter phenomenon has also been associated with low levels of self-confidence. Commonly found within high performers, it refers to an internal state of mind that involves feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt despite consistent evidence of success (Nakazwe-Masiya et al., 2017). As a result, this could become a barrier to promotion within organisations (Nakazwe-Masiya et al., 2017). In comparison to males, females are more likely to be affected by the imposter phenomenon as they firstly, often feel the pressure to successfully juggle multiple roles at home and work and secondly have to manage the tension between their feminine characteristics and the expected masculine leadership traits that society dictates (Nakazwe-Masiya et al., 2017). Females are additionally more likely to attribute their success to external factors such as luck or timing and failure to deficiencies within themselves (O'Neil et al., 2015). Furthermore, female professionals are more perceptive of the potential challenges that they may experience with subordinates (Vial, Napier, & Brescoll, 2016). Specifically, with regards to the acceptance of their leadership and their ability to influence. As a result, female professionals may shy away from leadership opportunities, to their ultimate detriment (Vial et al., 2016).

Social Networks, Mentoring and Sponsorship

Exclusion from informal and professional networks and the lack of role models and mentors are some of the interpersonal factors that obstruct the advancement of women within organisations (Sabharwal, 2015). Building social capital within organisations is critical in increasing career advancement and authority (Carbajal, 2018). With this in mind, networking is recognized as the most critical component with regard to building social capital (Carbajal, 2018).

According to Eagly and Carli (2007), time constraints are one of the reasons that prevent women from building social networks within the workplace, driven by the fact that they have managed both work and family commitments. As result women may not invest the required amount of time in building social capital within their organisations which has been proven to impact their advancement (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Substantiation of this can be found in previous research that corroborated that men are more likely to use social networks in order to progress whilst women are more reliant on traditional methods (Hoobler et al., 2014). Benefits of these social networks include providing guidance, coaching, feedback, protection and opportunities to influence key stakeholders (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). However, even when time is sufficient, female professionals often struggle to build effective social networks within male-dominated organisations, commonly referred to as the ‘boys club’, as most activities within these clubs tend to be masculine in nature (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In such cases, female professionals often feel that they don’t fit into the organisational culture (Hoobler et al., 2014). Furthermore, gender stereotypes have been associated with how women participate in these social networks (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). In order to avoid being viewed as status-seeking or self-promoting, women have commonly restrained themselves in these settings (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016)

Mentorship has also been identified as a crucial enabler to female leadership development. Similar to the social networks mentioned, benefits include career advice, emotional support and greater job satisfaction (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010). However, although critical women may struggle to identify with male mentors and female leaders in senior positions are often in short supply (Carbajal, 2018). Whilst the benefits of mentorship are clearly understood it does not always translate into promotion. Sponsorship on the other hand has been identified as an effective mechanism in regard to career advancement (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

According to Bell (1992), a sponsor is defined as “a senior manager within a company who advocates a junior employee’s advancement” (Bell, 1992, p. 152). White males were identified as the most common sponsors of women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Whilst on the surface this may seem confusing it is most likely driven by the fact that white males tend to dominate most leadership positions within organisations (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Social Identity

One cannot explore the female leadership journey without examining social identity. Social identity is based on the premise that “a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s)” (Hogg, 2020). “The central hypothesis of social identity is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image (Treppe, 2013). To restore a satisfactory social identity, people engage in certain processes and strategies. SIT postulates three possible alternatives: individual mobility, social competition, and social creativity. The strategy adopted depends on the perceived legitimacy of the intergroup relation, its perceived stability, and the perceived permeability of group boundaries (Mutezo, 2015).

Individual mobility is easier if group boundaries are permeable: for example, if it is possible to leave one's group and become a member of the outgroup, or if it is possible to achieve higher status individually. According to SIT, individual mobility is defined as leaving or dissociating oneself psychologically from an ingroup and is the preferred strategy used by members of low-status groups which are Black women in leadership in this instance. In the workplace, for example, women who perceive a “glass ceiling” may believe that the best strategy for advancing individually is to act as “one of the boys”. Women that have thrived in senior leadership have reached positive social identities through such strategies by denying that their gender is fundamental to their social identity, considering themselves in terms of male standards, and adopting male roles and behaviours to gain prestige (Hogg, van Knippenberg & Rast III, 2012). As a result, self-esteem can become more positive.

In comparison to other strategies, social competition is a more defiant approach that challenges the status-quo, and is more likely to produce social conflict and hostility between the in-group and out-group. Social competition is more likely, and individual mobility less likely, when people are highly identified within a group. People strongly identified with a disadvantaged

group tend to remain loyal to it, even when given the possibility of leaving it on behalf of an advantaged group. The structural preconditions for social competition are that the intergroup relation is perceived as illegitimate and unstable. The third strategy, social creativity, is more likely if the intergroup relation is perceived as stable and legitimate. Applying this strategy is often based on changing the value attributed to the ingroup. Individuals attempt to recover the ingroup's value by disregarding the merits of the outgroup or by emphasizing the importance of the positive virtues of the ingroup. Social creativity and social competition are more likely when people believe that group boundaries are impermeable (you need at least three references in this paragraph).

In the context of women in leadership, women can develop a negative social identity based on the realization that women have less successful careers than men in leadership. Women should thus be motivated to regain a positive social identity by embracing any of the three identity-management strategies. Scheifele, Ehrke, Viladot, Van Laar & Steffens (2021); examined how the perceived legitimacy of gender discrimination and its pervasiveness interact to motivate or undermine collective behavior. Women in academia had lower collective-action intentions when discrimination was perceived as legitimate and pervasive compared to rare (Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, Garza, & Mewse, 2011). Complementary results were obtained when examining the interest of women to engage in mentoring. Perceived illegitimacy of gender discrimination motivated women to engage in mentoring and to see mentoring as a collective strategy. This was pronounced when gender discrimination was perceived as pervasive (reference).

Implicit Bias

Research (Pritlove, Juando-Prats, Ala-Leppilampi & Parsons, 2019) focusing on conscious or deliberate biases toward women, particularly in workplace settings, has led to the study of unconscious bias. Unconscious gender bias (also referred to as implicit or second-generation gender bias) occurs “when a person consciously rejects gender stereotypes but still unconsciously makes evaluations based on stereotypes” (American Association of University Women, 2016, p. 24). Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) define it as “the powerful yet often invisible barriers to women’s advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favour men”.

Researchers are finding that an awareness of unconscious bias can help leaders fundamentally rethink the way their organizations approach strategic decision making, organisational culture and inclusion. Addressing bias begins with becoming aware of those biases both externally (e.g., organizational practices, individual actions) and internally (i.e., gender bias within oneself) (Madsen, 2017). Ross (2014) argued that even people who view themselves as progressive on gender issues and dynamics, including women themselves, have hidden gender-based biases. One of the most common methods of assessing unconscious gender bias at work is to gather data on people's experiences. A perception survey of women professionals in science, technology, engineering and mathematics conducted within Australia found that 70 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that unconscious bias had negatively impacted their career advancement, and sixty per cent agreed or strongly agreed that it had negatively impacted their earnings. Ernst and Young conducted a perception survey of 400 managers from a cross-section of industries globally (forty per cent from Europe, the Middle East, India and Africa; thirty per cent from North America; and thirty per cent from Asia and the Pacific). Men listed unconscious bias as the top barrier they witnessed to women's career progression (Madsen and Andrade, 2018).

There are numerous approaches that can be taken regarding unconscious bias training. For example, Google's unconscious bias training consisted of a 60 to 90 minute, in person workshop, where participation was voluntary (Moore, 2018). Using data from internal and outside sources and studies, a narrative was built that acknowledged and accounted for unconscious biases as a means to allow management to make better decisions regarding the evaluations, hiring, and promoting of employees (Moore, 2018). This unconscious training program presented participants with the biological reasoning behind the development of biases and how they could lead in talent acquisition flaws, as well as a means to mitigate their unconscious bias (Moore, 2018).

Microsoft's approach to unconscious bias training consisted of an e-learning module where business cases were built around unconscious bias and its effects on the company through the use of several videos displaying communication that was inadequate and non-inclusive (Moore, 2018). These videos served as a teaching experience whereby micro-behaviours of the characters in the videos were highlighted and explained how they contributed to dysfunction within the working environment (Moore, 2018). Unconscious bias training allows for managers and employees to understand how their brain responds to bias so that they could recognise,

acknowledge and develop a way to effectively respond (Moore, 2018). Research (Huang, Krivkovich, Starikova, Yee & Zanoschi, 2019) has shown that, after undergoing unconscious bias training, participants become increasingly aware of their own biases and how these biases could affect imperative decisions and workplace relationships (Graham et al., 2016). If hiring managers and boards of directors are made up of mostly men who unconsciously engage in such bias, it stands to reason that more men than women will continue to be hired and promoted – particularly men who share the same background with current managers. This only serves to perpetuate the cycle of men outnumbering women in leadership positions (Madsen and Andrade, 2018). Implicit bias puts women in a position where they are not associated with management effectiveness because that label is associated with male characteristics and they are associated with nurturing communal roles (Santana and Papa, 2016). Typical bias behaviour such as think male, think leader and think female, think manager beliefs reinforce the false belief that leadership roles are more suited for males.

The boys club

A vast array of literature (Mayer & Barnard, 2015) has investigated what causes women to lag behind men in the corporate world. According to the ‘old boys’ club’ hypothesis, this gap arises in part because men are able to network and interact with more powerful men in a manner that is less accessible to women (Cullen and Perez-Truglia, 2019). This mechanism can create a cycle in which male managers promote a disproportionate share of male employees, who continue promoting other men. A study by Van Heerden (2015), found that eighty-one percent of women feel excluded from relationship-building at work, and many also feel excluded from socialising outside of work hours. During these interactions, employees may learn useful information, such as which tasks or training are more conducive to promotions. Managers may also learn more about their employees, identifying their effort, accomplishments and potential (Webster & Francis, 2019).

According to (Doubell & Struwig, 2014), alternative networks such as corporate women’s networks or online social networks have the potential to counteract the negative impact of the boys club. Membership in the boy’s club is automatic if you are white, male, and white-collar. Black women do not have ready access or membership to this exclusive group, which makes their career prospects less attainable. (Long, 2020) stresses that this is because the boys club affords inside information, facilitates advancement, and provides a social support network to

its members. One of the most frequently reported problems faced by women in organisational settings is limited access to or exclusion from informal networks. (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021) describes the problem by hypothesizing that the few women who break through the glass ceiling do so by emulating men and reinforcing patriarchal systems that discriminate against women, which ultimately keeps women in their place, in accordance with the beliefs of a patriarchal society.

