

The intersectionality of gender, race and class: Implications for the career progression of  
women leaders in Southern Africa

By

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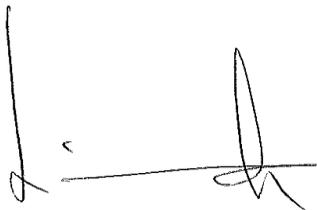
January 2018

# DECLARATION

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I declare that “*The Intersectionality of Gender, Race and Class: Implications For The Career Progression of Women Leaders in Southern Africa*” is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



31 January 2018

.....  
Signature

(Ms Linda Ncube)

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## ABSTRACT

The *aim of the study* was to investigate the implications of the intersectionality of gender, race and class on the career progress of women in corporate South Africa and Zimbabwe in order to create a theoretical framework of the factors that can influence women career experiences. The *research problem statement* was derived from the continued underrepresentation of women in leadership positions shown in global annual reports despite undisputed research on the necessity for gender diversity in management teams. The *key study objective* was to investigate how the intersections of gender, race and class have contributed to career experiences of women in senior and executive leadership positions in corporate South Africa and Zimbabwe. The detailed objectives included: (i) Exploring the impact of authorisation processes and dynamics on the career journeys of women (i.e., study participants), (ii) Understanding the internal influences (meaning the woman herself, her confidence, self-esteem, interpersonal skills etc.) and their impact on the career journeys of women, (iii) Exploring the systemic influences and their impact on or contribution to the career journeys of women and, (iv) Creating a holistic theoretical framework that explores the career “twists and turns” that women have to navigate and proposes how they can do so, thus enabling the creation of retention strategies for women in corporates.

The *research questions* formulated to unpack the research problem and study objectives were as follows: (i) How do gender, race and class simultaneously impact the experiences and career progression of women? (ii) How do organisations authorise or fail to authorise women in leadership positions? (iii) How do personal and internal factors influence the career journeys of women leaders? and lastly (iv) How do systemic and/or organisational factors impact the career experiences of women leaders?

**Methodology:** Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews from a total of 18 participants (i.e., 12 South African and 6 Zimbabwean women in positions ranging from junior manager to chief executive officer) selected using a combination of purposeful and snowballing sampling techniques. The main study findings showed that gender, race and class intersect on the career starting points of the working class African, Coloured and Indian women, and that race plays the bigger role in career progression in South Africa, while in Zimbabwe, gender is the bigger challenge. The study outcomes resulted in the development of a theoretical framework that women could use as a reference to navigate the workplace. The study limitations are that it focused only on three primary identities. The study will significantly contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of African women in management and could potentially advance the debate on race and gender transformation premised on lived experiences of women. It also confronts the issues of sexual harassment and intergenerational dynamics in the workplace. In addition, several recommendations are made for future research.

Key words: intersectionality, gender, race, class, authority, sexual harassment

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*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu – Nguni proverb*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Introduction and Orientation

Gender in the workplace has been the subject of discussion and research from the time that women started entering the formal workplace during the periods of industrialisation in Europe and the United States of America (USA) (Abbot, 1908; Billing and Alvesson, 1989; Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Hogg, 1921; Stewart, 1925; Vallentin, 1932). The type of work that they did started to change significantly after the First and Second World Wars, as did the areas of focus in research (Alesina, Giuliano and Nunn, 2013; Loizides, 2011; Vallentin, 1932; Wolfe and Olson, 1919). Whereas the focus of early studies was the very idea of women in the formal workplace (cotton mills and factories) as opposed to home industries, as if their presence were an absurdity, an “intriguing speculation” (Hager, (n.d.); Thompson, 1904), the discourse has evolved over the years. Gender pay parity was being discussed as early as the 1890s and continues to be a subject of discussion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Guy and Fenley, 2014; Heather-Brigg, 1894; Hogg, 1921; Persons, 1915; Seligman, 2005).

By the 1970s, once it had become clear and accepted that the era of women being only “stay-at-home” wives and mums doing home-based work or low-paying clerical jobs was gone, the research started to focus on issues such as occupational segregation (Alesina and al, 2013; Berger, 1971) and the characteristics and qualities of effective managers (Schein, 1973; Schein and Mueller, 1992; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy and Liu, 1996). Other topics that preoccupied researchers in the 1970s and 1980s include traditional gender roles (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Schein, 1973), stereotyping and gender bias (Brenner, Tomkiewicz and Schein, 1989; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz, 1972; Mattis, 2001; Nillissen and Young, 2007), tokenism (Kanter, 1977), sexual harassment in the workplace (Bingham and Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald, Swan and Fischer, 1995; Gruber and Bjorn, 1986; Jensen and Gutek, 1982), barriers to women’s advancement to senior leadership positions within organisations (Bridge, 1997; Carnes and Radojevich-Kelley, 2011; Diehl and Dubinsky, 2016; Mavin, 2006; Schein, 2001; Wirth, 2001, 2003) and gender differences in leadership styles (Booyesen, 1999; Rosener, 2000). Around the late 1990s and early 2000s, the research focus shifted yet again to include topics such as work-life balance (Caproni, 1997; Greenhaus, Callanan and Godshalk, 2010) and the importance of women in leadership (Cook and Glass, 2011; Holgate, Hebson and McBride, 2006; Johansen, 2007; Nkomo and Ng’ambi, 2009).

Intragroup dynamics, in particular women-to-women relationships at work, made a reappearance in leadership research and discourse (Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006). The majority of the

studies of gender dynamics in the workplace in Southern Africa have focused on South Africa (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Dlamini, 2013; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009). Nkomo and Ng'ambi (2009) reviewed research on African women in leadership that had been published between 1990 and 2008. The review provided a useful snapshot of the current state of knowledge. Their findings showed that 42 publications on women in leadership were available, the majority of which focused on obstacles and barriers to women's advancement. There were 16 articles which focused on this area, while 7 publications examined gender differences and 5 investigated the status of women. There were 4 publications on leadership styles and 3 publications focused on intrapersonal characteristics and strategies for advancing female managers and leaders. Two articles explored work and family, and the last 2 articles focused on mentoring and sexual harassment. Their review revealed a scarcity of studies that examined the status and experiences of African women leaders and managers.

Despite all this research on gender in the workplace, evidence indicates that women continue to be under-represented at the most senior levels of organisations (American Association of University Women, 2016; Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Grant Thornton, 2016; Klatt, Eimler and Kramer, 2016; McKinsey and Company, 2016; Schein, 2001; Wirth, 2001, 2003). The 2016 global reports show that only 24% of senior roles globally are held by women, representing a 3% growth in 5 years (Grant Thornton, 2016). Furthermore, 33% of global businesses had no women at senior management level. This applied to both the public and the private sectors ([www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)). Even those women who do make it to the top tend not to last as most leave their roles, often at the peak of their leadership careers, to pursue other interests (Daniel, 2004; Neck, 2015; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004; Wilhoit, 2014). The unrelenting issue of under-representation of women in senior positions, therefore, is an ongoing area of focus for researchers. Specifically, contemporary research seeks to investigate why the numbers of women in senior positions of leadership are not growing at the rate that is reflective of their total representation in both the workplace and the broader population (Bridge, 1997; Carnes and Radojevich-Kelley, 2011; Wirth, 2001; 2003).

In countries like South Africa, where legislation prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including gender and race, the number of women in executive positions would be expected to be growing rapidly. This, however, is not the case. The South African Employment Equity Commission annual reports, which I will discuss later, show that the number of women in senior and management positions in the private sector continues to be very low. White women are also shown to be over-represented in senior leadership positions of corporate organisations. This leads to the possibility that perhaps race mediates women leaders' career progression.

Existing literature on the career dynamics of women has tended to explore the issues that lead to hindrances in women's career advancement in isolation, and usually from the perspective of the organisation, without much attention being paid to the collective contribution of multiple factors. Research on diversity has also tended to focus on a single category, namely either race or gender, and seldom examines more than one category simultaneously (Dlamini, 2013; Holmes, 2006; Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009; Richardson and Loubier, 2008). Furthermore, most of the studies that examine the intersection of more than one category have been carried out overseas (Holmes, 2006; Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009; Richardson and Loubier, 2008). Very few studies have been carried out on the African continent (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Dlamini, 2013; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009).

The latest development in gender in the workplace research is the use of intersectionality as a lens through which to understand women's lived experiences at work (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Dlamini, 2013; Elu and Loubert, 2013; Groenmeyer, 2011; Nillissen and Young, 2007). The intersectionality discourse started in the feminist theory and antiracist theory space (Crenshaw, 1989, 1992) and has moved to social science fields of psychology (Cole, 2009; Holmes, 2006) and the workplace (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Dlamini, 2013; Elu and Loubert, 2013; Groenmeyer, 2011; Nillissen and Young, 2007; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012). It introduces the simultaneous impact of multiple identities on the self. Specifically, intersectionality seeks to ensure that the experiences of a person are considered from a holistic perspective and not just a single angle (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Holmes, 2006; Jean-Marie, Williams and Sherman, 2009; Warner, 2008).

While the importance of intersectionality is being seen in the fields of feminist studies, public policy formulation and the social sciences (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989, 1992; Holmes, 2006; Jean-Marie et al, 2009; Warner, 2008), there is a paucity of literature on leadership and management studies that employs intersectionality as a lens. And yet, the intersectionality discourse in leadership is important. It may hold some of the missing pieces in the puzzle as to why the number of women in senior and executive management positions is in the lower double digits despite their increasing numbers in the workplace, their increased educational levels and their higher numbers in lower and middle management positions. Intersectionality shifts the focus from external factors and barriers only, to the woman herself, in her totality. The intersectionality framework enables an exploration of how prepared women are as a function of their gender, race and class perspective to "swim with the sharks" (Nkomo, 2006). In this research, I sought to consider the multiple identities of gender, race and class simultaneously and investigate how they jointly play a role in the development of women leaders and their career advancement.

In South Africa, there are few studies that have used the intersectionality framework to carry out studies in the workplace. There were, in fact, only three comprehensive studies on intersectionality and business leadership at the time of writing this thesis (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Dlamini, 2013; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012). Dlamini's (2013) study focused on women CEOs and excluded women in senior and middle management positions. This exclusive focus on executive-level women, who by virtue of their ages would have grown up in a segregated South Africa, leaves out younger women who grew up and/or started their leadership careers post-1994. This current study extended this research to levels of leadership below CEO level. It provided an opportunity to study the experiences of such women, many of whom are currently in executive and senior management. Most of these women would have been at university in the 1990s and most likely entered the workplace during the era of employment equity legislation and policies. That notwithstanding, and of relevance to the study, Dlamini (2013) found that social categories such as race and class do have an impact on women CEOs' work experiences and career progression.

The study by Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike (2012) used intersectionality to examine the representation of women in top decision-making positions in the South African private and public sectors. The study showed that there was a growth in the numbers of women of these positions but then asked the question which women? The study further showed that white women occupied the majority of the positions leading to the suggestion that both race and gender needed to be taken into account when it came to the issue of appointing and promoting women in the workplace.

The other South African study by Booyesen and Nkomo (2010) that used the intersectionality framework was an investigation of gender stereotypes and management characteristics. The aim of the study was to determine how the combined effects of race and gender impacted gender role stereotypes. The results showed that black and white men subscribed to the "think manager, think male" hypothesis but neither black nor white women shared this thinking. The men were less likely to ascribe the characteristics of a successful manager to a woman and this was more prevalent among black men than white men. Black women were more likely to associate successful managers with women, whereas white women saw both men and women as possessing the requisite characteristics equally.

Nkomo and Ng'ambi's review of literature (2009) found no publications on leadership experiences using intersectionality as the framework. Non-academic business literature has also not paid much attention to the issues of intersectionality and how it impacts on the experiences of women in their workplace. There is therefore a gap in the literature on how the intersection of race, gender and class influences women's career progression.

While Hunter and Hachimi (2012) carried out a study of the intersection of language, race and class in a South African call centre, they focused on call centre agents and found that in that industry, opportunities were better for white people and for black Africans who did not have heavy accents that were influenced by their mother tongue when speaking English. Other South African studies on intersectionality have been carried out in the fields of social and cultural geography by Vaught (2006), who found that black African lesbian activists suffered abuse in the townships when they came out, but that affluent black Africans did not experience violence in the suburbs. There have been intersectionality studies on African identities (Moolman, 2013; Sanger, 2008) and sociology (Smuts, 2011). Smuts (2011) considered the impact of race, religion and social space on the extent to which lesbians come out and found that there was indeed an influence on the decisions and experiences on the coming out process. Despite the fact that these studies did not focus on leadership, their findings yield useful insights and serve to highlight the gap that this study sought to fill. A detailed review of these studies and their findings will be discussed under the literature review.