According to Fitzsimmons et al (2014), women and men need to ensure that they have appropriate time available to invest in establishing and maintaining meaningful networks within the organization. However, women found networking difficult and uncomfortable and they are unable to commit to the extra time to build beneficial strong ties outside work hours due to their home commitments (Broughton & Miller, 2009). Men are therefore more effective in creating career-relevant, “hard” social capital and create relationships with powerful people within or outside a company (Lutter, 2015). Research (Lyness & Grotto, 2018) found that job-seekers in white/male networks receive more relevant job information than those within minority/female networks, because of the white/male networks’ higher-status contacts (Lutter, 2015). Therefore, men have better opportunities to advance their careers in high-level positions as they are provided increased opportunities to do so. In addition to this, women who aspire to be promoted to senior roles are often affected by stress that leads to the fear of failure, and as a result, they often resign from their jobs (Schwanke, 2013). It is therefore argued by the researcher that the support network around women at higher levels of leadership is superficial and unhelpful as a whole.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework guides the direction of the study and explains why a particular phenomenon occurs. Intersectionality was chosen by the researcher as the theoretical framework of choice due to it enabling the researcher to scrutinize and dissect inequalities and discrimination on multiple levels that Black women are subject to when occupying positions of power and leadership such as senior management (Marecek, 2016). The researcher is of the opinion that prejudice and discrimination is increasingly rife within the private sector in comparison to organisations located within the public sector, this could be substantiated by the idea that trade unions in the public sector play a more active role in protecting and advancing

the interests of employees on all levels as a result of possessing closer political ties with government agencies (Viviers et al., 2017).

This suggests that employees within the private sector are more likely to experience elevated levels of marginalization and oppression due to private sector trade unions having minimal power in addressing issues such as fair labour practice which is owed to the idea that private sector trade unions are not ‘politically connected’ as public sector trade unions. Intersectionality is further seen as an efficacious theoretical framework for unpacking the dynamics of gender and leadership due to minimal research that exists regarding the manifestation of inequalities and power along gender, class and racial lines within South African private organisations (Rosette et al., 2018).

From an intersectional perspective, it could be argued that Black women that occupy positions of power within the private sector have a unique and distinct experience in comparison to that of white women due to past-historic socio-economic deprivation that is rooted in apartheid practice which sought to disenfranchise Blacks from having any opportunities for career growth and advancement. This is arguably one of the contributing factors for the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of power and leadership specifically in the private sector (Nikolaou, 2017).

Intersectionality posits that women have to overcome various barriers and challenges as a result of not only being a woman but also being a Black woman (Carastathis, 2014). This would suggest that Black women experience a double discrimination and prejudice. In other words, Black women encounter increased and perpetuated levels of marginalisation which is owed to their demographics of belonging to the female gender and non-white racial group, this can be supported by intersectionality literature which postulates that “black women are in a precarious position because they have to contend with discrimination based on their race and sexism based on their gender” (Smith et al., 2019).

Said differently, Black women within the South African workplace context are more disadvantaged than white women and Black men, not to mention white men who have positive experiences in senior management positions and career growth. White men in South Africa are arguably guaranteed leadership positions on the basis of race and gender to the point where they could even feel as if it is their destiny and fate to be in a senior management position despite revised labour legislation under post-apartheid South Africa and how credible and competent a Black woman might be (Mwagiru, 2019).

Therefore, this again emphasises the distinct experiences of Black women in senior management positions whilst also advancing the cause for addressing the matter of unobtrusive workplace practices that are to the detriment of Black women in senior management as a matter of urgency, especially in post-apartheid South Africa which is dubbed as a South Africa for all regardless of race, gender and class (Doubell and Struwig, 2014).

Within the South African context, the majority of senior management and leadership positions in private organizations are occupied by white males followed by white females, however, whites are a minority group, with Blacks representing the majority in terms of the South African population, but yet very few Blacks occupy senior management and leadership positions. This indicates that there is a discrepancy specifically within the sphere of the private sector in terms of recruitment and selection for positions of power such as senior management. It would not be far-fetched to conclude that it is not coincidental that none or a small proportion of Black women occupy positions of power but yet they belong to the majority group within South Africa. This translates into the presumption that sexism, bias and prejudice prevail under the new political dispensation of 1994, supporting the notion that race and gender are a pre-requisite for senior leadership positions whilst also being the foundation for the underrepresentation of women in senior management (Hills, 2015).

Intersectionality implies a crossover or overlap between two experiences. These two experiences can be said to influence or dictate each other's trajectory. Specific to the study, intersectionality has predominantly come to be known as race and gender crossing paths (Marecek, 2016). Intersectionality has been used extensively as a plausible tool to examine and unpack the negative experiences of black women that ultimately lead to Black women being disenfranchised on the basis of their gender as women and their race as belonging to the social category of Black and female (Ncube, 2018).

Historically, within the South African context, black women have been deemed to have the status of being subordinate because they have not enjoyed the same and equal rights as that of males and whites, who have instead enjoyed privileged experiences as a result of apartheid policy that only recognized whites, giving whites a social, economic and political advantage in terms of treatment in the workplace as well as in broader South African society. Having said that, South African black women have been treated as though they were invisible and have been ignored in their quest for recognition, freedom and gender equality which is mainly owed to South Africa's system of patriarchy which continues to exist across all South African race

groups. Patriarchy equates to women being expected to concern themselves only with matters in the home, with men concerning themselves with matters outside the home, with that being economic activity (Kinnear and Ortlepp, 2016).

It could be argued that intersectionality has been used as a device to declare and insist that Black women do not share the same oppressive experiences like that of white women, regardless of the fact that both white women and Black women belong to the social category of 'female'. With that said, white women's experiences of sexism and misogyny have widely been used as a starting point when exploring the disenfranchisement of women as a whole, which has created a false narrative and perception of the gender inequality and prejudicial experiences that Black women are subject to which are a much harsher and oppressive reality in comparison to white females (Rodriguez et al., 2016). In other words, Intersectionality has been employed to magnify the distinct experiences of black women in order to amend the false narrative that white women and black women share the same experiences, which undermines and takes for granted the magnitude of bias, discrimination and inequality that black women are subject to (Smith et al., 2019).

It could be said that intersectionality, strives to provide an accurate depiction of the distinctive lived experiences of black women when dealing with issues of race and gender also as a direct consequence of the oppressive experiences of black women being regarded as synonymous to that of their black male counterparts who have been in a more privileged position in the social, economic and political domain. Sigle-Rushton (2013) supports this by postulating that in the realm of deprivation and differential treatment, there are vast disparities in the narratives and discourses that black women endure when compared to black males and white women, this can be seen through the South African labour market being more favourable to men than it is to women, irrespective of race, as well as the South African labour market, being more favourable to white women than it is to black women because white women belong to the white race who under apartheid legislation enjoyed job reservation (Kinnear and Ortlepp, 2016).

It is also important to mention that intersectionality explicates how previously disadvantaged groups such as those that belong to the social category of being female and Black, perceive themselves and are perceived by others in the sense that, within the South African context, due to the apartheid and patriarchal ideology women have ingrained within their psyche that regardless of how educated, competent and experienced they are to fulfil a position of power

such as senior management, they still may not feel as if they are worthy enough or able to excel in a leadership position as a result of being not only a woman but also a black woman because the system of apartheid and patriarchy did not recognize women. In other words, it is a probability that Black women that have managed to navigate their way into senior management have a low self-efficacy that could possibly stifle their performance as a figure of authority in the contemporary South African workplace.

With that said, it is worth noting, that Black women in the contemporary world of work may hesitate to even apply for a leadership position in order to avoid experiencing feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy as a result of how they feel that they may be perceived by society and peers in the workplace, feeling as if others perceive them as overstepping boundaries when they are ambitious enough to apply for a senior management position (Viviers et al., 2017). This could be offered as an explanation as to why there are so few Black women in positions of power in the South African labour market, also shedding light on the barriers to career advancement from a black female point of view (McConner, 2014).

Chapter summary

This study aims to understand the barriers that affect the progression of Black women to senior management positions in the private business sector. South Africa has made progress in terms of legislation to correct the imbalances of the past, but a lot more should be done not only to implement them, but also to understand the existence of employment barriers. Only when employment barriers are clearly diagnosed, will the problems be addressed. Even though the study only focuses on the private business sector, it is possible that the research findings should contribute to the body of knowledge relating to gender issues within workplaces. Since 1994, there has been an influx of literature, which deals with racial issues, but there has been little done in terms of gender issues, especially in the private business sector.

The literature highlighted that there are several issues that could affect the progression of women to senior management positions, and these will include women who experience issues such as stereotypes and harassment. It has also emerged that women should have more confidence in their own abilities, and should take ownership of their careers. The literature also emphasized that there are subtler forms of discrimination that are suffered by women such as institutional culture and support.

The next chapter elaborates on the research methodology that was employed for this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methods of the study, which comprises of the research design, population, sample, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. This study follows a qualitative research design and data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analysed through the use of qualitative coding and thematic analysis. The sample consists of five interviews with Black female employees that occupy a senior management role within the private sector. Furthermore, the manner in which interviews were transcribed, the thematic analysis of the data and the way that samples were selected are described.

3.2 Methodological Framework

Due to the study proposing to explore the perceptions and experiences of women within senior management positions, the researcher employed the use of a qualitative exploratory approach which was viewed as the most feasible approach because qualitative research permits the researcher to explore social context, cultural meaning and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Furthermore, qualitative research enables the researcher to explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants in order to gain in-depth insight and understanding of the participants. Qualitative research is applicable because it is a highly flexible approach in that it allows the data and theory to interact which permits the researcher to remain open and receptive to unexpected data and ultimately contributes to extending an existing explanation or theory (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.3 Population

The population for this research study were senior leaders within corporate organisations across various sectors within South Africa, who are exposed to the realities of gender diversity within their organisations, particularly in relation to the progression of Black women into leading roles. In this study, senior leaders were categorized as managing directors, senior line managers and executive managers.

3.4 Study Participants

With regards to obtaining research participants, purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. In this sampling method, the researcher purposely chooses information-rich participants who are relevant to the study and meet criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Individuals that were selected to participate in the interviews were identified on the basis that they were well positioned to answer the research questions and met the research objectives. The chosen participants had personal experiences to share, as they had experience in rising above the challenges of gender inequality. Participants were also selected on the basis of being a Black female (Indian, Coloured & African), occupying a leadership or senior role in an organisation in the private business sector. These individuals that were selected as participants are based in Johannesburg and Durban. The researcher was initially aiming to include 6 – 8 participants but was only able to attain five participants that met the set inclusion criteria. The study consisted of five Black South African female participants who had worked for at least a year as senior managers within the private business sector in Johannesburg and Durban. The participants were aged between 30 and 49 years of age.

One of the participants were married. Two of them had children. The only participant that was married had one child and the other participant that had dependents, is a mother of three. The participant that is a mother of three has children that are all over the age of 18, the other participant that has a dependent, has a child that is under the age of 18. With regards to race, three of the participants were African, one of the participants were Indian and another participant was Coloured. All of the participants had at least an Undergraduate Degree, with three of the participants being in possession of a Postgraduate Degree. The sectors in which the participants worked in consisted of Retail, Mining, as well as the Finance and Accounting industry. The below table outlines the demographic characteristics of the sample. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used when referring to the participants.

<i>Demographic characteristics of study participants</i>		Number of Participants
Age	30-39	2
	40-49	3
Education	Undergraduate Degree	2
	Postgraduate Qualification	3
Socio-demographic characteristic		Number of Participants
Marital status	Unmarried	4
	Married	1
Ethnicity	African	3
	Indian	1
	Coloured	1
Industry sector	Finance and Accounting	3
	Retail	1
	Mining	1

3.5 Data collection

The instrument used to collect qualitative data was an interview schedule. The researcher employed the use of a semi-structured interview because it permits the participants to express their own experiences in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Semi-structured interviews also allow for new data and ideas to be brought up to prompt discussion. Another reason why semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study is that semi-structured interviews make it possible for the researcher to ask further questions if the participant's responses are not clear. The interview guide was developed after an extensive review of literature on gender and leadership within the South African context and globally. In addition, the interview schedule was informed by the aims and objectives of the research. The interviews were recorded through the use of a voice recorder and taking notes manually. Both these methods were used simultaneously, so as to improve the recording process. The use of a voice recorder allows the researcher to be fully present in the interviews.

3.6 Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection was an interview schedule with open-ended questions (see Annexure A). The use of open-ended questions permits the researcher to obtain rich information about the phenomenon being investigated as it allows the participants to openly discuss their viewpoints (Bernard and Bernard, 2013). According to research conducted by Neuman (2011) research that aims to explain individuals' subjective views about their world makes use of open-ended questioning, which was found to be appropriate for this study (Bernard and Bernard, 2013).

Reflexivity and position of the researcher

My position in the study is an outsider, however, the commonality between myself and the participants was that I identified as a Black African male intending to launch my career in the private sector. Therefore, I have similar worldviews and tensions as the Black female senior managers. However, I am an outsider in that I am an African male that has not experienced the patriarchal and discriminatory private sector environment. I am a 27-year-old Psychology graduate and therefore do not have knowledge surrounding the technicalities of the private sector domain. I am also not married, nor do I have children. Therefore, when analyzing the narrations of the Black female senior leaders (African, Indian and Coloured), critical reflection needed to take place. Additionally, during the interviews, I would paraphrase and summarise what the participant had said in order to clarify any discrepancies.

Ensuring Rigour

Due to the complexity of qualitative research it is pertinent to the quality of the research that rigour is ensured throughout the research process. However, as qualitative research is largely subjective and is based on the narratives of the participants, ensuring rigour is more complex in qualitative research than in quantitative research. Quantitative researchers rely on numbers and statistics to determine the rigour of the research, which is not applicable to qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). Establishing rigour ensures that the research is both valid and reliable, however, relating to qualitative research. Therefore, the quantitative measures to provide validity and reliability cannot be applied to qualitative research and need to be tailored to the research design. Despite the complexity of ensuring rigour in the qualitative research, in order to prove the quality of the research, rigour should be ensured throughout the entire research process, these are usually proven using four elements, which include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Cypress, 2017).

Credibility: Credibility refers to the interpretation of the data and whether the researcher has interpreted the participants narratives and views correctly, subsequently depicting an accurate portrait of the participants perspective and narrative (Anney, 2014). There are various strategies that can be utilised to determine the credibility of the research. The form of credibility that was used in the current research was triangulation. Triangulation has been used to determine the credibility of the research, as the researcher used multiple methods to formulate diverse perspectives. This method is used to reduce researcher bias. The manner which triangulation was used in the current research is that the researcher made use of a

variety of participants from various workplaces, industries etc. The participants were also from diverse backgrounds and age groups. By making use of a variety of participants, diverse perspectives were uncovered, hence, reducing the bias of the researcher (Anney, 2014). Triangulation was also used as various sites were also used for the interviews, therefore, various organisations were utilised, providing a diverse basis for perspectives (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability: Transferability refers to the extent in which the research results can be transferred to a different context (Anney, 2014). By utilising purposive sampling, the research results are able to be transferred to a different context, as the sample group has been chosen based on answering specific research questions, based on a specific purpose. By using purposive sampling, the researcher is able to gain knowledge that is specific to the research topic from participants that are knowledgeable about the topic. Therefore, Black female senior managers were selected in the sample, that had at least two years' experience as a senior manager. The female engineers were chosen for a specific purpose and therefore, when using the same sample, the research should yield the same results if transferred to a different setting (Anney, 2014).

Dependability: Dependability can be likened to the term 'reliability' in quantitative research. Hence, can be noted as the reliability and consistency of the research findings (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). The recordings of the participants interviews were initially listened to, to form the interview setting again. Once all the recordings were replayed, the transcription phase began. The recordings were then compared to the transcriptions to determine if there were any missing ques, which helped the researcher to replay the initial interview with the participant in the researcher's mind. This essentially assisted in the analysis phase, as the researcher had a clear understanding of the interview process and had highlighted any factors that were missed during the collection of the data. A table was also formulated highlighting the codes of the analysis, which assisted the researcher in linking any themes that emerged from the data. This allowed the researcher to easily analyse the different narratives across all the participants and to highlight any themes. These themes were reviewed to determine the applicability to the research questions and topics (Krefting, 1991).

Confirmability: Confirmability refers to how the conclusions can be derived from the results. Therefore, a process can easily be followed to determine how the researcher derived

the conclusion (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). The manner which confirmability was achieved was by keeping a research journal. This allowed the researcher to be self-reflexive throughout the process and to eliminate any biases. After each interview researcher notes were made during the interview, which were incorporated into the analysis of the findings. This can be likened to an 'audit trail' in which the interview recordings were transcribed, as well as additional notes were made on the interview process, eliminating any researcher bias.

Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of ensuring that the research adheres to the principles of ethics, the study took ethical issues into consideration. Gatekeepers are people with the formal or informal authority to control access to a site (Neuman, 2011). In the context of this study, the gatekeeper was the Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). Before initiating the research, a proposal was presented, seeking permission to conduct research. The HSSREC granted permission for the research process to proceed through a letter of approval that was signed and stamped, that I would present to the research participants to be included in the study.

Furthermore, the researcher provided an in-depth explanation about the purpose and nature of the study to each participant individually, assuring the research participants of confidentiality and anonymity. The research participants were informed of their right to voluntarily participate and that they could at any time during interviews choose to withdraw from the research without any negative consequences.

Data Analysis

The main objective of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of Black women in senior management by employing the use of thematic analysis as a feasible qualitative data analytical approach to analyse the data provided. Thematic analysis can be delineated as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is exclusive to the domain of qualitative research and has been lauded for its flexibility as an analytical tool specifically within the discipline of psychology. The flexibility of thematic analysis is illustrated through its compatibility with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms within psychology which permits theoretical freedom to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The efficacy of thematic analysis can be best understood through its propensity to consolidate and describe data in rich and elaborate detail in order for the researcher to be able to make reliable and truthful claims about the data (Joffe, 2012). Important to note is that data analytical approaches are and should be guided by the applicable theoretical framework(s) which frames the analysis for discussion (Joffe, 2012). Thematic analysis is neither exempt from the obligation of explicitly stating its theoretical stance.

The researcher specifically selected an inductive approach to thematic analysis. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), “inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions”. The researcher initially had the intention of allowing the data gathered from the participants to shape and determine the themes that surfaced, rather than following a deductive approach in which the data fits into pre-determined themes that are driven by the researchers theoretical or analytical interests (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The researcher followed the steps outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) in regard to the thematic analysis process which included the following:

The first phase: familiarising yourself with your data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that this first stage of analysis is mainly about reading and re-reading the research material up to a point where the researcher is comfortable with the material, as this will assist the researcher in the identification of patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the researcher familiarises himself or herself with the material, the process of note-taking is also very important at this stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This phase was achieved by continuously listening to the recording after the interview up until the stage of writing the dissertation. The recordings were transcribed word for word. Constant checking of whether the transcriptions corresponded with the recordings were done, so as to be sure that the interpretations to be made were supported by what was discussed by the research participants.

3.7.1.2 The second phase is generating initial codes.

This phase is concerned with creating codes, through the use of participants’ terminology as a point of reference for their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher attempts to refine codes by subtracting, splitting and adding potential codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of coding enables the researcher later in the process to locate the pieces of data and

recognise why they were included (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding is a very crucial phase for later detailed analysis, due to the fact that, at this phase, the researcher is constantly reorganising the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The dependability of the study increases as the researcher makes use of concrete codes that are descriptive in nature.

To ensure that this phase was performed adequately, the researcher went back to the data and coded freely the responses while paying special attention to the language used by the research participants. The coding was done manually. The transcripts were written in English and when the participants spoke in IsiZulu those sections were translated into English. The researcher avoided being too interpretative at this phase.