There is no record of previous studies on intersectionality conducted in Zimbabwe. Table 1 on page 7 is a summary of some of the studies that have been conducted using intersectionality as the framework. These studies are discussed in detail in chapter 3. The summary gives a snapshot of how this study addresses a gap in previous research.

The current study addresses the gap by using intersectionality to study the lived experiences of women in senior and executive positions in Zimbabwe and South Africa. While extensive research has been done on the barriers that women face in the workplace once they reach middle management (Dimorski, Skerlaraj and Mann, 2010; Hurn; 2012; Wirth, 2001), there is very little research into the experiences of the women who have progressed past middle management level. As a result, organisations and nations are losing out on the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the victors and to identify the measures which can be used to bridge the gap between the number of men and women in executive leadership positions globally. In this study I explored the impact of race, gender and class, as well as authorisation on the "lived" or actual experiences of women who were in senior management and executive positions or had held such positions in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

In addition to intersectionality, the issue of authorisation as well as the factors that influence the ability and willingness of women to take up and exercise authority effectively have not been adequately researched. The decision to include the authorisation dynamics in this study was done to enhance the understanding of

not only the external dynamics, but also the internal dynamics that impact the career progression of women and their ability to exercise authority when they are in positions of leadership.

The most comprehensive study on women and authorisation in the workplace in South Africa has been that of the “queen bee” syndrome (Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006). While that study does not specifically use the term “authorisation”, it does in fact tackle the issue of authorisation by examining the authority relations between women and their female subordinates and how that dynamic plays itself out when it comes to senior women supporting and empowering their junior female colleagues. The authority dynamics play a big part in career success or failure. Hence, I explore the impact of the gender, race and class experiences on the ability of women to authorise themselves in a role. In summary, this study uses intersectionality to study how gender, race and class affect a woman’s ability to authorise herself and to seize the authority from without, within, above and below.

The choice of countries to use in the study was influenced mainly by convenience. I had been living and working in South Africa for eight years when I applied to the university to read for the doctorate and South Africa was a natural choice of study. I am originally from Zimbabwe, hence the networks on which I would have relied to access the target population for the study would be in the two countries. The two countries are both understudied and doing the research in both countries would have brought depth and breadth to the study.

The contribution of this study can therefore be articulated as follows:

1. To Africanise studies on business leadership by providing insight into the intersection of gender, race and class from the perspectives of women in South Africa and Zimbabwe.
2. To recommend elements that can influence the policies in corporates by sensitising leadership on how to create enabling environments for women.
3. To enable students of career dynamics and career aspirants to hear and learn from the real life stories of women who have progressed to senior levels within corporates.
4. To assist human resources practitioners in identifying tools that help women leaders understand how their career progression is or can be impacted by their gender, race and class experiences or their inability to exercise authority in their positions.
5. To use qualitative research methods to tell the lived experiences of women in corporates.

Table 1: Summary of Areas of Study Using Intersectionality as a Lens

Author and year of study	Area of study	Country in which research was done	Primary identities studied	Study group
<b>Crenshaw (1989)</b>	Feminist	USA	Race and gender	USA anti-sexism and anti-racism policies
<b>Crenshaw (1992)</b>	Feminist	USA	Race and gender	Women of colour and the impact of policies on them
<b>Holmes (2006)</b>	Psychology	USA	Race and class	Psychology patients
<b>Richardson and Loubier (2008)</b>	Management	USA	Gender, race, context and professional occupations	University staff to study their perceptions of their leaders and the leader's accomplishments
<b>Kantola and Nousiainen (2009)</b>	Legal reform	Europe	All inequalities with a view to tackling discrimination against all inequalities and not in pockets	European Union policies
<b>Vaught (2006) and Smuts (2011)</b>	Gender studies	South Africa	Race, class and sexual orientation	Members of the gay community Lesbian activists
<b>Booyesen and Nkomo (2010)</b>	Business leadership	South Africa	Race and gender	Black men, white men, black women, white women managers
<b>Groenmeyer (2011)</b>	Entrepreneurship	South Africa	Race and gender	Female entrepreneurs in fishing and construction industries
<b>Hunter and Hachimi (2012)</b>	Social and cultural studies	South Africa	Race, language and class	Call centre agents
<b>Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike (2012)</b>	Business Leadership	South Africa	Race and gender	Female decision-makers in the public and private sector in SA
<b>Dlamini (2013)</b>	Business leadership	South Africa	Race, class and gender	Female CEOs in South Africa
<b>Elu and Loubert (2013)</b>	Workplace	Tanzania	Ethnicity and gender	Female employees employing up to five ethnic groups

## 1.2 Context of the Countries in the Study

### 1.2.1 SADC Gender Debate

South Africa and Zimbabwe are signatories to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development, which was adopted in 2008 to address the issues of gender inequality in the member states ([http://www.un.org/millennium\\_development\\_goals](http://www.un.org/millennium_development_goals)). In addition to being signatories to the SADC Protocol, these countries all signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which embodies the international Millennium Development Goals which were to be achieved in the period between 2000 and 2015. These goals were aimed at addressing the most pressing global challenges in the world. Goal 3 – “promote gender equality and empower women” – speaks to the heart of the current study.

Within the SADC region and specifically in the countries studied, there is a recognition and commitment to address the issue of gender inequality at government level. This is evidenced by the countries not only adopting the SADC Protocol on gender equality and development, but also agreeing to the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and being signatories to the Millennium Development Goals referred to above. At government level, in both countries studied, the stage has been set for women to take up their positions at leadership level. The following sections deal with how the two countries have legislatively created an environment that is conducive to gender equality and empowering of women both from a constitutional perspective and within the labour laws.

### 1.2.2 SADC Reality

In order to address the issues of gender inequality, in August 2008, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (the Protocol) was adopted (<http://www.genderlinks.co.za>). The Protocol has six objectives which include empowering women; eliminating discrimination and achieving gender equality and equity through the development and implementation of gender-responsive legislation, policies, programmes and projects; harmonising the implementation of various global, continental and regional instruments on gender equality and equity; and addressing emerging gender issue concerns (SADC Gender Protocol 2016 Barometer).

In the preamble to the document, I noted the following:

- That member states undertook in the SADC treaty (Article 6(2)) not to discriminate against any person on the grounds of, inter alia, sex or gender;

- That all SADC member states are convinced that gender equality and equity are fundamental human rights and are committed to gender equality and equity and have signed and ratified or acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

There was also a requirement for member states to incorporate gender-related clauses in their constitutions. The SADC Gender Protocol 2012 Barometer tracked the region's progress towards meeting the goals that were set for 2015. On the face of it, with Joyce Banda of Malawi becoming the first woman head of state within SADC and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma becoming the first female chairperson of the African Union, it appeared that woman power was marching on in SADC ... until a detailed analysis of the achievement of goals ([www.genderlinks.co.za](http://www.genderlinks.co.za)) is made. The detailed report itself showed contradictory developments in some of the countries. For example, in South Africa, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was pushing for a Gender Equality Bill which contained many provisions of the Protocol while at the same time, a Traditional Authority Bill was seeking to give customary powers to customary courts (SADC Gender Protocol 2013 Barometer). The report noted that patriarchal attitudes still abound in the countries that are signatories to the Protocol. It also showed backward movements in the results of elections held in the region. The economies in the SADC regions remain a male preserve, with women lacking a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

But it was not all gloom and doom. There had been some successes as well. Education was still the bright star of the SADC region and constitutional reviews that consider creating a more conducive environment for women are ongoing. There was a better understanding of gender-based violence and there was evidence of attitude and behavioural change towards women. The SADC Gender Protocol 2016 Barometer showed an improvement in increased numbers and proportions of women in political decision-making and in management of the public service. The SADC region was third in the global rankings of women in parliament after the Nordic countries and the Americas. In education, the number of girls in primary schools was increasing and there was improved access to secondary level and to the study of science and technology. There was further improved health care access for women in the SADC region.

Challenges continue to be faced by women in terms of access to resources and the economy due to multiple responsibilities in the family, home and workplace in both formal and informal employment. There is a strong regional focus on creating a conducive environment that enables women to take up their rightful positions in government, the social and private sectors. These measures, however, are still not

translating into meaningful representation of women at all levels of leadership and hence the question that begs an answer is: if the legislative environment is right, where is the problem?

### **1.2.3 Legislative frameworks: South Africa and Zimbabwe**

In the next few paragraphs, I outline the legislative measures that the two countries have introduced to create a conducive environment for women to advance in their careers. I also provide a synthesis of the current state of practice regarding gender transformation.

#### **1.2.3.1 South African legislative environment and state of practice**

The legislative environment in South Africa is very progressive. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, has non-racialism and non-sexism as two of its founding values. Section 9(3) of the Constitution prohibits the state from unfairly discriminating, either directly or indirectly, against anyone on grounds of, inter alia, race, gender and sex.

The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (hereafter referred to as the Employment Equity Act) prohibits, inter alia, discrimination against potential employees on the grounds of gender. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, provides for four months' paid maternity leave, the quantum of which is determined by the Minister of Labour. The Act, however, is silent on paternity leave, thus enhancing the perception that child-rearing is for women and men have no part to play in this regard. This is important to note as child-bearing responsibilities have often been used as justification for discriminating against women in the workplace (Miller and Wheeler, 1992; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004).

The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (2013) was enacted to give effect to section 9 of the Constitution of 1996 with regard to the empowerment of women and gender equality. It was aimed at establishing a legislative framework to align with all aspects of the SADC Gender Protocol on Gender and Development. In addition, South Africa has a Commission for Employment Equity (hereafter referred to as the Commission or CEE). This is a statutory body that advises the Minister of Labour on issues related to implementation of the Employment Equity Act. The Commission produces an annual report which shows the statistics for South Africa. Tables 2 and 3 below show the results for the periods 2009-2017 on an annual basis. South Africa has comprehensive and recent data on the status of women in leadership. The South African picture does not look rosy despite the conducive environment that has been created through legislation.

Table 2: South African CEE Report Statistics For 2010 to 2017 - Top Management by Race and Gender

Description	2010-2011 %	2011-2012 %	2012-2013 %	2013-2014 %	2014-2015 %	2015-2016 %	2016-2017 %
<b>Male</b>	81.1	80.9	80.1	79.4	79.1	78.6	78.0
<b>White (both sexes)</b>	73.1	65.4	72.6	62.7	70.0	68.9	68.5
<b>African (both sexes)</b>	12.7	18.5	12.3	19.8	13.6	14.3	14.4
<b>Coloured (both sexes)</b>	4.60	4.80	4.60	5.10	4.70	4.70	4.90
<b>Indian (both sexes)</b>	6.80	7.50	7.30	8.40	8.40	8.40	8.90
<b>Foreign (both sexes)</b>	2.90	3.90	3.10	4.10	3.40	3.40	3.40
<b>Women as % of economically active population</b>	44.8	45.4	45.2	46.0	45.0	45.0	44.8

(Source: [www.labour.gov.za](http://www.labour.gov.za))

Table 2 shows the race and gender makeup of top management structures in South Africa between 2010 and 2017. The starting point for the discussion of the above table is the percentages of women as the economically active population (EAP). The reports define the EAP as being aged between 15 and 64 years. It shows that between 2010 and 2016, the majority of leadership positions in government and corporate employers with more than 150 people were held by men. This is despite the fact that women form on average 45% of the EAP. The trend of the results over the years shows a phenomenon known as the “random walk phenomenon”. This means that there has been no consistency in the results (CEE Report, 2014). There is an increase in one period followed by a decline in the next. What the picture does show consistently, however, is that the majority of top management are male and white. The public sector has a concentration of Africans and Coloureds, whereas the private sector is dominated by white males (CEE Report, 2017). Furthermore, 79.9% of the private sector and 69.4% of the public sector top management is male.

Table 3 below shows that in the period covered, while women constituted an average of 45% of the EAP, they made up an average of 18% of top management, thus showing an under-representation of women in senior management in a country that has a legislatively conducive environment. Table 4 below presents the same statistics for women and their racial breakdown for the 2016 - 2017 report.