3.7.1.3 The third phase is searching for themes

During this phase, the researcher reads through the initial codes from phase two and begins to produce tentative themes, which can be changed if there is insufficient support from the textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher is able to combine many of the initial codes to form a single theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The examination of how the codes join to form over-reaching themes is important for this phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher will have a number of themes and start focusing on the broader patterns and combining coded data with proposed themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7.1.4. The fourth phase is reviewing themes

At this point, the researcher is expected to have a number of potential themes, as the reworking of themes occurs at this phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher has to look for data that will either support or refute the proposed theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This will make it possible to revise the theme, as some themes might collapse into one another and others might need to be condensed into smaller units (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are two levels involved in the reviewing of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In level one, the researcher reviews the coded data extracts to identify whether the themes form logical patterns. The researcher then proceeds to level two once level one has occurred (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In cases where the themes do not form coherent patterns, the researcher has to determine whether the data does not fit that theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Level two entails considering whether the individual themes are valid, by assessing whether they are an accurate reflection of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7.1.5. The fifth step is defining and naming themes

The fifth step begins when you have a satisfactory thematic map of your data. At this point, you then define and further refine the themes that you will present for your analysis, and analyse the data within them. In the context of thematic analysis, define and refine refer to identifying the essence of what each theme is about, as well as the themes overall, and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important not to try and get a theme to do too much. You do this by going back to collated data extracts for each theme and organising them into a coherent and internally consistent account, with an accompanying narrative. It is vital that you do not just paraphrase the content of the data extracts presented but identify what is interesting about them and why (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7.1.6. The sixth step is producing the report

Phase 6 begins when you have a set of fully worked-out themes and involves the final analysis and write-up of the report. The task of the write-up of thematic analysis is to tell the complicated story of your data in a way that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is important that the analysis (the write-up of it, including data extracts) provides a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell within and across themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The writeup must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data i.e., enough data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme. Ideally, you should add extracts that capture the essence of the point you are demonstrating, without unnecessary complexity (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The extract should be easily identifiable as an example of the issue.

Chapter summary

This study set out to establish the barriers that affect the progression of Black women to senior management positions in the private business sector. This chapter focused mainly on the research methodology of the study. The researcher explained who the target research population was, and how they were selected to participate in this study. The researcher elaborated on how the data was collected and analysed.

In Chapter Four, the researcher displays the research results of this study followed by an interpretation and articulation of the findings.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will set out the findings from the five individual interviews that were conducted with the Black female senior leaders who were part of this study. The findings are reported according to themes. The broadest theme that was evident from the findings was “barriers that prevent Black women from obtaining senior and leadership roles”. This particular theme had sub-themes such as structural and cultural constraints, tokenism, lack of self-confidence and women as each other’s worst enemies and the ‘boys club’. The theme, “helpful mechanisms”, gave rise to a theme labelled work-life balance and coaching/mentoring. In addition, “characteristics of leadership” also emerged as a major theme to consider in relation to the themes and sub-themes that emerged. To ensure the anonymity of participants they will be referred to as follows: the first participant will be P1, the second participant will be referred to as P2, the third participant will be P3, the fourth participant will be P4 and the fifth participant will be referred to as P5.

4.2. Table 3

Tokenism	Barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior and leadership roles
Lack of self-confidence	The boys club
Characteristics of leadership	Women as each other’s own worst enemies
Helpful mechanisms	Coaching/Mentoring
Structural and cultural constraints	

Themes utilised for the purpose of this study

4.3. The boys club

All of the participants made mention of and alluded to the existence of ‘the boys club’ as a barrier and challenge to them as Black women attempting to thrive in their roles as leaders. The boys club can be understood as an informal group made up solely of males that excludes and intentionally or unintentionally marginalizes women. What makes the boys club such an overarching and significant barrier is because, through the boy’s club, valuable information that is deemed as career-defining is shared amongst the males in the boy’s club, support is extended amongst the group, as well as sharing of career opportunities, all of which can make a substantial difference to the careers of these Black women in senior management.

In light of the participants being Black and female, the effects of the exclusion from the boy’s club are heightened in comparison to white women in leadership that would be excluded from the boys club on the basis of their gender only and not their race, given the fact that the boys club are predominantly made up of white males. This is consistent with the concept of intersectionality, which stresses “that people are members of more than one category or social group and can simultaneously experience advantages and disadvantages related to those different social groups” (Rosette et al., 2018). An intersectional study by Ncube (2018), also found that race closely followed by gender emerged as key influences on both the career starting points and career journeys of Black female leaders.

“I learnt that I needed to be much more stakeholder conscious, so I must have closer relationships with my stakeholders, so I must be in the environment, in their face, I must be with them even if they go to the pub on a Friday afternoon, as a woman I need to be in the pub with my stakeholders to build relationships.” (P1)

“You just watch the interaction of everyone and then you watch how they include you or exclude you and normally they continue, it’s a boys club, you know what I mean.” (P2)

“I think the other challenge is that you find these ‘boys club’s and the recent trend is that everyone is into golf, just because you don’t join people on a golf course, doesn’t mean you should be excluded, so those are the type of cultural things that also need to change, those are the challenges women still face today.” (P2)

“You find ‘people’ making decisions on your behalf you know, it still happens now, where my boss does not consult much with me, he just goes and makes decisions that are going to affect my department, whereas, he would go and consult extensively with the other divisions because they are led by white males you know and one can always decide to question him, why are you doing it that way, why don’t you talk to me like that?” (P2)

More often than not, the culture of the boy’s club has traditionally created hostile working environments that have been detrimental to the progression of Black female leaders. The boys club culture continues to influence the workplace culture that we experience today, through it, unwritten rules and standards are written, ultimately deciding who succeeds and who doesn’t. Having said that, one of the ramifications of the boy’s club network is that those who occupy decision making positions but are not a part of the boy’s club are dispossessed of their decision-making power and authority, subjected to being excluded from business decisions with their voices and opinions being disregarded.

According to Mwagiru (2019), “informal networks such as the proverbial old boys club continue to form barriers to women’s access to influential and power groupings in organisations.” With that said, informal organizational aspects are equally as important as formal organizational aspects mostly because formal and informal aspects require relationship building and rapport for organizational operations. It is understandable and easy to see why the participants perceive the existence and continuity of the boy’s club as a critical barrier and challenge to the enablement of their careers at senior and leadership levels. In other words, a strong correlation exists between informal networking ‘the boys club’ and career progression (Kayi, 2013).

Gaining entrance and acceptance into the ‘boys club’ may not be as advantageous as it seems to be, keeping in mind that the boys club are widely regarded as the gatekeepers for career advancement, mentorship/coaching, career opportunities and just generally a catalyst for

women to optimize their experience and effectiveness as leaders due to the nature of the information that is circulated within the ‘boys club’ (Khoza, 2015). Literature centred around gender and leadership indicates that female leaders at some point in their careers as leaders are more than likely to be subject to elements of sexual harassment whether it be verbal or non-verbal. This becomes increasingly important to emphasise in light of South Africa’s culture of rape, which is rooted in the legacy of patriarchy, wherein the organisational context, women are expected to entertain and submit to sexual advances in return for career advancement (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). In light of that, it becomes apparent how female senior managers may be deterred by the idea of joining the ‘boys club’. This is resounded by an intersectional case study by Rosette et al., (2018), which found that male employees purposefully generate institutional impediments to freeze female’s advancement.

“Sometimes you would go thinking that okay, it’s a black male that is the boss and you thinking ah thank God it’s a black person, I don’t have to go through being belittled and all that, only to find that the black male has a different agenda, Uhm, expects things from you that you don’t expect from him. (Unethical?) Yes, unethical of course because he’s seeing you as a girlfriend or whatever and you are here professionally and that’s all you are here to do and once you kind of reject him then he also then pulls out all sorts of stunts.” (P3)

A study by Samuel and Mokoaleli (2017) found that the sexual objectification of women by men contributes to gender inequality in the workplace. This objectification includes public suggestive sexual comments regarding women, discussing, sharing, and/or posting sexualized images of women, and flirting with women, well or not well known, within the workplace (Morgan & Davis-Delano, 2016).

Furthermore, more than half of the participants stressed that the ‘boys club’ had adverse effects on their experience as leaders, making them feel alienated and that the ‘boys club’ is a way of maintaining the status quo of men occupying positions of power exclusively. In other words, the boys club is widely regarded by the women in the study as a means of restricting the EEA, Affirmative Action, diversity and transformation interventions by the Government in order to increase the participation of Black women in senior and leadership roles.

“Sometimes what happens when you are sitting in a boardroom full of men, you kind of think that there’s all this testosterone in here, they know more than me and you kind of, you dumb your voice down.” (P4)

Research has shown that imperative relationships are built during networking; therefore, networking should not be underestimated as it can serve as preparation for a step forward in careers (Gallagher & Morison, 2019). These imperative networks, however, are often male dominated. Women’s access to these male dominated social networks within the workplace can lead to development and career advancement as information exchange is an essential component in learning and gaining qualifications as they pertain to the job (Wright, 2016). The exclusion of women from these male networks, and consequently necessary job learning, can deter the advancement of women, strengthening the glass ceiling and further contributing to the lack of support that women trying to ascend to senior leadership receive. Continuously supporting organizational norms where gender bias against women is common, or the “male is norm” cultural concept, also contributes to the fuelling of workplace gender inequality (Neck, 2015, p. 491). This concept further creates a culture where it becomes more difficult for women to fit in (Neck, 2015).

SIT has also been used to explain why individuals exclude and discriminate against those they perceive to be different from their in-groups (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). This is likely to be reason why 45% of the interviewees noted a negative impact on their professional identity due to them not fitting in. Black women tend to be non-prototypical in terms of gender and race (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Consequently, they are likely to experience pressure to conform to the dominant group behaviours in order to fit in (Jones et al., 2015).

Lack of self-confidence

At an individual level, work-life balance challenges and lower levels of self-confidence and self-belief are key factors that affect women aspiring to leadership positions (O’Neil et al., 2015). Life stage responsibilities and priorities on the other hand, affect the career decisions that women make as they juggle their professional and personal roles (O’Neil, et al., 2015). In this study, five interviewees mentioned the challenge of having to balance their professional and personal duties at home. Respondents described delays in their careers, limited focus in jobs and making tough sacrifices as the negative outcomes of balancing both work and family.

According to previous literature (Bornman, 2019), low levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy are key factors that affect women aspiring to leadership positions (O'Neil et al., 2015). In line with the literature, the only internal barrier mentioned by participants was self-doubt. Accordingly, respondents felt pressure to work harder and outperform their peers but also held themselves back from taking on certain opportunities. This is in line with literature that reports that women often feel pressure to outperform their male counterparts (O'Neil et al., 2015). Furthermore, they are likely to have a heightened sense of accountability (O'Neil et al., 2015). Finally, this self-doubt causes female professionals to shy away from leadership opportunities (Vial et al., 2016). In light of this, literature suggests that, females that pursue occupations which are male dominated are likely to leave the field, as females tend to return to occupations that allow them to fulfil their primary caregiver role, due to the association of the caregiver role and the mother (Mwagiru, 2019). Therefore, many women enter traditionally female dominated occupations in order to fulfil their family and work responsibilities simultaneously as opposed to entering a male dominated occupation, which requires a primary focus of work responsibilities (Rosette et al., 2018).

The perceptions of men as leaders are that they are rational and agentic, and possess confidence, dominance, and self-reliance (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). More often than not, the qualities that are utilized as a description of men are deemed as the better approach to leadership than the perceptions that surround women. One of the most common perceptions of men in leadership is that of self-confidence, which matters because this perception has been equated to social status, influence, better performance, and effective leadership (Guillén et al., 2018). Self-confidence appearances also relates to other outcomes of men, including decisions regarding hiring and promotion, having been associated with successful job performance and work task proficiency (Guillén et al., 2018).

“So, I think as women, we also quite accepting of what people give to us in terms of a response, we feel down about it and think aah I’m going to work even harder.” (P4)

“There’s a handful of women that will stand up for themselves and have conviction in what they are saying and the rest will say okay let me keep quiet about it, I’ll show it to them in my results and ill show it to them in my work ethic, you have both, you’ve got to have the work ethic and have to have the voice to match it.” (P4)

“I think more and more women are starting to realize that there is power in being a woman at the workplace at senior management level, we don’t have to sell ourselves out and become men to advance in a career.” (P1)

“You feel unworthy, you think that you don’t know what you are doing, you know” (P3)

All five of the research participants, directly and indirectly, drew special attention to the criticality of self-confidence of Black female leaders against the backdrop of a South African culture of patriarchy, how significant and instrumental self-efficacy is as a Black woman occupying the traditionally male-dominated role of senior management. Moreover, in unpacking the barriers and adversities that Black female decision-makers encounter in the present day, the research participants maintained the notion that there is no evidence of male senior managers seeking affirmation in their roles as senior leaders. In contrast, female leaders are susceptible to seeking validation in their day-to-day activities as decision-makers, in one way or another wanting to be assured that they are doing the right thing, which is an evident sign of a lack of self-belief as a leader.

Self-efficacy arguably is a major component of leadership philosophy. Most job profiles for senior management positions list the competency of ‘confidence’ as a requirement for that specific senior role. This is why it is so fundamental for Black women as leaders to breed confidence and have a ‘you can do it’ attitude at the forefront of their leadership identity as a way of accelerating their progression in leadership roles and having more positive experiences.

Holding back, not being able to stand their ground and apprehension, has not aided in the cause for increasing women’s participation in leadership. As a way of moving forward, all of the research participants alluded to how highly important it is for Black female leaders to challenge themselves to find the inner leader in themselves and believe in their ability to thrive in their capacity as decision-makers because it is instrumental in the attainment of organizational goals and desired outcomes (Hora, 2014). This is arguably why the legacy of males dominating senior leadership roles exists, not because they are males but more so because they have developed and nurtured the characteristics of trusting and believing in themselves as leaders.

It is a given that a large component of a decision-making role comprises of creating and conceptualizing strategies and aligning them with organizational goals. This requires that

leaders do presentations on a continuous basis to business stakeholders. The lack of self-efficacy of a leader during a presentation can raise concerns from stakeholders with regards to the leader being able to deliver according to business requirements.

“When you need to now do presentations because consulting is about presentation, it’s about wowing clients and all that, then when you have to do presentations, you feel like crawling underneath something because you are judging yourself before they even judge you, you know, so I had to do a lot of work to myself and by myself.” (P3)

Women as each other’s own worst enemies

Interwoven with the theme of ‘lack of self-confidence, is the theme of ‘women as each other’s own worst enemies, which is another key theme that emerged. These two themes are interlinked in the sense that, women at senior and leadership levels don’t only believe and trust in their capabilities but they synonymously also do not have trust and confidence in the abilities of other female leaders, which is also another major barrier to the progression of Black female leaders and can be seen as another reason as to why there is an inadequate representation of Black female leaders in senior and decision-making roles. Many women in South Africa are unable to adhere to the ‘ideal leader’ based on the dual roles that women play in society, as both a mother and a professional. Thus, the ‘ideal leader’ is usually conceptualised as a male, due to the employee having unlimited availability to dedicate to the organization, as well as is not having distractions such as familial commitments outside of work (Brue & Brue, 2018). In South Africa, many women take breaks in their careers, usually occurring in the middle of their career to raise children, in which is the time when the ‘ideal leader’ is moving up the career ladder (Ertac & Gurdal, 2012). As a result of having dual roles as professionals and a mother, Black women in leadership may be reluctant to support and encourage the appointment of other Black women. These Black women in leadership that distance themselves from other Black women seeking appointments in senior leadership can be seen as legitimizing gender inequality in organizations.

Four of the five participants made direct and indirect reference to the idea of Black female leaders not only trusting in one another but also not being supportive of one another by way of keeping valuable information and resources to themselves only. Information and resources that can be considered as career-defining. In other words, the research participants felt that other women that are also in senior and leadership roles have little or no allegiance to other women in senior roles or allegiance to the cause of facilitating the increased participation of Black

female leaders in senior roles. The lack of solidarity and unity amongst Black female leaders in senior management is of paramount importance because it impedes on women having access to opportunities that could progress their careers and optimize their experiences as leaders (Kakabadse et al., 2015).

The participants in the study implied and made mention of how they experience hostility and scepticism from other female senior leaders.

“What corporate South Africa does sometimes is that, especially when you are a black woman, you will uhm get used to being the apple of someone’s eye you know, you the only black woman that can do this, you not like them you know. So, then you have this uhm this identity of being special and now if you have to share this platform you don’t feel so special anymore and I think some of us get caught up in that fake identity of being special and wanting to be the only special one. I’ve worked with women like that, that will support you as long as you not threatening to break into their space you know.” (P3)

“I feel that women can be each other’s worst enemies, it’s only recently that you see little sayings about you know ‘let me empower you as a sister and you empower me as a sister’, it’s very recent. Over all of the years in the fight for women to be successful, it’s dog-eat-dog right because I want that job, you want that job, then we’ve got the male counterparts applying for it, so I’m going to do you a disservice because I want that job. So, what happens is that I think the relationship between women disintegrated due to the fact that there was one job and there was so much competition for it, that type of thing. We need to support each other, we need to stand on each other’s shoulders when it’s necessary.” (P4)

“Us women are each other’s worst enemies because there are so few positions for us in the top structures at the moment. When we get there, when we arrive it’s like very territorial, I just arrived, I worked so hard to get here, nobody’s going to take this away from me. So, any other woman, you push them away, so we are our own worst enemies in that we don’t embrace each other, we are not unified. Because there are so few women in top positions, I think the more women in top positions, the less territorial and afraid we will be for other women to take our space. (P1)

It is important to mention that, despite most of the participants being of the opinion that women are and can be each other's worst enemies in the leadership space, that it is a definite barrier to the mandate of increasing the progression of Black female leaders in senior management. One of the participants pointed out there has been some progress.

"You get a lot of women in leadership groups, I started one at my previous place of employment, where women get together and they talk about their challenges and talk about how they are overcoming their challenges and they are coaching each other about how to deal with certain male personalities or issues in the workplace, but yet when they arrive at those top positions they don't automatically make space for other women to be where they are. I think that it happens because of a fear-based mentality." (P1)

"I think when I was starting off my career there were a lot of those 'I want to be the only black person in that position but I think in the past two or three years people are starting to change because you become the only one there and you realize you don't have support, nobody supports you and it gets lonely, so I've seen a change in the past two years whereas a black female community we are just supporting each other you know and uhm we even talk about it amongst my friends and say listen if there's a young female coming in, get that person, mentor them, help them up but its Uhm yeah, it's just going to take some time." (P5)

In this study, three interviewees reported having negative occurrences with senior women in the workplace. The queen bee phenomenon is the tendency of women in senior roles to distance themselves from other women and obstruct their progress (Sheppard & Aquino, 2017). Literature has found that those who have managed to navigate the labyrinth successfully have found little to no support from other females at the top (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010). Behaviours associated with this phenomenon include exclusion, sabotage and gossip (Sheppard & Aquino, 2017). Results presented in chapter five corroborate this. However, for each of the interviewees this experience shaped the type of leaders they became in that they were determined to be better leaders for other black females. This is in line with recent research conducted by Sheppard and Aquino (2017) that confirmed that women are more likely to become mentors to other women and generally focus their efforts in driving their advancement (Sheppard & Aquino, 2017).

There is a bias in which employees prefer men as their bosses over women. This is the case with both male and female employees, whereby female employees have even been programmed to see men as superior leaders versus women. According to a Harvard University study Davis & Maldonado (2015), “female employees are less inclined to experience their gender as a positive basis of identification with other women” and “senior women are hardly recognized as legitimate role models for top positions” (Visser, 2011, p. 18). Women attempting to obtain leadership positions often receive a lack of support from their female peers as a result of an unconscious bias. This gender bias has been created by the stereotyping, both conscious and subconscious, of women (Neck, 2015). Leadership bias against women has developed from the preconception that women do not make good leaders and that men have been linked consistently with traits that connote good leadership (Neck, 2015).

Women are additionally more critical of women in senior leadership positions, often caused by the unfamiliarity that surrounds women that operate within senior level roles. In recent studies (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2017), it has been found that women who achieve senior level positions feel they are less accepted by their colleagues of the same gender (Visser, 2011). In an American Management Association conducted survey, “95% of women reported being undermined by a women at some point in their careers, whether through sabotage, abuse of authority, or deliberate destruction of their relationships” which can have an impact on their work (McCormick, 2015 p.3).

Tokenism

The concept of ‘tokenism’ has been a recurring subject in the context of women’s experiences in traditionally male-dominated positions of senior and leadership roles. Tokenism is widely regarded as limiting and hindering women’s progress and experiences in leadership in the sense that organizations are obliged to meet quota standards in terms of diversity, increasing the number of minority and previously disadvantaged groups in the workplace and leadership roles for the purpose of inclusiveness and workplace transformation.

Within the South African context, Affirmative Action, Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) and the Employment Equity Act (EEA) have intentionally been designed and implemented to address the legacy of exclusion and inequality. Although legislation such as the EEA, BBE, and Affirmative Action has been designed to restore balance and empower historically marginalized social groups such as Black women, it may have more

detrimental effects on the mandate for inclusion and diversity because business uses it as a way of creating the perception and impression that they are committed to mitigating the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions when in actuality they disregard the endorsement of Black women in decision-making roles.