Table 3: CEE Statistics for Women in Top Management 2011 - 2017

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
<b>% of Women in Top Management</b>	19.0	19.8	20.6	20.9	21.4	22

(Source: [www.labour.gov.za](http://www.labour.gov.za))

Table 4: Women in Top Management as per Racial Breakdown

Population Group	% of Economically Active Population	Theoretical Split Based on EAP <sup>1</sup> Ratios
<b>African</b>	35.1	78.3
<b>Coloured</b>	4.50	10.0
<b>Indian</b>	1.00	2.20
<b>White</b>	4.00	9.30
<b>Foreign</b>	4.20	
<b>Total</b>	44.8	100

(Source: [www.labour.gov.za](http://www.labour.gov.za))

Tables 3 and 4 above show that while in 2016-2017, women made up 44.8% of the EAP, they constituted only 22% of the top management structures in South Africa, which is less than half of their EAP. The reports of the years 2014-2015; 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 do not give the race breakdown of the women in top management but the 2013-2014 report shows that their representation in top management by race was not reflective of their EAP by race. Based on their proportion in the EAP, black women should have constituted 77% of women in top management but in reality this figure was only 44.3%. This was in sharp contrast to white women who formed 4.5% of the EAP and 32% of top management. According to their EAP proportion, they should have constituted 10% of women in top management. Hence despite the legal framework that seeks to advance women in the workplace, two issues are glaringly apparent:

- i) Men are in the majority of top management positions and the majority of these men are white.
- ii) White women representation in top management structures is not aligned with their proportion of the EAP.

This situation begs the question: is whiteness a qualifying factor to ascend to a position of top management in South Africa or are there other factors which come into play when decisions are being

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<sup>1</sup> EAP refers to what the ratio should be, based on the percentage of women in that racial category in the nation's EAP

made in the workplace? The gaps between men and women in top management can only be filled by an understanding of the factors that can help women advance up the career ladder and whether these aids actually work in practice.

### **1.2.3.2 Zimbabwean Legislative Environment and State of Practice**

In those countries that faced racial oppression in their political history, gender oppression compounded the experiences of women (Van Hook, 1994). Prior to the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement which granted independence to Zimbabwe, the country was a British colony. The colonisation of Zimbabwe by Britain brought with it capitalism and Christianity which, when coupled with the customary laws, contributed to the oppression of women and were in line with the government strategy of maintaining control of the indigenous African people (Gordon, 1996; Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Van Hook, 1994). Under the colonial administration, women were subjected to laws that treated them as either dependants (of their fathers and later husbands) or mothers. The education policy supported the societal gender roles that discriminated against women and girls by limiting their access to the school system and the kind of education that they received (Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Seidman, 1984).

In line with the Western Christian ideal of women being homemakers, the school curriculum had domestic science with subjects such as Food and Nutrition as well as Fashion and Fabric for girls of all races (despite the importance of women in agriculture in Zimbabwe), while the boys were prepared for working outside the home with subjects such as Agriculture (Gordon, 1996; Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Seidman, 1984; Van Hook, 1994). The education policy and practice of the colonial state made it difficult for African women to complete and acquire a formal education (Gordon, 1996). The African girls who did get an opportunity to further their education could study to be either nurses or teachers (the most common occupations for women in the West) in institutions that catered for Africans (Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Seidman, 1984). Once in the workplace, the women in colonial Zimbabwe faced further discrimination based on both gender and race (Ncube and Greenan, 2003). They earned less than men because of the “breadwinner” concept that existed at the time.

Zimbabwe obtained its independence in 1980 (Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Van Hook, 1994) and with that a new government came into power. For women, independence brought expectations of a change in their status, more so for the women who had fought side by side with men during the war (Seidman, 1984). During the liberation struggle, the independence goal of black Zimbabwean women was described as not only “freedom from racial and economic oppression, but also in terms of freedom from oppressive gender

relations” (Seidman, 1984:419). The newly elected government sought to change the legal status of women. The Bill of Rights in the first Constitution of a democratic Zimbabwe created barriers for gender transformation by referring to individuals without reference to gender (Ncube and Greenan, 2003). Hence there were no gender-specific rights and protection (Gordon, 1996).

The Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982, which was “hailed as a milestone in the legislative history of Zimbabwe” (Gordon, 1996), removed the minor status of women, giving them majority status and allowing them to open bank accounts, as well as buy property in their names without the consent of their husband. The beneficiaries of the Act, however, were black middle class women who had the means to use their legal majority status (Gordon, 1996). The 1987 Education Act, while giving every child a right to school education, was not gender-specific, and post-independence, working class families continued to prioritise the education of boys whom they saw as a pension plan for their old age years (Van Hook, 1994). As Gordon (1996:225) eloquently puts it: “Whilst institutionalized racism in education was done away with, institutionalized sexism was never seriously addressed”. It is interesting to note that of the three delegations that attended the Lancaster House conference to negotiate the granting of independence and to draft the Constitution of the soon-to-be established Zimbabwe, none of them had a female delegate. This is possibly the reason why gender was not addressed anywhere in the first Constitution of Zimbabwe.

In line with the SADC Gender Protocol requirements, the provisions for gender equality have had to be incorporated into the Constitution. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20), 2013, has several provisions enshrined in it that are aimed at uplifting Zimbabwean women. It has gender equality as one of the founding values and principles on which Zimbabwe is built. The following sections of the Constitution deal with gender equality in Zimbabwe:

- **Section 14(2)** of the Constitution requires that “the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must ensure that appropriate and adequate measures are undertaken to create employment for all Zimbabweans, especially women and youths”.
- **Section 17** requires the state to “promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean Society” including full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men and to take all measures, including legislative, to ensure “the equal representation of both genders in all institutions and agencies of government at every level and that women constitute at least half the membership of all commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by

or under the Constitution or any Act of Parliament”. It further requires that the state take “positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies”.

- **Section 24(d)** requires that the state and all institutions of government at every level to endeavour to serve “the implementation of measures such as family care that enable women to enjoy a real opportunity to work”.
- **Section 27(2)** requires the state to take measures to “ensure that girls are afforded the same opportunities as boys to obtain education at all levels”.
- **Section 56** states that “women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres”.
- **Section 65(6)** states that “women and men have a right to equal remuneration for similar work” and
- **Section 65(7)** gives women employees the “right to a fully, paid maternity leave for a period of at least three months”.
- **Section 80** of the Constitution deals with the rights of women in respect to being treated with the same dignity as men, their rights in terms of the custody and guardianship of women and the laws, customs, traditions and practices that infringe the rights of women as enshrined in the Constitution.

The Constitution also discriminates against women, albeit in a positive manner, by not allowing the death penalty to be imposed or carried out on a woman (section 48).

The Zimbabwe Labour Act (Chapter 28:01) has continued to try and create a working environment that is conducive to women entering and progressing in the workplace. Section 5(1) of the Act prohibits any employer from discriminating against an employee or potential employee on grounds of, inter alia, gender. Section 5(2a) further prohibits any employer from not paying equal remuneration to male and female employees for work of equal value. Finally, section 18(1) grants maternity leave to a female employee who has been with the employer for at least 12 months. The Act makes no provision for paternity leave. Between 2005 and 2014, Zimbabwe’s Vice President was a woman but she was replaced by a man. The National Gender Policy (2004) was passed by the Parliament of Zimbabwe in 2006. This document focused on the domestic plight of women more than anything else and was aimed at reducing gender-based violence. It extended the definition of domestic abuse to include financial, emotional and psychological abuse (National Gender Policy, 2004).

Women form a significant part of the workforce in Zimbabwe but their numbers in positions of senior and executive management are few (Booyesen, 2007; Makome and Geroy, 2008; Zimbabwe National Statistics

Agency, 2012, 2016). Between 1991 and 2016, the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency produced five publications that provide information on women and men in Zimbabwe. Table 5 below shows the statistics in the reports that are relevant to this study from the 2012 and 2016 reports. While women constitute 52% of the population in Zimbabwe, their participation in paid employment was at 14% for both reports. The 2016 report shows that 27.6% of managers were women. The reports do not make any reference to race but there is a strong emphasis on the reports being used to measure progress towards gender equality in line with the various international and regional instruments to which Zimbabwe is a signatory.

Table 5: Women and Men in Zimbabwe Reports, 2012 and 2016

Description	2012	2016
<b>Women as % of the General Population</b>	52	52
<b>% of Women Completing Tertiary Education</b>	2.9	5
<b>Labour Participation Rate</b>	Not given but higher than that of the previous report and lower than that of men	Not given but higher than that of the previous report and lower than that of men
<b>% of Economically Active Women in Paid Employment</b>	14	14
<b>% women managers</b>	0.4	27.6

(Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2012 and 2016)

### 1.3 Research Problem

Global research has shown that the number of women entering the workforce over the past two decades has increased, as have their levels of education (Baird and Williamson, 2008; Dimorski et al, 2010; Klatt et al, 2016; [www.ilo.org/statistics](http://www.ilo.org/statistics); Wirth, 2001). Women are, however, finding that once they reach middle management levels in their career, an “invisible barrier” comes between them and the executive level. While extensive research has been done to determine the cause of the barriers that women face (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Schein, 1973, 1975), the research on how those that have broken through those barriers have done so is limited. The inability to break through these barriers comes at a cost which is seen in women leaving corporations to either join organisations that seem to offer better prospects, start their own businesses or look after their families (Daniel, 2004; Felmler, 1984; Miller and Wheeler, 1992; Wilhoit, 2014). This exodus of women from the formal workforce results in the loss of “a wealth of untapped talent in the country which is not achieving its rightful place alongside men in the hierarchy of organisations” (Hofmeyr and Mzobe, 2012).

While organisations and the glass ceiling may be blamed for this exodus, the role of women themselves in breaking through these barriers needs to be understood. It is therefore important to capture how the intersection

of gender, race and class in connection with work environments and internal authorisation processes have helped women in their navigation of the career labyrinth. The labyrinth, a term first used in Greek mythology and later in business studies by Eagly and Carli (2007), has been deemed to be appropriate when referring to the career journey of women as it implies that there are various “twists and turns”, both organisational and personal, that women go through in their careers in order to get to the top. The labyrinth also shows that, although there are many routes, only one of them leads to the centre of the maze. Hence this study helps understand the best route to get to the top of an organisation.

In addition, once women get to management positions, authority and power dynamics come into play. These include the inability of women to exercise the authority given to them by the organisations (Gould, 1993; Weber, 1947) as well as being sabotaged by their subordinates and very often leading to self-doubt (Clance and Imes 1978; Clance and O’Toole, 1987; Kets de Vries, 1990) and sometimes the crash-landing of very competent women.

#### **1.4 Study aims and objectives**

The aim of the study was to understand how the intersections of gender, race and class have affected the experiences and career progression of corporate women leaders in Southern Africa. The existing literature, as previously mentioned, has tended to consider these issues in isolation, either focusing on gender or race or class, but never all three at the same time. Their simultaneous impact on the career experiences of women leaders remains under-theorised. This study used the intersectionality framework to holistically determine the experiences of women in their career progression and the collective contribution of race, gender and class (if any) to career success. The study also examined the impact of authorisation processes on career progression and success or failure. The objectives of this study were therefore:

1. To investigate how the intersections of gender, race and class have contributed to the career experiences of women in leadership positions in corporates in South Africa and Zimbabwe.
2. To explore how the authorisation processes and dynamics have impacted the career journeys of women in the study.
3. To understand the internal influences (meaning the woman herself, her confidence, self-esteem, interpersonal skills and so on) and their impact on the career journeys of women.
4. To explore the systemic influences and their impact on or contribution to the career journeys of women.

5. To create a holistic theoretical framework that explores the career “twists and turns” that women have to navigate and proposes how they can do so, thus enabling the creation of retention strategies for women in corporates.

It was not my intention to test the existing theories of the glass ceiling and women in leadership. I do not deny the existence of the glass ceiling, but I sought to broaden the extent of the barriers to beyond systemic obstacles and to also hear the women’s “all at once” self-narratives. I sought to gain insight into the lived or “real-life” experiences of women in executive leadership positions. The study therefore looked for “patterns, ideas or hypotheses rather than testing of confirming hypotheses” (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

### **1.5 Research questions**

Some of the questions that I sought to answer in this research were:

1. How might gender, race and class impact the experiences and career progression of women in the workplace?
2. How do organisations authorise or fail to authorise women in positions or is this something that they must do themselves and, specifically, how do women authorise/withhold authority from each other?
3. How did women’s understanding of themselves help them to be able to execute their work successfully despite any negative experiences that they may have had?
4. How did the policies of the organisations for which the women worked impact their career journey?