In other words, tokenism undermines women since it only gives the appearance that historically marginalized groups are treated fairly and are in senior roles on merit when the reality is that they do not feel valued and are not given access to equal opportunity. This corroborates intersectionality theory, which puts forward the argument that Black women face unique and complex challenges in comparison to white females in executive and senior leadership roles in organizations (Key et al., 2012). Cain (2015) emphasises that Black Women face a double jeopardy or a “double whammy”, making reference to the tokenism that Black women encounter in the corporate world, in that these Black women are arguably placed in senior and leadership roles as a result of policy and legislation, instead of being placed on merit. Furthermore, these Black women’s contributions are overlooked and undermined when they are placed in these senior leadership roles.

“You get those token women in companies, you know what I mean? You are the company’s brand, you gladly go out on platforms, you speak out, I’m the black person and to say well, you shouldn’t really be proud of that because the question then becomes, what have you done to lift up other women below you.” (P2)

“The other trend that I’m seeing now is that more and more clients and society are asking to see a female face at senior management level, especially at client-facing environments like consulting companies. But uhm, some companies are really being forced to have a female face because there is just a gentleness to the way that females will approach a situation and a gentleness in the way that females would acquire customers and show empathy and show real honest interest in other human beings.” (P1)

Having said that, the participants’ experiences are that tokenism is used as an attraction tool, in the sense that organisations have accepted that they are inclined to promote women into leadership roles by legislation, which is something that they do not necessarily want to do, or face sanctions by Government and have a negative public image which could impact market share.

The participants came across as having the opinion that organizations have found a loophole in tokenism by utilizing it as a way of increasing brand image which is a priority for multinational corporations operating in competitive environments. In other words, the consensus was that organizations generally promote Black women in leadership out of self-interest, the Black women in these senior roles do not generally possess any power or influence in their senior roles as would be expected, which elevates the alienation that Black women have historically been subject to.

“When you are a person of colour in leadership, sometimes it’s advertised as tokenism to me and it irritates the hell out of me. Uhm, I think that it’s up to business and it’s up to people to get rid of that stereotypical advertising that because you are a woman of colour you are being put in this position.” (P4)

Women granted leadership roles out of tokenism face a lack of support, as well as challenges to their authority (Glass & Cook, 2016). The lack of support stems from a lack of resources that should be made available to them and the authoritative challenges are from subtle to overt resistance from peers and subordinates to authority (Glass & Cook, 2016). Those that have been deemed the token are often more prone to anxiety caused by feelings to be the delegate for women, responsible for ensuring that different concerns and viewpoints from a vast majority of women are represented. This creates a fear that if one woman in power, that delegate for all women, fails, then, essentially, it becomes disastrous for all women looking to advance as it categorizes women in which all are presumed to fail.

Coaching/mentoring

It has been reported that female role models play as an integral component to the protection of women from stereotype threats (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). A lack of role models for women can contribute to the leaky pipeline, where women drop from their careers (Surawicz, 2016). Women often face a lack of mentors who would be able to better assist them in honing in on and selling their skillset (Reddy et al., 2017). Often, women are unable to build rapport with male bosses, leading to the inability to connect with a beneficial mentor, obtain connections necessary for ascending the organizational ladder, and an overall lack of necessary support (Reddy et al., 2017). Women in senior positions that serve as role models shows that senior leadership is attainable, which increases self-belonging and aspirations.

Many of the participants called attention to resources that could be instrumental in alleviating the barriers and challenges that Black female leaders face in their roles as leaders. These enabling resources come in the form of coaching/mentoring.

“I’m so grateful to God that I’ve got a life coach that my organization pays for, that helped me along my journey.” (P4)

“When white women come into the organization, they will be put forth to say this is a potential talent and they get groomed through the process, it’s not like they are left alone you know. They get groomed, they are assigned a mentor, somebody who will teach them how to do things and be there and you know uhm help them but as a woman of colour you actually don’t get that you know, it’s like you are on your own you know, you get there on your own.” (P5)

One of the participants noted that she has two coaches/mentors who are Black women that are executives and can be considered to be paving the way for other Black female senior leaders in the private business sector, these two women have been executives and board members at Sasol, Standard Bank, Old Mutual, Nedbank and Anglo-American.

“They are very open to having mentoring discussions and meetings to give you that streetwise insight and coaching, uhm they give you names of people you can network with and I think I agree with their approach, they don’t give you opportunities for jobs but they give you the right connections to follow up and make it happen for yourself.” P1

With that said, most of the participants alluded to the idea that coaching and mentoring fosters the progression of Black female leaders, in terms of performance and their overall experience as a leader. The most interesting insinuation made by the participants was that coaching and mentoring gives a heightened sense of self-awareness as a leader and of the organizational context, which can be seen as critical in the retention and advancement of Black female leaders in the contemporary business context.

According to Ramaite (2013), the importance of coaching and mentoring in light of female leadership cannot be undermined or taken for granted because it enables Black female leaders as a marginalized group to get a better sense of workplace politics, the dynamics of the business

so that they can position and align themselves accordingly. One of the participants gave an interesting take on coaching and mentoring, why there is a lack of coaching and mentoring for female leaders as a collective.

“You put your eggs in one basket, you invest lots of money in terms of training and development, you invest a lot of time in terms of mentoring this person and then she leaves because she is a hot commodity and company Y wants her.” (P2)

In light of the above, one participant implied that Black female leaders can be considered to be a niche market, there is a demand for the value that they bring into the leadership space to the extent of them being head-hunted, which is why companies may be reluctant to establish coaching and mentoring programmes. In other words, business tends to find more appealing, Black female leaders that are ‘ready-made’ and established that do not need to be developed.

With her extensive experience in the private business sector which spans over twenty years, one of the participants gave her take on why business does not see coaching and mentoring as a priority, placing emphasis on the fast-paced nature of the business world that is performance-driven, subject to constant change and the position that it leaves Black female leaders that can benefit significantly from coaching and mentoring programmes.

“In my industry, top talent, we want top talent, we want performers, we want people that are very comfortable with their own skin and they can go and play the game. We have no time for people that still need to learn and need to be coached and all that.” (P3)

Male dominance within an organization allows men to have more access to social capital and the advantage as those within a group of dominance are more likely to assist in the promotion and advancement of those from the same group (Kiser, 2015). This lack of social capital for women creates difficulty in finding network and mentoring opportunities necessary for their development (Neck, 2015). Due to male dominance, women find it difficult to find mentors in a position to help them as well as find themselves excluded from informal networks that would provide access to important information (Neck, 2015).

Some organizations have implemented resource groups, often called affinity groups, where networks to promote and welcome underrepresented groups are established (Rishani et al.,

2015). These groups consider and welcome individual differences, perceptions, and needs and creates systems, structures, and processes to ensure that these specific groups of people are treated equitably, feel valued, and receive necessary development (Rishani et al., 2015).

Characteristics of leadership

The participants were asked to give their own understanding of what leadership means and entails. In addition, the participants gave an account of the type of leadership and management style they utilize in their functioning as leaders, that enable them to maximize their effectiveness in senior management. The attributes that the participants associate with leadership are those along the lines of collaboration and teamwork, which was heavily emphasised by the participants as key in their functioning as leaders.

“If you include people, which is my preference of working, everything that I do, I like to consult with the team and I like to get everyone’s input and then you make a decision jointly.” (P5)

In the modern world of work, sharing ownership, involving subordinates in identifying and solving problems can be seen as a direct response by leaders to digital transformation, which requires leaders to be more innovative by way of drawing meaningful insights from employees at every level for informed decision making and taking advantage of new business opportunities (Offermann & Foley, 2020).

In the present work environment, nurturing employee growth is identified as a key competency for senior and leadership roles. The nurturing aspect of leadership is considered as a soft skill that is essential in today’s leadership because it sustains a happier and more productive workforce. The nurturing dimension of leadership depicts the evolution of leadership because previously, the focus of leadership has been on the technical and hard skills, with less focus on the soft skills that emphasise a focus on people (Timko, 2017).

The increase and demand for leaders to be more employee-centric have seen leaders have more of an impact on business performance in today’s business environment, where leaders nurture the growth of their employees. The nurturing element of leadership takes training and development appraisal a step further because these leaders have a genuine interest in their employees, they want to get to know their employees better, discover the strengths of their employees and what they require for further growth (Post, 2015).

“I find that as a woman I take a step back and say, how great would it be to take this person, whether they are a male or female, whether they are black or white, being a person who feels uhm less in a team, who feels they are incapable, help them, to nurture them because I know that they are capable of doing what they are supposed to do, I just need to nurture their talent, I need to help them come out of their shell, groom them, I need to create a platform for them, to create that visibility but I need to provide them that fail-safe environment that says go and try it even if you fail, I know you did your best, I’m okay with that you know. It is so great when you see those people coming out of it and just being these top performers who nobody thought that they could make it. I am that person, I want to nurture the unnurtured, I want to give a chance to those that haven’t been given a chance because I was also given a chance.” (P3)

“I feel that there is no generic form of leadership because different people require different parts of you, they require different types of leadership from you. What I like to do is I like to get to know the person first, so whoever is in my team I like to appreciate their personality and I like to observe how they want to be managed.” (P4)

An employee-centric approach to leadership is widely regarded as a catalyst for employee engagement and also considered a solution to disengagement. ‘Flexibility’ is also highly regarded in not only the modern workplace but also seen as key for shaping the future world of work as a result of the workforce being made up of a multigenerational workforce that comprises of Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X and Baby Boomers. A high proportion of talent professionals posit that a multigenerational workforce makes an organization more successful but key to this is the type and influence of leadership that business makes use of in unlocking the potential of every generation in the organization which requires a high degree of agility and flexibility as a leader (Bornman, 2019).

In the spirit of collaboration and teamwork in the context of leadership, one of the participants gave her outlook on how leaders should ideally influence employees in the current state of business affairs and wider transformation practices taking place, alluding to the idea that autocratic and paternalistic leadership styles are outdated and not feasible as much as they were in the past.

“So sometimes it’s important that you lead from the front and you set the example, you set the standards, you put down stakes in the ground as to how this team needs to work and how this organization needs to function but most of the time I feel I need to step to the back of the team and ensure that the people in the team are stronger than me in many respects and coach them and facilitate them to achieve success so that they become successful in their own right without being supervised by me from the front, so I’m in the back, if they need me ill come in and if I see something, a red light, I’ll come in, I’ll facilitate, ill coach, ill mentor, ill open doors, ill manage escalations, ill manage situations where they going to make a big mistake before they make the big mistake but I will not lead them from the front, pulling them along, I will rather be supporting them from the back, from the side, that’s my ideal leadership. That way you build other leaders.” (P1)

Transformational leadership has emerged as a crucial capability that enables the growth and sustainability of an organization because it cultivates a culture of employee ownership without micromanagement. Having been exposed to training, employees are given the confidence to use their discretion to make informed decisions without overreliance on their leaders, this in turn shapes future leaders that are able to look to the future to find solutions for current and anticipated business problems (Sidani, Konrad & Karam, 2015).