### **1.6 Research Propositions**

A proposition is defined as a statement about a concept that may be judged as true or false if it refers to a phenomenon that can be observed. Where the proposition is formulated for empirical evidence, it is known as a hypothesis. In quantitative studies, hypotheses are tested or confirmed but in qualitative research we seek to look for patterns, ideas and hypotheses (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). A proposition is important in that it guides the study direction and identifies relevant and irrelevant information. It helps to identify an appropriate research design and provides a framework for organising the results and conclusions (Cooper and Schindler, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, the following assumptions guided the research:

- The intersection of gender, race and class influences women leaders’ career progression.
- A simultaneous impact of various social categories informs how women exercise authority in the workplace.
- There are both personal and systemic influences on women leaders’ career progression.

- Due to the historical trajectories of the countries included in this study, women leaders will have both common and unique experiences.

Women who work in corporates and their individual perceptions of the factors influencing their career progression were studied. The nature of these propositions, and the intention to study women's subjective experiences, rendered qualitative methodologies more appropriate. The paucity of local studies that employ intersectionality called for a methodological approach that would allow the lived experiences of the women leaders to inform theory. This was the most effective way of obtaining information on the women's subjective experiences of how gender, race and social class has influenced and continues to influence their experiences as they climb the corporate ladder.

### **1.7 Significance and contribution of the Study**

While the subject of women in leadership is one that continues to attract interest globally (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Wirth, 2001, 2003; www.catalyst.org), the research has been confined mainly to the Western world with the focus being the importance of having women in leadership and the workplace barriers that impede women from reaching executive positions (Makome and Geroy, 2008; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzinde, 2012; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009). The study of gender dynamics in the workplace in Southern Africa has been extremely limited and the majority of the studies have focused on South Africa (Dlamini, 2013; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009). Research on women and work in Zimbabwe has been limited to women as entrepreneurs (Ncube and Greenan, 2003), their work in factories and rural areas (Makome and Geroy, 2008) as well as in agriculture (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2012, 2016). In both these countries, the information that is available on the number of women in key decision-making positions, whether in government or in the private sector, tends to be "embodied in figures and graphs without really expounding their successes, reasons for failure or concerns in these positions" (De Kock, 2011:98). This preoccupation with numbers may have led to insufficient attention being given to the subjective experiences of women who have made it to the top.

One of the key measures of good doctoral research is its ability to provide an original contribution to the field of study being undertaken. This study contributes to the body of knowledge from both a theoretical and practice perspective. It contributes to theory in that:

- This research explored previously uncharted waters both in terms of the area of study and the countries in which the study was conducted. A study of this nature contributes to the existing studies in this area that have been done in other parts of the world, mainly the West (USA, Britain and Australia).

- The use of intersectionality as a conceptual framework is relatively new in the area of business leadership and more so in Africa (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Dlamini, 2013). Hence this study brings to the table of leadership studies the intersectionality lens of viewing the world from the perspective of the women in leadership positions in corporates in Africa.
- As previously stated, there are a few studies that have determined the impact of the intersection of key identities in the workplace, but none of these considered the experiences of women below the level of CEO in African corporates.
- Most of the studies on the women and leadership studies were carried out in South Africa (Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009) and hence spreading the research to Zimbabwe adds to the depth of the knowledge in this area.
- There is limited research that uses qualitative methods (Dlamini, 2013; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009) and this study will further contribute to existing body of knowledge that uses qualitative methods.

From a practice perspective,

- A study of this nature enables human development practitioners to identify or develop tools that would help career women to understand how their career progression is or can be impacted by their race and gender and class experiences or their inability to exercise authority in their positions. I have deliberately put the word “and” after each attribute to try and emphasise that it is the simultaneous impact that is addressed. The said tools are psychometric in nature and aimed at being able to help the individual to recognise any shortcomings that can be traced to these simultaneous experiences and enable the identification of the individual development that would be required to overcome the barriers that are related to them.
- The stories of women who have been successful are important for students of career dynamics and for female career aspirants who need a holistic view of the journey to the top. The findings of the research are also of help to women in middle management positions who have reached a dead end in their careers and do not know how to navigate through it. The findings also help sensitise the executive leadership (and ultimately policies) of various organisations as to how work environments and cultures can be conducive to creating an enabling environment for women to move and make it to the very top of their chosen career paths.

## 1.8 Preliminary Literature Review

The focus of research has evolved over the years and the discourse has changed accordingly. In the early part of the 1900s, right through to the 1950s and 1960s, when women first started working in formal places in large numbers and entering fields which were previously male dominated, the key discussions were on the history of women and their journey into the formal workplace (Abbot, 1908; Alesina et al, 2013; Loizides, 2011; Thompson, 1904). Studies also examined the conditions for women as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century and traced the issues that they faced (Hager, n.d.; Hogg, 1921; Thompson, 1904; <https://www.luc.edu.org>). There were suggestions that the workplace was not a place for women, and that it affected their health; therefore, they should stay at home and raise families (Dillaway and Pare 2008; Fuchs, 1971; Hale, 1996; Martin, 1916). Other studies also questioned the value that women brought to the workplace (Thompson, 1904).

Once women were firmly in the formal, paid workplace, the discussion turned to the work that they did and the manner in which they were remunerated (Berger, 1971; Finley, 1984; Hartmann, 1976; Heather-Brigg, 1894; Thompson, 1904). The focus of these studies has since moved from the historical reasons for occupational segregation (Finley, 1984; Hartmann, 1976) to how the current structures of society continued to contribute to this trend of occupational segregation (Alesina, et al, 2013), and its impact on pay between the sexes (Berger, 1971; Finley, 1984). The studies that focused on pay parity (Berger, 1971; Finley, 1984; Guy and Fenley, 2014; Seligman, 2005) explored the question of whether women should earn the same amount of money as men.

In the 1970s attention shifted to the characteristics and attitudes of successful managers, and the “think manager, think male” phenomenon appeared in gender and leadership research. This was a belief held by both men and women, that men had the requisite skills for successful managers (Klatt et al, 2016; Schein, 1973; Schein and Mueller, 1992; Schein et al, 1996). Further research carried out in the late 1980s showed that while this was a global phenomenon (Schein et al, 1996), the attitudes of women in the USA had started to change and attributes required for successful managers were ascribed to both men and women (Schein and Mueller, 1992).

The research in this area focused on the challenges faced by women by being pigeon-holed into roles which were deemed to be feminine and requiring womanly traits (Brenner et al, 1989; Klatt et al, 2016; Mattis, 2001; Nillissen and Young, 2007; Ryan, Haslan and Hersby, 2011). At the same time, they were condemned showing those traits that were considered to be “masculine” and yet were deemed to be necessary to be an effective leader (Brenner et al, 1989; Klatt et al, 2016; Mattis, 2001; Ryan et al, 2011).

Still around the 1970s the queen bee syndrome, first coined by Staines, Travis, Jayaratne (1973), became the focus of studies. The term has since evolved from meaning women who resist change to the traditional sex roles

to the current description of senior women who do not want to share the leadership space with other women (Mavin, 2008), and women's "selfishness" when it came to sharing the workplace with other women (Mavin, 2008; Staines, et al, 1973).

It was during this time that "tokenism" and its impact on the tokens (which included women) formed part of the studies (Kanter, 1977). These studies introduced tokenism into business literature, a term that was seen to mean being representative of "one's kind" (Kanter, 1977). The initial research advocated that the negative experiences of tokens were due to their being in the minority. Kanter (1977) also argued that if the numbers of minorities were increased to 15% of the populations in which they found themselves, the group would cease to be tokens and the adverse consequences would disappear.

The 1990s and early 2000s saw research start to focus on the leadership styles of women and their importance to organisations (Booyesen, 1999; Rosener, 2000). Research also explored women's management and leadership styles (Brenner et al, 1989; Mattis, 2001), including the differences in the leadership styles of men and women (Booyesen 1999; Mnguni, 1998; Rosener, 2000). One of the findings of these studies was the "double-bind" that women found themselves in when using a "masculine" management style (Catalyst, 2007). This double-bind consisted of women managers being criticised for trying to be like men and yet being labelled as "soft" or "feminine" if they did not use such a style (Catalyst, 2007).

The glass phenomenon started to emerge in the 1970s with the term "glass ceiling" being used to refer to an invisible barrier to the progression of women (and later minorities) into positions of higher authority in the workplace (Bridge, 1997; Carnes and Radojevich-Kelley, 2011; Wirth, 2001, 2003). Other terms were added later such as the glass escalator (Williams, 1992), which is the phenomenon seen in the promotion of men in female-dominated occupations; the glass cliff (Haslam and Ryan, 2008; Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Ryan, Haslan and Hersby, 2011), which is the phenomenon of promoting women into positions associated with increased risk of failure in organisations that are in crisis, and glass partitions, which are the obstacles to cross-sex friendships at work (Elsesser, and Peplau; 2006).

Later research continued to focus, inter alia, on the importance of having women in positions of leadership (Holgate et al, 2006), gender stereotypes and perceived management differences between men and women (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Klatt et al, 2016; Schein, 1973; Schein and Mueller, 1992; Schein et al, 1996) and workplace relationships among women themselves (Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has continued with studies on the importance of women in organisations and the value that they bring. The studies have examined the role of women within strategic and operational structures as well as their governance role on the boards of directors (Cook and Glass, 2011; Holgate et al, 2006; Johansen, 2007; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009; Wirth 2001, 2003).

“Work-life balance” became a buzzword of the studies on women in the workplace during the 1980s and 1990s and has continued into the new millennium (Caproni, 1997; Greenhaus et al, 2010). The focus of the studies was initially on how women can balance being mothers and primary caregivers with being efficient workers and deliver on the requirements of the jobs that they have. Later research has moved to focus on work-life balance for all employees and not just working mothers (Caproni, 1997; Greenhaus et al, 2010).

Studies on intragroup dynamics have explored the relationships among women themselves (Hurst, Leberman and Edwards, 2016, 2017; Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006) and have built on some of the work that was done on the queen bee syndrome of the 1970s (Stein, 1973 et al).

The studies on issues of authority and power in the workplace are not focused exclusively on women, but they are important in understanding the career journeys of women and how they have dealt with issues of authority. The studies have covered the impostor syndrome (Clance and Imes, 1978; Clance and O#Toole, 1987; Kets de Vries, 1990), authority in organisations (Gould, 1993; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Schieman, Schafer and McIvor, 2013) and not knowing one's place, among others (Kane, 2012).

As alluded to earlier, major focus areas of current research are the continued under-representation of women in senior leadership positions (Wirth, 2001, 2003) and the importance of having senior women leaders (Booyesen, 1999; Holgate et al, 2006; Johansen, 2007; Klatt et al, 2016; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009; Rosener, 2000). Related research seeks to understand women leaders' lived experiences at work, in particular the impact of multiple social categories on their leadership and work-related experiences (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Dlamini, 2013; Elu and Loubert, 2013; Groenmeyer, 2011). The importance of these research foci is further underscored by the fact that even international organisations such as the World Economic Forum are holding annual summits that focus on the global position of women in the workplace.

### 1.9 Importance of Women Leaders in Contemporary Organisations

Global research shows that with the increase in their educational levels, the number of women entering the workplace has increased especially since World War 2 (Billing and Alvesson, 1989; Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Dimorski et al, 2010; Williamson, 2008; www.ilo.org/statistics). However, the number of women in executive leadership positions, whether in the public or private sector, are not reflective of the total workforce (American

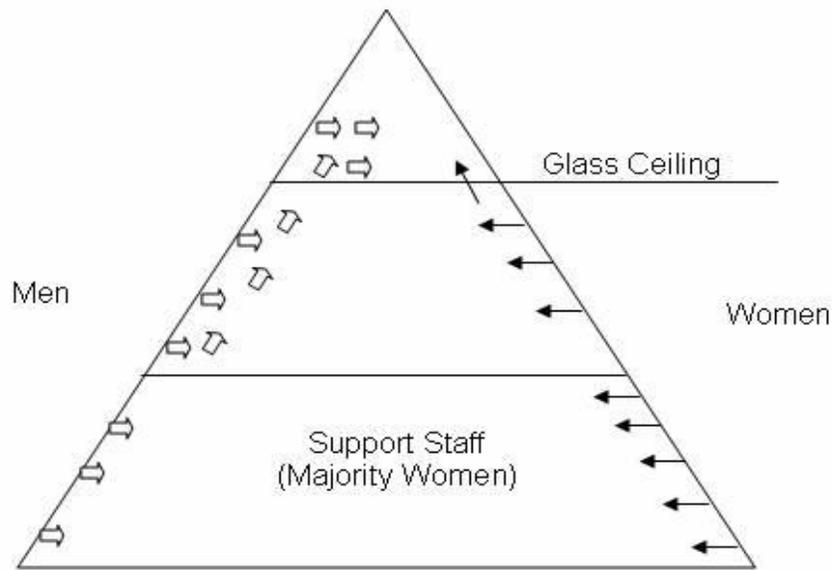


Figure 1: The Glass Ceiling in the Organisational Pyramid, Source: Wirth (2001).

Association of University Women, 2016; Grant Thornton, 2016; Klatt et al, 2016; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Ryan et Haslam, 2007). Women are entering the formal workplace by the thousands and starting at the bottom of the work ladder in as many numbers as their male counterparts, but the higher up the rung of the ladder of success, the fewer women can be found (Wirth, 2001; 2003). Figure 1 above illustrates as a pyramid, how the numbers of women are higher at the lower levels of the organisational hierarchy and dwindle towards the top.

This pyramid still represents the reality of hierarchy and gender in the workplace in the 2017 (Cook and Glass, 2011; McKinsey and Company, 2016). Organisational hierarchies still show that, globally, the number of female CEOs in both the public and private sectors is very small. The Grant Thornton International Business Report 2016 shows that globally, 24% of senior roles are held by women and 33% of organisations have no women in senior leadership (Grant Thornton, 2016). The glass ceiling phenomenon will be further discussed further in chapter 3.

Table 6 on page 26 summarises the research trends from the 1950s and shows, at a glance, the evolution of the discourse on women in the workplace. It should be noted that research on women in the workplace is not as

linear as the above discussion and table may suggest. Most of the areas of research have spanned across decades and continue to be areas of study even today. The preliminary research does however show of the continuing gap in literature of studies that have used intersectionality as a framework. A more detailed literature review is in Chapter three of the thesis.

### 1.10 Definition of Key Concepts

The main constructs of the study are gender, race and class. I discuss these in more detail than the other key terms for which I will give a single definition used in the study. I have chosen to discuss these three main constructs in greater detail because I believe it is important to explore the real meaning of the words versus the colloquial meanings that have developed for them. For the terms where I use only a single definition, I have chosen the definition which, in my view, is the most appropriate for the study.

#### 1.10.1 Gender

*“the classification of socially, politically, culturally and religiously constructed identities of men and women that are not necessarily static. They react to social environmental changes, therefore women’s and men’s roles and responsibilities change in response to social environmental changes (National Gender Policy, 2000)*

**Gender** refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures (Martin, 2004; Stead, 2013). The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender roles and expectations are learnt. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. Systems of social differentiation, such as political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, age and more, modify gender roles. The concept of gender is vital because, applied to social analysis; it reveals how women’s subordination (or men’s domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined, nor is it fixed forever ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)). The term “gender” has morphed to mean whether one is male or female (Baden and Goetz, 1997) and even on official documentation “gender” is stated and the options to choose from are male or female. The countries studied here are very patriarchal. The domestic roles of men and women are still strongly defined by societal expectations. Men are expected to be breadwinners and so they do not do any household work inside the house. They are expected to clean the yard and in most cases will employ a gardener. Women are expected to raise children, clean, cook (and even when they have full-time jobs, cooking is seen as the role of the woman and not the house

Table 6: Historical Trends in Research on Women in the Workplace

Period of study	Topics researched	Key studies
1900s	Employment of Women	• Abbot (1908); Thompson (1904)
1920s	Pay parity	• Hager (n.d.); Hogg (1921); Thompson (1904)
1950s – 1960s	Women in the workplace	• Alesina et al (2013); Loizides (2011); www.luc.edu.org
1970s	Occupational segregation	• Berger (1971); Finley (1984); Guy & Fenley (2014); Hartmann (1976)
	The queen BEE syndrome	• Abramson (1975); Johnson & Mathur-Helm (2011); Mattis (2001); Mavin (2006); Staines et al (1973)
	Think manager, think male and sex typing of management	• Catalyst (2007); Elsesser & Lever (2011); Schein (1973); Schein (1975); Schein & Mueller (1992)
	Tokenism	• Kanter (1977); Stichman, Hassell & Archbold (2010); Yoder (1991);
1970s- 2000s	Reasons women leave the labour force	• Daniel (2009); Neck (2015); Stone & Lovejoy (2004); Wilhoit (2014);
1980s	The glass ceiling/glass phenomena	• Bridges (1997); Eagly & Cauli (2008); Elsesser & Peplau (2006); Haslam & Ryan (2008); Maume (1999); McLaughlin, Uggen & Blackstone (2012); Ryan & Haslam (2005); Smith (2012); Williams (1992); Wirth (2001, 2003)
	Stereotyping and gender bias	• Brenner et al (1989); Mattis (2001)
	Sexual harassment	• Alesina et al (2013); Cortina & Wasti (2005); Fitzgerald et al (1995); Yoder & Aniakudo, 1995
	Work-life balance	• Caproni (1997); Greenhaus et al (2010);
1990s	Leadership styles	• Booyesen (1999); Rosener (2000)
	Authorisation of female leaders	• Kane (2012); Gould (1993); Kets de Vries (1990)
2000s	The importance of women in leadership	• Cook & Glass (2011); Holgate et al (2006); Johansen (2007); Nkomo & Ng'ambi (2009); Wirth (2001, 2003)
	Intragroup dynamics	• Mavin (2006) [ Staines et al (1973)
	Intersectionality	• Booyesen & Nkomo (2010); Dlamini (2013); Holmes (2006); Kartola & Nousiainen (2009); Richardson & Loubier (2008)

helper). These societal expectations are taught and the teachers are usually those who went through the same school of defining roles according to sex as opposed to abilities. There might, however, be qualitative differences among the racial groups. The definition of gender for this study is the “morphed” version of being male or female. Hence the study effectively sought to determine how being a woman has affected the career progression of women in the workplace.

### **1.10.2 Race**

The human race is categorised and continues to be divided according to race, which is a social construct (Adhikari, 2006; Machery and Faucher, 2005). The word “race” has an elusive meaning (Erasmus and Ellison, 2008; MacEachern, n.d.). The South African Oxford school dictionary (1996) defines race as “a very large group of people thought to have the same ancestors and physical characteristics (e.g. colour of skin and hair, shape of eyes and nose) that differ from those of other groups”. This definition is the one that is used in everyday speech and with which most people are familiar. However, anthropological studies have other definitions that need to be considered and discussed. In anthropology, the word “race” broadly has two meanings. In physical anthropology, race considers the different characteristics of the members of different groups. Physical anthropology research has evolved from a focus on the external features of people, such as hair type, skin colour and eye shape, to blood group and antibody types and more recently to genetic makeup (MacEachern, n.d.). The focus for physical anthropologists is to answer the question whether human races exist as physical groupings and to identify the characteristics of the other groupings.

Cultural anthropology defines race differently. The focus is on the ways in which people are divided into social groups. Cultural anthropologists view race as a “social” construct and not a biological fact (Adhikari, 2006; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; MacEachern, n.d.). Racial definitions tend to be either along physical characteristics (black, white, etc.) or geographical locations (Asian, European, African), these being the dominant categories that are in use in the definitions. These definitions emanated from Europe and North America and other populations have had to “fit” into these categories (MacEachern, n.d.).

For the purposes of this study, the physical anthropologists’ definition of race is used. The reason I focus on the physical definition is that in the recent political histories of the countries being researched, the populations were racially categorised according to physical appearance. While most of the studies on race and on race categorisation were in the USA (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; MacEachern, n.d.), the same model has been used in most parts of the world, including South Africa and Zimbabwe.

#### **1.10.2.1 Racism**

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, racism and racial discrimination were legislated and common in many countries, including South Africa and Zimbabwe (Adhikari, 2006; Durheim, 2003; Goodhart, 2014; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Seekings, 2008). Racism is defined as the belief by one racial group that it is superior to another and it discriminates against the perceived inferior race on the basis of that belief (Ikuenobe, 2010). Racism can be institutionalised or personal (Adhikari, 2006; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; Durheim, 2003; Goodhart, 2014; Seekings, 2008). Desmond and Emirbayer (2009:345) define institutional racism as “systemic White

domination of people of colour [non-white], embedded and operating in corporations, universities, legal systems, political bodies, cultural life, and other social collectives”.

During the periods of racial segregation that these countries went through, race played a major role. The rights and privileges of the citizens were not equal and were defined by race. The white race in both these countries was at some stage deemed to be superior. Being white stood for “superiority over black people” (Adhikari, 2006; Green, Sonn and Matsebula, 2007). White people had no professional limitations and their movements within the country of their citizenship were unlimited. White women could choose whether or not they wanted to work (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012). Whites were closely followed, in terms of their societal positions and privileges, by Coloureds (and later Indians). Africans (in this case meaning the indigenous people of Africa) were lowest in status. In South Africa, being African meant a Bantu education that was targeted at ensuring that African people did not fulfil their professional and vocational potential and were given an inferior education to that of other race groups. The Bantu education system was intended to ensure that Africans low and demeaning menial jobs in the economy and their professional options were limited (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012). Some private and Christian schools accepted African students but most Africans who could afford to do so sent their children to schools in Swaziland.

In South Africa, the Population Registration Act 30 of 1950 provided for the stratification of the population into racial groupings (African, Coloured, Indian, and white,) (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012), using criteria which were subjective and fluid. Within the Coloured race group were six subcategories which were sometimes treated as distinct groups and at others classified under Coloured. These criteria could be appealed at the Race Classification Appeal Board and the South Africa Supreme Court (Adhikari, 2006; Erasmus and Ellison, 2008; Seekings, 2008). The criteria laid down by the Act for classifying race were appearance, descent and acceptance. The fairness of skin and straightness of hair played an important role in being classified Coloured (Adhikari, 2006), proving that race is a fluid concept and can be changed according to political circumstances and times. On 27 April 1994, South Africa became a democratic state under the African National Congress (ANC) (Seekings, 2008). In 2017, 23 years after the end of apartheid, South Africa is still dealing with the effects of an inferior education system for African people. The post-apartheid classification of race is White and Blacks. Blacks in South Africa now means African, Coloured, Indian and, since 2008, Chinese. This lends support to the argument that the South African population criteria as defined in the Act had no biological basis (Erasmus and Ellison, 2008; MacEachern, n.d.).

The dismantling of institutional racism should have seen the ushering in of more egalitarian societies and workplaces. In South Africa, although apartheid has been outlawed, society remains “fractured by race” and the racial hierarchy introduced during apartheid is still intact (Adhikari, 2006; Seekings, 2008). A subtler form of racism, in the form of attitudes and racial forms of thinking, is prevalent (Adhikari, 2006; Seekings, 2008). There is limited interracial contact outside of workplaces although residential areas and schools have become racially integrated (Seekings, 2008). White South Africans remain economically privileged whereas most African people remain poor. Post-apartheid affirmative action policies which were introduced in the public service after 1994 are viewed as discriminatory (Seekings, 2008). White South Africans are opposed to race-based policies such as black economic empowerment and employment equity (Durheim, 2003; Nkomo, 2011; Seekings, 2008) as they are of the view that racism died with apartheid, and that such policies are, in fact, reverse racism.

During the periods of segregation, the Coloureds and Africans in Zimbabwe were not subjected to an inferior system of education. They were limited in terms of the schools they could attend (although the private and mission schools seemed to be exempt from the racial dictates in terms of their student race profile). They were, however, limited in their occupational choices to being predominantly teachers, nurses and clerical workers (Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Seidman, 1984). Zimbabwe obtained its independence from British colonisation in 1980 (Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Van Hook, 1994) and its independence is celebrated on 18 April of each year. As was the case in South Africa, institutional racism was rife (Gordon, 1996; Novak, 2011; Seidman, 1984). The hierarchy of race in Zimbabwe was similar to that in South Africa, with Europeans (white) being at the top, followed by Indians, Coloureds and Africans.