Research has shown that, at a rate somewhat more than men, women manifest leadership styles that are positively effective (Eagly, 2007). In addition to this, women have been shown to lead in style that is best suited for leadership, compared to men who are likely to lead in styles that include being absent or uninvolved during critical moments and avoiding resolving the problem until it becomes acute (Eagly, 2007). In a study (Kim & Shin, 2017) conducted to measure the leadership abilities in women in comparison to that of their male counterparts, it was discovered that teams that were led by women were better positioned to achieve cohesion, participative communication, and cooperative learning (Post, 2015). Increasing functional diversity within these teams led to the reporting of more cohesion within the teams led by women and increasing the size of the team led to the reporting of more participative communication and cooperative learning, in addition to more cohesion, in comparison to teams.

Women often have displayed increased evidence of their competence and prove their capabilities when their male counterparts do not. In addition, women often have to change their leadership style. Certain leadership qualities, including delegating abilities, assertiveness, and

confidence, are deemed as masculine, therefore, women who display these qualities are not well-liked and belittled (Shinbrot et al., 2019). Successful female leaders are seen as competent but cold, while women in more traditional positions are seen as incompetent but warm (Shinbrot et al., 2019). Women are forced into a difficult situation where they are unable to display signs of femininity nor masculinity, or risk being viewed as less favourable (feminine) or as a violation of gender roles (Rishani et al., 2015). Unfortunately, this provides an indication to others that they will not be able to outperform their peers, resulting in a less likely promotion to senior management (Rishani et al., 2015).

Barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior and leader roles

The ‘Glass-Ceiling’ is a concept commonly used to describe the unique challenges and barriers that women often face in advancing to leadership positions. The Glass Ceiling is also used to narrate the impediments that women already in leadership roles face in advancing further in their careers as senior managers. With that said, women are predominantly subject to a multitude of distinct barriers that disable their progression to senior roles, these obstacles range from organizational practices with regards to recruitment, selection and promotion, as well as cultural and structural practices that spill over into the organizational space. The research participants in the study gave their personal accounts of how they have experienced the Glass Ceiling effect.

“You know it’s illegal to ask that question in interview’s but they’ve become smarter in how they ask that question, they just ask you ‘tell me about your life outside of your CV’ because it’s actually illegal to ask somebody if they planning to have children or if they planning to get married because it would be seen as unfair discrimination but yes, I get asked that question regularly, what’s your family like or what do you do outside of your CV, who are you outside of work, especially for uhm, positions where there is a fast pace and a focus on making targets, whether its sales targets or other targets. Companies are interested in the bottom line at the end of the day. So yeah, that question still comes up in interviews but in a subtle way.” (P1)

“In one of the interviews I went to I was honestly asked are you planning to get married, are you planning to have kids, is there anything big you are planning in the coming years and you sit there you think hmm, my answer is going to be a deciding factor in whether or not I get this job.” (P5)

“When I look at some of the interviews I’ve been on, people do ask if I am married and have any children and the question is that, why are you asking and sometimes they just say that ‘no we just want to understand who you are as a person.’” (P2)

As previously mentioned, Black women often experience a thicker denser ceiling driven by the combination of both racial and gender discrimination (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Consequently, they are likely to experience a double outsider status as they are neither share gender nor colour with the majority of their colleagues (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). This double minority status influences the development of their careers (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). Moreover, from a race perspective leadership identities are typically associated with being white (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Today, it is more common for Black women to experience a subtle and cunning form of bias (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Interviewees reported experiencing this type of subtle bias usually in the form of being undermined or ignored. As it often goes unpunished it produces a variety of emotions that range from indifference, anger and frustration (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). A study by Green et al.,(2007) found that seven women who worked for the same organisation at the same time experienced it quite differently. The two Indian and two of the three Coloured women leaders indicated that they did not experience assistance from senior white and Indian men in their career growth in the same way that the white women did. It would seem that there is a continuation of the institutional racism that is embedded and operating in corporations that ensure that white women have no professional limitations in their career progress (Desmond & Emirbayer 2009). This relays the intersectional ideology, which argues that Black women encounter increased and perpetuated levels of marginalisation in comparison to white women.

African women have to contend with patriarchy which plays a role in determining the suitability of women in leadership positions (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). According to literature, underpinned by patriarchy, the majority of South African women are subject to the authority of males within their personal lives thereby, effectively rendering them as minor citizens in their private lives (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). Consequently, patriarchy justifies putting the interests of men ahead of women (Dlamini & Adams, 2014). This extends into the workplace where men disempower, disrespect and exclude women from promotional opportunities in order to maintain their positions (Dlamini & Adams, 2014). Hence the current reality where men dominate leaderships positions whilst women occupy subordinate roles (Dlamini & Adams, 2014). In line with literature, four interviewees in this study described experiencing

patriarchy in their careers. They were expected to remain submissive and quiet. Respondents reported constantly fighting and being labelled as aggressive. This is in line with previous studies that have found that women who stood up against patriarchy are often labelled as defiant or abnormal (Dlamini & Adams, 2014). From an intersectional and social constructionist lens, this can be substantiated by the idea that prestigious occupations and high wages are often associated with masculinity. Similarly, female-dominated occupations require ‘feminine’ characteristics and male-dominated occupations require ‘masculine’ characteristics (Cejka & Eagly, 2015). Therefore, women who pursue male-dominated occupations are required to behave in a manner which may be considered unnatural to them as women, resulting in the women adopting aggressive and competitive characteristics in order to succeed in the workplace (Rosette et al., 2018).

Work-Life Balance

According to Jones et al. (2013), ‘Work-Life Balance’ can be defined as “An individual’s ability to meet their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities”. The premise behind Work-Life Balance can be interpreted as the idea that ideally, the demands of work, family and private life should be equally balanced, without one taking precedence over the others. It could also be argued that when one of these aspects of an individual’s life is more dominant, it subsequently leads to adverse effects such as fatigue, stress, burnout and a deterioration of the quality of home and family life (Delecta, 2011).

The concept of Work-Life Balance is seen as a critical subject to unpack in relation to gender and leadership, more so with regards to uncovering the barriers and challenges of women advancing in leadership roles. In an attempt to gauge the current state of Work-Life Balance practices in the contemporary South African business context, the research participants were probed on their experiences of Work-Life Balance and how they have been impacted by it.

“In terms of relationships, I always felt that work was an influencing factor for my relationships not getting to the level that I would have liked them to because I’ve been a busy person with my career but yeah and some men don’t understand that there are other priorities when it comes to being in a formal relationship and it can be hard, I always find myself working on weekends, working into the evening, working early hours of the morning and that has an impact on a relationship, definitely.” (P1)

“If I was married I don’t know how I would cope you know because uhm I have to be like I said, you are expected to be available 24/7 you know and to be quite honest, I don’t think I would be where I am today if I had kids and was married, I mean there are people who are in senior positions, I don’t know a lot of them hey, who have got families and who are married and you know, yeah, it is just hard, I don’t know how they do it, I’ve got so much respect for them because as a single person now who doesn’t have kids, I’m finding it super difficult so now you’ve got a family to worry about. I’ve got so much respect for those women, I just don’t know how they do it.” (P5)

It appears as if Black women in senior management struggle with balancing their personal lives with their careers and professional lives and that it ultimately comes down to choosing and sacrificing one over the other whether it be a conscious or subconscious decision. According to Malherbe (2020, p. 125), “work-life imbalance affects the overall well-being of the individual causing such problems as dissatisfaction from life, prolonged sadness, using drugs or alcohol”.

As a way forward it could be argued that business and labour law should and needs to make ‘flexible working hours’ a stronger focus in order to mitigate the underrepresentation of Black women in senior roles. Organizational culture can also be considered as a catalyst for change in the cause to reduce the adverse effects of Work-Life imbalance for Black female leaders by way of enhancing work from home policy and job sharing (Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

On a more positive note, one of the participants alluded to the idea that some progress has been made in terms of Work-Life Balance in the agenda for mitigating the challenges faced by women in leadership.

“I feel where my company makes it easier for women, is that there are flexible working hour options, so on the one side I’ve mentioned it as a challenge generally but where they try to assist and ultimately assist women and assist women in leadership, there are flexible working hours, there’s a Creche’ facility in the office as well, there are gym facilities that they offer on-site. So, there are different benefits that sort of work for working mothers or work for women and that helps them with being in the office longer or at least for the required time and those flexible working hours assist greatly as well. So at least those are some of the positive initiatives that help us in that regard.” (P2)

Contrary to the other two participants who maintained that they experience a Work-Life imbalance in one way or another, one of the candidates asserted that they have been able to maintain a positive and healthy Work-Life balance throughout their career due to spousal and family support.

“When you talk to men in general and you kind of say hey you know what, I’m travelling quite a bit for work, the first thing in my experience that I’ve been asked is ‘oh and what happens to your child?’, well my child has a father, my child has a grandmother, he’s got two grandmothers and what happens is that people forget about the support structure that women have that can go out to work, that provide for their homes on an equal basis as their partner, they forget that that structure helps to assemble the success of a woman.” (P4)

The above extract illustrates the instrumental role that support structures in the form of a spouse and family can play in enabling the progression of women in leadership and ultimately achieving a Work-Life balance. In the case of Participant 4, Participant 4 experiences less role conflict between being a mother and being a senior manager as a result of her support structure who is her husband and the grandmothers of her child who are involved in child-raising (Brue & Brue, 2018).

Structural and cultural constraints

In their roles and tenure in the senior management space, the participants were asked to give their outlook on the structural and cultural practices that impede their experiences and advancement in leadership.