#### **1.10.2.2        *Whiteness and White Privilege***

Privilege is defined as a “special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group” (Kendall, 2002:1). It is invisible to those who are born with access to it and visible to those to whom it is not granted (Kendall, 2002). What is considered as privilege to those who do not have it is considered normal to those who do and hence those who enjoy the privileges that come with their position assume these privileges to be “daily experiences universally available to everyone” (Grubbs, 2008; Kendall, 2002). In most countries, privilege is or has been held by white people (Green et al, 2007) and has come to be known as whiteness which comes with white privilege. In most countries, whiteness is associated with skin colour, although it can also be associated with educational and class status (Green et al, 2007).

In Africa, it is common to hear non-white people who are highly educated or who hold positions of authority being referred to as “*umlungu omnyama*” or a white black (Green et al, 2007). White privilege is the “set of

benefits granted to those who by race resemble the people who dominate the powerful positions in institutions” (Kendall, 2002:1). White privilege is institutional rather than individual and benefits white people, opening for them doors that are closed to other race groups (Kendall, 2002). All whites enjoy white privileges although the extent to which they are enjoyed will differ between individuals based on other factors such as gender, social class and sexual orientation. White privilege is a social construct and the cornerstone of racism (Green et al, 2007; Grubbs, 2008; Kendall, 2002) and is influenced by a multitude of factors such as religion, gender, socioeconomic status and so on. It is created by systems that are aimed at granting to white people privileges that cannot be avoided or given away (Kendall, 2002). Whiteness can outlive social and political conditions as has been witnessed in post-apartheid South Africa where it “continues to determine privilege and desirability” (Adhikari, 2006; Green et al, 2007; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Ratele and Laubscher, 2010; Seekings, 2008).

### **1.10.3 Social Class**

Everyone is of and in a social class. People are of the class that they were born into and are in the social class that they have attained for themselves and now belong to (Gabrenya, 2003). Class is the division of society according to status and social power (Tomida, n.d.). I have chosen to define “class” as the stratification of society according to wealth. This definition is in line with those of some social theorists. Class is fluid in that people move from being a member of one class to another (Tomida, n.d.; Wyatt-Nichol, Brown and Haynes, n.d.), although those in the upper class tend to remain there all their lives (Tomida, n.d.). These movements tend to be upward as people strive to improve on the foundation that has been set by their parents. Education is the biggest contributor to social class mobility, although movements can also be attributed to marriage and success in the music and the arts (Goldthorpe, 2016; Tomida, n.d.). Class is a “social inequality that is most consequential for individuals’ material well-being and in turn, for a wide range of their life-chances and life-choices” (Goldthorpe, 2016; Wright, 2003). In summary, the social class of a child affects its life trajectory (Gabrenya, 2003).

In order to study social class, people are compared using three methods of stratification, namely education, occupation and income (Gabrenya, 2003). Social theory defines class in a few ways. The structural approach to social class defines class as a social continuum along which individuals can move up and down, whereas the process approach sees class as group identities that are shared by common, shared experiences (Wyatt-Nichol, Brown and Haynes, n.d.). Within the structural approach, class is measured using socioeconomic indicators such as income, occupation and education (Wyatt-Nichol et al, n.d.). Weber (1947) introduced the model of stratifying society as working class, lower middle class, intelligentsia and upper class. Building upon this model, Warner (1949) as quoted in Wyatt-Nichol et al; (n.d.) introduced the class model by dividing the class into

lower, middle and upper, with subdivisions within each (upper-upper class, lower-upper class, upper-middle class, lower-middle class, upper-lower class, lower-lower class). These categories continue to be used even though they are not necessarily given this naming convention. The process approach to class focuses on exploring how individuals develop, interpret and display class identities (Wyatt-Nichol et al, n.d.). For the purposes of this study, the structural approach to class is used and class is stratified according to Weber's model of working class, lower-middle class, intelligentsia and upper class.

Social class impacts many things in the day-to-day life of an individual (Gabrenya, 2003). The social status of parents usually affects their attitude to education and intellectual expectations of their children. Research in America shows that when parents did not complete high school, their children only had an 11% chance of getting a bachelor's degree. The more educated (and by definition the higher the class) the parents were, the more likely the children were to attain a higher level of education. The home environment of a child is determined by social class, and the higher up the ladder, the more likely there is to be intellectual stimulation in the home, such as education devices, newspapers, magazines and so on (Gabrenya, 2003). The effects of the work done by people are felt in their homes. Middle class people tend to have complex and non-routine work that requires self-management and consequently they impart "self-directed" values such as independent thinking to their children. Working class workers have routine jobs with close supervision and as a result, they expect their children to conform. Daily influences have an impact on the children's exposure and aspirations, attitude to academics and work and the extent to which they can be socially mobile.

During the periods of racial segregation in the countries under study, class was inevitably linked to race (Dlamini, 2013; Moyo and Kawewe, 2002). Hence the majority of whites would be in the upper and middle classes, whereas Africans were to be found among the working class and the rural poor. The other races were somewhere in between. A few Africans (predominantly those who owned a business and professionals) could be found in the middle class, but the segregation laws dictated that they lived in areas designated for Africans. Typically, then, class differentiation could be found in the African residential areas where wealthier Africans had houses or lived on streets that were commensurate with their acquired wealth. The issue of social class is one that has tended to be marginalised when dealing with matters of oppression, with prominence being given to race and gender. This study incorporates social class as an identity category that affects the career experiences of individuals.

#### 1.10.4 Other Definitions

**Executive** (a.k.a. manager, director, chief, principal): For the purposes of this research, an executive is defined as a chief executive officer (CEO) or a person who reports directly to the CEO and sits on the executive committee (Exco). This definition excludes the administration support that reports directly to the CEO.

**Senior manager:** a manager who reports to an executive as defined in the paragraph above.

**Intersectionality:** "The idea that social identities such as race, gender and class interact to form qualitatively different meanings and experiences..." (Warner, 2008:454).

#### 1.11 Delimitations of the Study

The delimitations of a study establish its scope (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This research was limited to the experiences of women in corporate organisations in the selected countries. Those of women in academia, politics and the civic sections were excluded. Women in politics were omitted from the study due to the differences between political appointments and corporate promotions. The women in academia and civic organisations were omitted due to time and budgetary constraints. Furthermore, due to the same constraints, only women in Harare, Bulawayo and Johannesburg were included in the study. These cities were chosen because they are either the political or economic capitals of their countries and hence the headquarters of the major corporations and the target populations were likely to be found there.

In each country, I interviewed a cross-section of women and limited the interviews to three women per level. The selected women needed to have occupied a position at any one of the levels of middle and senior/executive manager in the past five years. I also included women who had occupied senior and executive positions and had left these positions to pursue other interests.

#### 1.12 Limitations of the study

The limitations of a study are the "weaknesses or deficiencies" in the research process and methodology (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This section of the report was updated throughout the course of the study. The constructs of gender, race and class were selected, but sexuality was omitted from this study. The government of Zimbabwe frowns upon homosexuality and the former President of Zimbabwe publicly referred to homosexuals as "worse than dogs and pigs". In fact, section 78(3) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe specifically prohibits persons of the same sex from marrying each other. I was of the view that the women in that country would be uncomfortable answering questions around sexuality and that this could lead to an uncomfortable and possibly tense interview

process or even termination of the interview. It would have been very interesting to see how (if at all) homosexuality impacts the career experiences of women and their ability to authorise themselves in the workplace. Consideration of the impact of this construct would have further contributed to the body of knowledge on the studies of women's experiences in the workplace.

### **1.13 Critical self-reflection and positionality**

This research was a personal journey as well as an academic endeavour. I first came across the issues related to the advancement of women in the workplace in the mid-2000s when I was doing the research report for my Master's in Business Leadership. The research was on the gender leadership gap in Zimbabwe and specifically focused on the glass ceiling. As I interviewed men and women in executive positions as well as women in middle management in corporates in Zimbabwe, I came across varying and often divergent views about the glass ceiling. I also became aware of the fact that executive men and women did not seem to believe in the glass ceiling, whereas women in middle management were frustrated by their inability to take their careers to the next level - the executive floor. My study was qualitative with extensive use of open-ended questions. The term "glass ceiling" was specifically raised in the questions posed to respondents. While most of the women in middle management had never heard the term "glass ceiling" per se, their workplace experiences reflected the findings of international researchers. Interestingly, the views of the executive men and women were not aligned with international research on the glass ceiling. As I reflected on these findings as part of the preparation for this research, I arrived at the following propositions:

- Men in executive positions may indeed be ignorant of the fact that a glass ceiling exists since it tends to affect women.
- Men in executive positions feign ignorance of the glass ceiling so that they do not have to put its resolution on their agendas.
- Women in executive positions may have chosen to "forget" the negative or painful memories of their climb to the top.

In a world where gender challenges in the workplace are being reported far and wide (Booyesen 2007; Wirth, 2003), it would be a mistake to believe that Zimbabwe would not face such a problem. In fact, Booyesen (2007:77) notes that "culturally in Zimbabwe organisational leadership is shared predominantly among men" and "the need to bring about gender balance in organisational leadership is multifaceted. There are fundamental human rights at stake as well as the needs for socio-cultural redress". In fact, Zimbabwean society has numerous

signs that it does not acknowledge the role of its women. In early 2013, I attended a state funeral that was held at the National Heroes Acre. The highest recognition that the state can confer on a person who has “liberation war credentials” is to bury them at the National Heroes Acre. There are literally hundreds of men who are buried at this site and at most ten women. The interesting fact is that most of the men were in exile during the war of liberation while their wives and children remained in Zimbabwe. The wives had to suffer harassment at the hands of the security forces and raise children singlehandedly. Yet only a handful of the hundreds of women who remained behind are buried at this national shrine. The other unsung heroines are going through life and will die unrecognised for their role in keeping families intact while the men went to war!

As I look back on my own career journey, I can see the reality of the hurdles and the glass ceiling for women in the various organisations for which I have worked. The Zimbabwean firm at which I served my articles of clerkship had six partners, three of whom were women and only associate partners at that, while the men were all full-time partners. All of them were white. There were no female managers despite the fact that quite a few women had served and completed their articles at the organisation. While discussions around being appointed to manager with a view to partnership were held with the men in their final year of articles, such discussions were never held with women.

On completion of my articles, as I went from interview to interview, the same questions, totally unrelated to the job (posed usually by males), were almost always asked: "how long have you been married", "when do you intend to start having children?", "how many children do you intend having?" I soon realised that asking questions about maternity leave policies were red flags to interviewers. I even experienced situations where positions would be offered to men who had less experience than me for higher salaries than I had been offered. When I relocated to South Africa and started working for one of the biggest listed companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the dynamics were more covert but still existed. Men would make snide comments about female colleagues being late for early morning meetings without taking into consideration the fact that children were being dropped off at school by mothers at 7:00am while fathers could afford to be at work at that time. The same men were ready to admit that their wives dropped off the children in the morning but failed to recognise that their female colleagues were mothers and wives.

These experiences, in two different countries, with similar attitudes towards women executives aroused my interest in asking the question how other women have done it as opposed to what the challenges are preventing their ascent into the executive suite. As a woman who has worked in professional organisations and corporates, I

am not unbiased in this research. This was a journey that brought about many flashbacks which were recorded in a journal and are shared as part of the research.

### **Who am I in relation to my research question?**

One of my research questions deals with the early childhood experiences of the woman leader and so I feel that it is useful to share my own story. I was born in Zimbabwe and am the eldest of a family of six children, five girls and a boy. Zimbabwe gained its independence from Britain when I was 8 years old and from that time on, I was educated in multiracial schools where English was the language of communication; hence I regard English as my first language although isiNdebele is my mother tongue. My mother was a housewife and my father worked in a middle management position for a corporate that paid fees for employees' children to go to private schools. I did my primary school years in a government school for Coloured children and spent six years of my life in a white-dominated private high school for girls. I studied for a Bachelor of Accounting Science (Hons) degree with UNISA and went on to qualify as a chartered accountant. I hold a Master's in Business Leadership from the UNISA Graduate School of Business Leadership.

Being born in a family that was predominantly girls, gender was not an issue. My dad had me believe that I could be anything I wanted to be and could beat any boy. I grew up beating boys both physically and academically. In all my junior school years, there was never a year where a boy got higher marks than me and even in the final primary school-leaving exams, only two girls got distinctions for both subjects that were written and I was one of them. So at home, we were not defined according to gender and to this day, I struggle when I hear men pass comments with the words "for a woman", or "even a woman". In the final year of my master's studies, a male colleague said to me, "Linda, if you become too educated, no man will marry you"! He was the Executive Director for HR studying towards his own master's and I wondered why he thought that a master's was an asset for him and a liability for me! More often than I care to remember, I have had (African) men tell me that I do not behave like a woman and I do not know my place as a woman. I have stopped losing sleep about such comments as I have realised that my upbringing made me gender-neutral in my dealings with people and outlook on life. I am slowly starting to think of myself as having feminist leanings.

During one of our meetings, my supervisor asked me two questions, one being how spending six years in a private school where I was in the racial minority and growing up in a lower-middle class family shaped me, as I had initially not written much about this. I attended the private school that I referred to earlier six years into Zimbabwe's independence when racial tendencies were still prevalent. This was compounded by the fact that

there were only two African teachers in the school and the rest were white. These African teachers taught isiNdebele, one of the major African languages in Zimbabwe.

Interestingly, though, one of them replaced a white woman who had taught isiNdebele at first-year high school level. She was the only white person that I knew personally who spoke isiNdebele fluently. In high school we were referred to as Africans by white people who had been born and raised in Africa. This was a legacy of Zimbabwe's racist past (similar to apartheid in South Africa), where people were previously racially categorised as European, Coloured, Indian and African. I also remember our English teacher, using books with strong racial connotations such as *"To Kill a Mockingbird"*, as part of our set works for literature. We were forced to critically analyse scenes in which black people were demeaned and our marks strongly depended on how well we could criticise our own. During one lesson, she told us that she hated black people and that having an education gave them a veneer of civilisation. I guess the fact that this was happening during the period of civil unrest when dissidents were robbing and killing white farmers and kidnapping white tourists did not help. It was during these high school years that I started to speak out and speak loud and earned a reputation for being a "blabbermouth".

I struggled to get into articles as a black woman. The world of chartered accountants started opening up to black women when, in 1995, the Zimbabwean government started to ask firms to give details of the gender and racial makeup of their staff who were articulated when responding to government tenders for external audits. Most of the accounting firms employed white women as Human Resources managers and they tapped into their social networks when recruiting for articulated clerks. There was a belief that "black girls fall pregnant and leave". I personally did not know any black woman who had fallen pregnant and left articles. I knew quite a few white girls who had married and left articles to raise their children full time. It was when I started serving articles that I really started to appreciate the fact that I came from a privileged background. My colleagues in those years used to refer to me as a "nose" (in South Africa, it would be a "coconut",) a derogatory term which meant that I spoke English through the nose (like a white person). This is a literal translation from an isiNdebele idiom which means to speak English fluently. The guys were relentless in calling me a nose until I said to one of them, "I am sure given a choice, you would have been a nose as well." His response really surprised me. He said, "My children will be more noses than you, at least you still speak isiNdebele." I had never realised that having a private school education was something other people dreamed of. For me it was just the school I had attended and I was never really conscious of what it represented. Being categorised and defined by the school I had attended was really an eye-opener.

I think that the racism I experienced in high school and in my early working life made me realise that no laws or policies were going to address the race issues that I faced as an individual. I would need to fight these wars myself and I did. By the time I completed my articles of clerkship, it was well known throughout the firm (where there were no black people above supervisory level) that racist jokes were not acceptable to me and that I would speak out, even if a partner told the joke. So between my high school years and my training, I learnt to speak up and was unapologetic about being proudly African. By the time I came to South Africa, I had been through the fire of racism, was comfortable in my skin and was able to deal with issues of race as and when they came up. I came to South Africa at an executive management level and hence may have been shielded from racist experiences by the positional power that I had in the organisations for which I worked.

I have been told that I have “white” mannerisms. Whenever I have asked what white mannerisms look like, I am told that I speak my mind, I do not behave like an African woman and I do not treat men like men. It may be that, having spent so much time in the minority from a race perspective, I have become a coconut and I make no apologies for it. If growing up in a middle class home and attending a private school made me a coconut, then coconut is part of my identity and I really do not have issues with it. Having said that, I had to pull my then 4-year-old son out of a private pre-primary school after one of the White children said to him “don’t sit next to me, brown boys stink”. When I approached the head of the school (a White woman), her response was that she did not think it was a big issue. So while I can take racism directed at me in my stride, I come out guns blazing when it is directed at my son!

I would say I grew up in a lower-middle class home, living on a smallholding that my parents owned, and had many extended family members in the working class. This effectively meant that I lived in three worlds from a class perspective. I went to a private school, which obviously catered for the upper class and spent about eight hours of each day there. One of the results of this is that I spoke English for the greater part of my day and it effectively became my first language. I speak my mother tongue with an accent and I think in English. Home was in a lower-middle class society and we associated with working class relatives. My maternal grandparents, with whom I lived until I was 7 years old, lived in a high-density working class township and my paternal grandparents were in a semi-rural area. I had never really given much thought to the impact of this in my life until the said meeting with my supervisor. I think it enabled me to be comfortable with people at all levels of society.

Interactions at school opened my eyes to career possibilities and opportunities that probably would not be available to a girl from a lesser background. A conversation that is still vivid in my mind was with one of my

first cousins in 1998. She was trying to sell me something that I did not need and asked me to buy it to support her business. I responded by saying to her that she had no business being a vendor when her father had been a teacher and she had been educated to Ordinary level (Cambridge-board high school exam); therefore, she had only herself to blame for not taking her studies more seriously. She looked at me and said, “Linda, you don’t know how lucky you are that you had a father who told you why education was important. We just went to school because fees had been paid.” Being a middle class family, there was enough money for us to have a fairly decent life and I guess that freed my parents up to have conversations with us that could not be had in families that were trying to balance their income and expenses on a daily basis.

#### 1.14 Format of the study

**Chapter 1: Introduction and Background:** provides the background for the study, the research problem and its aims and objectives. I sought to identify the gap to be filled by the research and the original contribution the study makes to the theory and practice of the studies on women in leadership. I set the scene by providing a brief background of the evolution of studies on women in the workplace and leadership and a summary of the status of women from a global perspective and in the countries investigated. Brief mention was also made of the limitations and delimitations of the study.

**Chapter 2: Key Conceptual Framework:** introduces intersectionality as the key conceptual framework in the study. It traces its beginnings and its importance in leadership studies. The chapter also deals with the metaphor of the labyrinth in the studies on career progression and concludes with a discussion on how intersectionality and the labyrinth talk to each other in the studies of women in positions of leadership.

**Chapter 3: Literature Review:** lays the theoretical foundation of the study. The various areas that have been researched in the studies on women in the workplace are discussed and the discourse from the 1800s to contemporary times is traced. Studies that have been done on intersectionality in the countries under study are reviewed.

**Chapter 4: Research Methodology:** the type of study, the research methodology used and the reasons for the choice of method are covered. The process of data collection and the results of the study are described. There is also a discussion on the ethical considerations in this type of research.

**Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion:** is a discussion of the key findings, which are compared to similar studies discussed in the literature review. The discussion explores and expands on the major themes that emerge and they are compared between the different countries. The theoretical framework referred to in the study objectives is developed and discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations:** deals with the significance of the study and its contribution to the field of leadership and gender dynamics. I will make recommendations for practice and for further studies.

## Chapter 2: Key Conceptual Framework

*“We ... find it difficult to separate class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously”* – Combahee River Collective (Cole, 2009).

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the key conceptual framework used in this study is introduced. The development of studies in intersectionality and their contribution to academia are explored. I will also examine the concept of the labyrinth, which I believe interlinks with the studies on women and career progression in the workplace.

### 2.2 Intersectionality of gender, race and class

The idea of the self-having multiple identities is not new (Stirrat, Meyer, Ouellette and Gara, 2008). An individual is normally categorised in terms of their core identities. The first identity document for a human being is a record of birth or a birth certificate. This document requires details of race and sex as a minimum and those are primary categories of identity. An individual cannot be just race without having a sex identity; the two must go hand in hand as the identities intersect, meaning that they exist at the same time. Intersectionality has been important in articulating the fact that multiple identities combine to bring about different experiences for people in both their everyday and professional lives. Hence where more than one category of identity is oppressed or discriminated against, “the simultaneous experiences of all the (different) identities result in different meanings and experiences than what could be captured by consideration (of a single category alone)” (Stirrat et al, 2008:91).

Critical race theorists Jean-Marie et al (2009) concur with this finding as critical race theory considers among its major themes “the intersection of race, class and gender”. Moreover, sociologists argue that constructs such as race and gender affect a person’s beliefs about their capabilities and define their opportunities (Cole, 2009). Hence the consideration of a single category of identity may lead to other experiences that emerge from another category being undermined or indeed ignored and yet they are important in order to arrive at an understanding of the total experiences of an individual. The term "intersectionality" was born out of feminist discourse during the second wave of feminism (Biklen, Marshall and Pollard, 2008). It was attributed to Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal scholar and critical race theorist (Cole, 2009). The intersectionality discourse has been predominantly the preserve of feminist scholars and critical race theorists. It was within the studies of critical race theory that the double jeopardy of race and gender for black women came to the forefront (Jean-Marie et al, 2009).

During the years leading to the term being coined, the major movements in the USA were based either on race or gender and failed to take into account the intersection of these categories of identity (King, 1998). At this time, black feminists were trying to find a balance in conversations where they could be recognised as black women. Hitherto, the term “black” had immediately conjured up images of men. So any discussions on black

grouped black men and women together and focused on the experiences of men, which were then assumed to be the same for women (Biklen et al, 2008). Similarly, the leadership studies of the 1970s and 1980s on women focused on the experiences of middle to upper class white women without attention being paid to women from other classes and races (Jean-Marie et al, 2009). It was assumed that the experiences of middle and upper class white women were reflective of the experiences of all women regardless of their race or class. This would have meant that discussions on discrimination of women in the workplace would have centred on sexism as experienced by white women and ignored the fact that for black women there is a "double jeopardy" of race and gender (Jean-Marie et al, 2009). Jean-Marie et al (2009:566, 576) recognise that "Black women experience situations in which their authority is undermined, their competence compromised and their power limited", and that they "view the world from discrete perspectives based on their social positions, ... and within the confines of the larger social structures of race and gender".



Figure 2: The Elephant and six blind men

Within feminist studies, intersectionality has encouraged the study of women's experiences to consider the "multiple identities" of women in terms of race, gender, social class and sexual orientation as the main categories of identity (Cole, 2009). The advocates of intersectionality have rightly argued that considering one element of a woman's identity will lead to a partial understanding of the total picture, which, while true, will also be incomplete. For example, a black (African) female chartered accountant working in a corporate organisation will have experiences that are informed by gender, race

and class as well as the institutional environment. A white woman with a similar academic and professional profile will not experience issues related to race even though she may face gender-related issues. A black male, on the other hand, will not experience gender-related issues although he may come across the race and class experience. An intersectionality lens will consider the experiences of a black woman from a gender, race and class perspective **simultaneously** as part of the total experience and not the different individual categories. The poem of the "Six blind men and an elephant" below further illustrates the importance of "seeing" and discussing the full picture and total experience in research.

### **Six blind men and the elephant - John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887)**

*It was six men of Indostan, to learning much inclined,  
Who went to see the Elephant, (Though all of them were blind),  
That each by observation, might satisfy his mind.*

*The First approached the Elephant, and happening to fall  
Against his broad and sturdy side, At once began to bawl:  
"God bless me! But the Elephant is very like a wall!"*

*The second, feeling of the tusk cried, "Ho! What have we here?  
So very round and smooth and sharp? To me, 'tis mighty clear  
This wonder of an Elephant, Is very like a spear!"*

*The Third approached the animal, and happening to take  
The squirming trunk within his hands, thus boldly up he spake:  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant, Is very like a snake!"*

*The Fourth reached out an eager hand, and felt about the knee:  
"What most this wondrous beast is like  
Is mighty plain," quoth he, "the Elephant, is very like a tree!"*

*The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear, said: "E'en the blindest man  
Can tell what this resembles most; deny the fact who can,  
This marvel of an Elephant is very like a fan!"*

*The Sixth no sooner had begun about the beast to grope,  
Then, seizing on the swinging tail that fell within his scope.  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant, is very like a rope!"*

*And so these men of Indostan, disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!*

As the poem wraps up, the six men are heatedly debating the nature of the elephant and none understands what the others have "seen". They obviously have different ways of seeing the elephant based on the part that they touched. Each perspective provides some information about what the elephant is like, but none conveys a full sense of what the elephant is like. All of these perspectives need to be taken into account when considering the nature of the elephant (Powell, 2012). All the parts described above are part of the elephant but no one part is a description of the full elephant. It is only when the different parts are put together that the full picture of the elephant can emerge. The elephant, in hearing the discussion, probably starts to wonder about who he really is and possibly needs someone to consolidate what each person saw to describe who he is.