“In different cultures, women are perceived to be the homemakers, they are the ones that are supposed to look after the children, do the cooking and if you’ve got a job that supersedes those things, you are then labelled. Who creates that? I do think that it’s a masculine creation.” (P4)

“Even if you do get successful as a black woman, then you going to deal with a salary thing, where you are getting more than your husband and then that immediately throws another spanner in the works because suddenly there’s going to be so many things that he doesn’t like, that okay you are the one that’s deciding because you’ve got more money and all these other things, these societal things are at play because you are almost emasculating him when you

have more money. His role in society is that of a provider and now you are taking that away from him because you earning more and now what does that mean? He gets emasculated, he gets insecure and then everything follows into you know, he doesn't want you to be at work until late, he's insecure about who you deal with. I've got so many clients that are male and they call me anytime that they need to call me because of the nature of my work.” (P3)

“As a black woman and then you know maybe we are more traditional than others, I'm speculating here, where you want to go home, fetch your kids on time, still cook for your husband, all those things, family time. So that sometimes almost gets in the way.” (P2)

The above extracts outline the severity of structural and cultural practices on the progression and experiences of Black female leaders, making it clear why leadership positions have been held by men for so long.

Helpful Mechanisms

The participants in the study revealed some of the strategies that have enabled them to advance and navigate their way in the leadership space, through this they shared insight on ‘survival skills’ for Black women in senior management in the present world of work, which is seen as highly useful in equipping up and coming future Black female leaders.

“People see vulnerability as a very negative word when it isn't. When you are a vulnerable leader and you allow people to see the holes in you, they are quick to fill those and assist you and they are also quick to say, ‘I've also got that fault, how do you fix it, let's do it together. That is so so very important.” (P4)

The above extract highlights the paramount importance of being self-aware as a leader, knowing that you are not the expert at everything as a leader and that your subordinates can contribute significantly to increasing your efficiency and effectiveness as a leader.

“As a woman, when we get into those top positions, not just bring our feminine superpowers but really bring a combination of what makes a man successful and what makes a female successful.” (P1)

As a way of coping, adapting and surviving in the senior management space, as a young black female leader, one of the participants stressed the importance of having frank conversations and the criticality of confrontation as a way of eradicating unconscious bias's, prejudices and discriminatory behaviours that stifle the functioning of female leaders.

"I found that I'm even better friends with some people where we have had very frank conversations, where I've had to come out and say Jabu, this is how you've treated me and I think you've done this because I'm a woman." (P2)

As previously mentioned there is a significant amount of research (Motloun, 2018) that has recorded the challenges that female professionals face as they ascend up the corporate ladder (Cook & Glass, 2014b). These challenges arise from personal, relational, cultural, societal and organisational barriers (Peus et al., 2015). In this study, five out of the five respondents reported experiencing some type of barrier over the course of their careers. Authors have found that the most commonly found barriers in the workplace include gender stereotypes or bias, exclusion from social networks, inflexible organisational policies, competing responsibilities between the home and workplace, low levels of self-confidence and a lack of mentors and role models. In this study, the most common challenge experienced by the 92% participants was gender and racial bias. For almost half of these participants they experienced both gender and racial bias. This was proof of the concrete ceiling that black female professionals have to break through (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). Moreover, SIT has been linked to bias, stereotypes and gender inequality issues (Brown, 2020). Furthermore, in line with the literature presented in chapter patriarchy and the queen bee syndrome were some of the barriers encountered by the participants. As a result the leadership journey of these women was filled with experiences of discrimination, isolation, challenges to their competence authority and power (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

However, it has been argued that it is these negative experiences of race and gender that have contributed in building the capacity to understand, manage and navigate complex and diverse situations (Bass & Bass, 2009). Successful strategies utilised by female professionals include a strong work ethic, drive, resilience, authenticity, self-confidence and strong support system that includes mentors and social networks (Chengadu & Scheepers, 2017). The findings of this study were consistent with literature as the majority of the respondents described hard work, drive, authenticity, self-belief, resilience and mentorship as key contributors to their success.

One of the reasons that Black women in senior and management do not last and have short tenures in the leadership space can be attributed to 'Tokenism', which means that as a result of high pressure and demands from legislative and labour policy, organizations place Black women in senior management not on merit but only for the purpose of checking and ticking the diversity box. Brand Image in today's business context has never been more fundamental than it is right now, organizations need to have a diverse workforce but they will place one or a minimum number of Black women in the leadership space in order to appear inclusive. The consequences of these actions are dire because that specific female that has been placed in the leadership role ends up being alienated because they are amongst men who subscribe to the boy's club culture, which historically has marginalized women and excluded them from the leadership space.

The participants highlighted the importance of women only being selected for leadership on merit and when they are competent enough to take on the demands and pressures that come with a senior role. Black women that are placed in senior management but are under-skilled, underdeveloped and have not been groomed for the position are more likely to leave the senior role and experience dissatisfaction.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The results of the findings from the study reveal that present-day Black women in leadership encounter a myriad of barriers and challenges in the leadership space. The participants in the study have managed to persist and persevere in their careers as leaders due to adaptive behavioural characteristics such as showing resilience during trying times as a Black female leader, not personalizing discrimination and prejudice and using adversity as a steppingstone to improve overall as a leader. What also enabled the participants in their careers as leaders was not being afraid of hardship, embracing hardship as a way of improving, the participants embraced the idea of failing forward in their careers. In addition, the participants stressed that one of the major inhibitors for female advancement in leadership, especially in the South African context, are cultural and gender norms, which correlates with how and why leadership has continued to be defined in terms of masculine ideals.

Females that try to adopt and lead in a masculine way are criticized and perceived as ‘trying to be a man’ or too tough, which has left women in leadership in a difficult situation because when they try to lead in a feminine way, they are also labelled and criticized for it. Finally, the participants emphasised the significance of Work-Life Balance in today’s fast-paced and dynamic business environment. With Work-Life Balance needing to be re-imagined specifically to cater and accommodate female leaders in their role as mothers, wives and leaders.

Recommendations

It is recommended that a further study be conducted which also includes white female senior leaders, as well as male senior leaders. It would be especially helpful to compare the perceptions and experiences of white female leaders with those of Black female leaders because of the vast differences between backgrounds. White women can be said to have their own unique perspectives and experiences as white female leaders, especially when you take into consideration South Africa's history and socio-political landscape which has favoured whites more and arguably situates white female leaders in a more privileged position than Black female leaders.

In order for there to be long-lasting and impactful change, the private business sector needs to approach the cause for increasing female leadership in a way of thinking that propels more Black women up to senior management and positions of power and facilitates the progress of Black women in leadership is not just something that they would be doing for the company but it is something that would contribute to South Africa as a developing nation that is renowned for its spirit of 'Ubuntu', which endorses togetherness, empowerment and embracing individual uniqueness. Having said that, organizations need to adopt a shared value mentality, in that nurturing women in leadership is beneficial for South Africa and is the way forward because South Africa belongs to all those who live in it.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study was that of time constraints, due to the busy schedules of the research participants, which meant that the researcher could not conduct follow up interviews with the participants which could have led to questions that could have potentially emerged through the data analysis process. Given that the research participants are from the Gauteng province and Kwazulu-Natal only, it could be fruitful to have research participants from other parts of South Africa which would add more depth to the research. Also, a mixed-methods approach could have increased the generalisability of the findings, giving a more accurate depiction of the current state of gender and leadership in today's current socio-economic and political landscape.

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Annexure A

Interview Schedule

Topic: *Gender & leadership: The perceptions and experiences of Black women in senior leadership*

Good morning, how are you today? [Shake hands] My name is Sizulu Mkhize.

The primary purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of Black female senior managers concerning gender and leadership. The research will seek to identify and understand the unique challenges that Black women in senior management encounter in advancing to leadership positions which ultimately will provide an in-depth understanding of the contributing factors that lead to the underrepresentation of Black women in senior positions.

The duration of the Interview will be a maximum of 30 minutes, Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

1. What are the prevailing perceptions between gender and leadership in the workplace?
2. What unique challenges do Black women face as leaders in the workplace?
3. How do socio-cultural factors influence gender and leadership in the workplace?
4. How do micro-inequities shape Black women's experiences as leaders in the workplace?
5. Do Black women in leadership perceive their advancement to senior management positions as a function of tokenism?

6. What intervention(s) can be used to increase the appointment of Black female leaders in senior management positions?

7. Any concluding remarks?

I should have all the information I need. Your input is highly appreciated. Thank you so much for your time.

Annexure B

Consent to participate in research



Research Participant Consent Form

Gender & leadership: The perceptions and experiences of Black women in senior Leadership.

Consent to take part in research.

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves my answers being collated anonymously for the use of research.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original survey responses will be retained in data format until the results for the dissertation are released and confirmed.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

I hereby provide consent to:

- Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Researcher: Sizulu Mkhize

Contact details: 0731460726 / mkhize.sizulu@gmail.com

Supervisor: Mr. Dean Isaacs

Contact Details: 0312601546

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher

Date

Annexure C

Participant information sheet

Dear Respondent

PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT: Gender & Leadership: The perceptions and experiences of Black women in senior Leadership

My name is Sizulu Mkhize. I am a student registered for the Master of Social Science in Industrial Psychology in the Discipline of Psychology, School of Psychology, Howard College Campus, University of Kwa Zulu-Natal in Durban. My supervisor is Mr. Dean Isaacs in the Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

You are being invited to consider participating in the above-mentioned research project as this research is part of the requirements for the above-mentioned degree.

The aim and purpose of this research is to uncover and comprehend the unique challenges that Black women in senior leadership encounter in advancing to leadership positions in accordance with exploring the contributing factors that lead to the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions. Your input in this study is valuable as it is intended to provide insight into gender dynamics in the context of the South African private sector from a women's perspective.

Please note the following:

- The information you will provide will be treated confidentially and will be anonymous as no name or information can be linked to you personally.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. There will be no negative consequences should you decide not to participate in the study.
- Data will be stored in secure storage in the Discipline of Psychology and destroyed after 5 years.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Human Social Science Research Ethics Committee. Should you require clarification of further information regarding

the study, please do not hesitate to contact me, my supervisor as well as the Humanities Social Science Research Committee. The contact details are below.

If you are willing to participate please indicate so by signing be section below. You may keep this letter for your information.

Name -

Contact Details of Researcher:

Name: Sizulu Mkhize

Telephone: 073 146 0726

Email: mkhize.sizulu@gmail.com

Contact Details of Supervisor:

Name: Mr. Dean Isaacs

Telephone: (031) 260 1546

Email: isaacsd1@ukzn.ac.za

University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Mr. P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

✂=====

PARTICIPANT DECLARATION

I (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project, and consent to participating in this study.

I understand that:

- Information I provide will be confidential and anonymous.
- Participation in the study is voluntary.
- I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Signature of Respondent

Date

Signature of researcher

Date