This poem aptly describes the limitations of leadership studies with regard to women, especially non-white women. Diversity studies have previously focused on one or two diversity attributes and ignored the effects of “multiple intersecting attributes” (Richardson and Loubier, 2008). Studies examining the interaction of multiple factors in leadership style have been rare, usually focusing on one or two attributes (Harrison, Price and Bell, 1998; Jackson, Joshi and Erhardt, 2003; Richardson and Loubier 2008). Hence the concept of intersectionality was offered “to describe the analytic approaches that simultaneously consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference and disadvantage” (Cole, 2009:170).

The following quotations paint a very clear picture of what intersectionality is and what it is not. I have deliberately quoted them verbatim, as in trying to summarise and put them into my own words, I felt that I lost the essence of what the authors wanted to convey.

"Intersectionality is the idea that social identities such as race, gender and class interact to form qualitatively different meanings and experiences ... Thus a theme that runs through different perspectives on intersectionality is that one cannot reduce identity to a summary of the social groups to which a person belongs. Instead, these social groups interact with each other to create specific manifestations that cannot be explained by each alone” (Warner, 2008). "The premise of intersectionality theory is that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of power. In other words, people are members of more than one category or social group and can simultaneously experience advantages and disadvantages related to those different social groups" (Richardson and Loubier, 2008). “An intersectional approach neither constructs categories like race, class, gender and sexuality as autonomous categories of analysis nor attempts merely to add one category to another, in a process known as additive analysis” (Zerai, 2000). The intersectional framework examines all three categories of race, class and gender “together or simultaneously to get some sense of the ways these spheres of inequality support each other to maintain the status quo” (Zerai, 2000:185). The approach recognises “race, class and gender as interlocking spheres in which domination occurs” (Zerai, 2000).

"Intersectionality makes plain that gender, race, class and sexuality simultaneously affect the perceptions, experiences, and opportunities of everyone living in a society stratified along these dimensions ... To understand any one of these dimensions [researchers] must address them in combination; intersectionality suggests that to focus on a single dimension in the service of parsimony is a kind of false economy. This insight invites us to approach the study of social categories with more complexity and suggests ways to bring more nuance and context to our research on the social categories that matter most in a stratified society” (Cole, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, the lens of intersectionality enables me to view through the different identities in order to understand the "whole woman" as opposed to understanding her from just a gender or race or class perspective.

### 2.3 Definition of the labyrinth and its characteristics

The labyrinth, a term that was introduced into leadership literature by Eagly and Carli (2007), speaks to the various issues in career progression in a manner that makes them seem as if they intersect. Eagly and Carli (2007) are of the firm view that the biggest barrier to women's career progress "is the sum of many obstacles along the way" and as long as the problem is misdiagnosed, the correct cure cannot be prescribed. While acknowledging the existence of a glass ceiling in the career path of a woman, they do not see it as an absolute obstacle as there are women who have broken through it and are in executive positions. The authors go on to say that the journey to the top is more of a "labyrinth" with the metaphor being used to convey the idea that while the route to the top consists of "twists and turns", it has a "viable route to the centre", which means that the "goals are attainable". The obstacles identified in the glass ceiling research have overshadowed those of the labyrinth because the latter has mainly been ignored.

The labyrinth consists of several obstructions as identified by Eagly and Carli (2007) and many other researchers who have studied gender dynamics in the workplace (Caproni, 1997; Felmlee, 1984; Heather- Bigg, 1894; Klatt et al, 2016; Ryan, Haslma, Herby and Bongiorno, 2011). The obstacle of vestiges of "prejudices" advocates the fact that women are disadvantaged at most levels of the organisation and not just at the top. Even in similar roles, men on average are paid more and ascend the career ladder more quickly than women. This is not a new finding and research on gender dynamics has included the gender pay parity which has been a concern from the 1800s and continues to exist to this day (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Guy and Fenley, 2014; Heather-Bigg, 1894; Hogg, 1921). While the issue of equal pay for equal work is important and needs to be addressed, it cannot be a limiting factor to the quest for women to make it to the top in organisations.

Another obstacle is the "resistance to women's leadership" due to stereotypes of the attributes of leaders, men and women (Klatt, Eimler and Kramer, 2016; Schein, 1973, 1975). Women are associated with transformational leadership traits which are not in line with the traditional transactional nature of men's leadership traits (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark and van Dick, 2016; Klatt et al, 2016; Ryan et al, 2011; Schein, 1973, 1975). Consequently, women are not seen to have the leadership characteristics which are associated with effective leadership. The issue of the differences in leadership styles between men and women is a challenge not only from a societal perspective, but from men as well. Where women have shown a more masculine style of leadership, they have been criticised for it, leaving them with the double-bind of being "doomed" if they have a transformational style of leadership and "damned" if they show masculine traits in their leadership style (Catalyst, 2007; Klatt et al, 2016; Ryan et al, 2011).

The demands of family life also present an obstacle in the careers of women. Women unarguably do the lion's share of household and childcare duties (Caproni, 1997; Daniel, 2004; Felmlee, 1984; Greenhaus et al, 2010;

Thompson, 1904). Decision-makers continue to have the perception that households' demands, especially children, prevent women from being able to fulfil their work obligations (Felmlee, 1984). This issue is worse in patriarchal societies where taking care of the household and raising children are often seen as women's work and sharing it with a partner is not even a thought in the minds of both men and women.

Investment in social capital is a necessity in the life of a career-minded person who wants to progress in the workplace. However, due to household demands, women are left with very little time for networking (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Wirth, 2001, 2003). Several obstacles have been identified which relate to family responsibilities. Working long hours is often seen as a reflection of commitment and this works against women who have young families and cannot put in long hours when children need supervision at home. However, in the countries under study, domestic help and childcare are readily available. I am from Zimbabwe, where the extended family culture is still strong. There is almost always a relative who has completed their high school and is undergoing tertiary education in the city or awaiting to start tertiary studies while living with the family – more so a family where the mother works. Hence the supervision of home and children can be shared with the household help or another family member.

Investment in “socialising, politicking and interacting with outsiders” is a crucial part of workplace advancement (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Social networks may be more necessary than skilful performance of the job. Within the workplace, women tend to socialise among themselves and among their hierarchical levels and this partitioning of friendships also limits their ability to interact with the decision-makers – whether male or female. This issue speaks to the glass partitions (Elsesser and Lever, 2011) that I discuss in a later paragraph. This lack of integration across the levels could also be driven by the fact that women might be concerned that they could be seen as “sucking up” to management by their peers. I am reminded of a friendship I had with a senior internal auditor in an organisation where I was a general manager (direct report to the chief finance officer). My friend and I had lunch together in the office canteen and a few days later she told me that someone had said to her, “I see you are now rubbing shoulders with general managers!”

In addition to making time to invest in the social aspect of the workplace, it is important for women to find a “career sponsor” (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989), preferably a man, who can take an interest in her career and build her “legitimacy”. In my workplace experience, this recommendation often proved to be a “kingmaker”. The men with “equity” in the workplace were the voices that were heard when it came to promotion and salary decisions. On the executive committee, as well as at other informal meetings where performance and succession planning were discussed, the voices of these career sponsors got contracts drawn up and salaries reviewed even outside of the policies of the organisation.

The “labyrinth” needs management intervention for it to be a transversible maze. These interventions may serve as the map to help women navigate the twists and turns that will get them to the executive floor. One of the recommended interventions is to increase people’s awareness of the psychological drivers of prejudice toward female leaders, and to work to dispel these perceptions. This suggestion refers to deliberate programmes to raise awareness of the importance of gender diversity in the workplace. Women started entering the workplace in larger numbers during the World Wars and have been growing in number ever since (Alesina et al, 2013; Loizides, 2011; Toossi, 2002; Vallentin, 1932; Wang, 1989). The current crop of leadership consists of "baby boomers" and their offspring. These are people who have been at school and tertiary institutions with girls and women and competed with them for marks and recognition. Furthermore, in countries such as the USA and South Africa, with a long history of the segregation of minorities, diversity is obvious. Hence it is highly improbable that lack of awareness of gender diversity can be a problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There could be another dynamic at play that prohibits women from being able to increase their numbers at leadership level to be in line with their representation in the population and the workforce.

The lack of family-friendly policies and unwillingness on the part of organisations to allow staff members with family responsibilities more time to prove themselves worthy of promotion is another twist in the maze of career progression for women. Family-friendly policies such as company-sponsored childcare and flexi-time serve to support women who want to stay on in the workplace but have home-care responsibilities. Having these options enables them to have both and they do not have to sacrifice one for the other. Having a “time-based” career progression allows more time for employees who are capable of reaching high levels of achievement to accomplish their goals (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Greenhaus et al, 2010). Organisations should consider providing an opportunity for women who leave the organisation to have children to return when their circumstances change. This enables the organisation to have a pool of “tried and tested” employees from whom to make recruitment choices. There should be a concerted effort to encourage male participation in family-friendly benefits and dispel the notion that these are for women only.

The subjectivity of performance evaluation is another of the obstacles that has been identified by Eagly and Carli (2007). Decision-makers need objective performance evaluation criteria to limit the influence of perceptions and subjectivity on the process. The experience that I have had with previous organisations on the issue of performance management has been that performance evaluations are seldom objective and can be manipulated to suit the objectives of the line manager. Moreover, there are often cases of performance targets being set after the fact, just to fulfil the HR department's requirements. Reducing performance subjectivity would need a disciplined managerial workforce that buys into a fair and objective performance appraisal process.

The recruitment tools that are in use in most organisations (informal social networks and referrals to fill positions rather than advertising and employment agencies) lead to positions being filled by friends and friends of friends. The latter are obstacles in the career paths of women (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Wirth, 2001). An objective and transparent process will ensure that all applicants have a fair opportunity to compete for positions in the organisation. In addition to transparent recruitment policies and tools, a critical mass of women in executive positions helps to head off problems that come with tokenism. Companies need to have women in reasonable numbers to avoid perceptions of tokenism and for their voices to be heard. Hence having women as sole members of team's ends up being an obstacle as there is a gender barrier to be broken through in order to form allies.

The types of assignments that women are given can be an obstacle that they need to navigate to get to the top. Women need to be prepared for line management responsibilities with appropriate demanding assignments. They need line experience as opposed to focusing on line functions in their work. Line experience is crucial on the road to the executive floor (Wellington, Kropf and Gerkovich; 2003; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

The findings above are not new and are consistent with those that deal with the glass ceiling (as will be seen in chapter 3). They do confirm that issues identified at that time are real and need to be acknowledged but also raise the point that these are not the only issues that impact the career progression and success of women. There are organisations that have taken the issues of women in the workplace quite seriously. Some of the recommendations identified by Eagly and Carli (2007) have been implemented in organisations but the number of women in positions of leadership continue to be few. In one of my supervisory meetings I asked the questions: Is the problem in the boardroom or in the bedroom? Is the career progression of women an organisational challenge or is it a "home life" issue? Is it possible for a high-performing career woman to advance in the workplace without the support of a significant other? Are workplaces conducive environments for the career advancement of women? I included these questions in the interviews.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter was aimed at providing a background to the key conceptual framework of intersectionality and how it came about. I discussed the term "labyrinth" as it relates to the career journey as the two are closely related and I use it to explore the intersectionality of gender, race and class as part of the career maze that women must navigate if they are to be successful in their chosen careers. In the next chapter, I will discuss some of the key literature on the studies on women in the workplace and the dynamics that they face.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the literature review of some of the studies that have been done on women in the workplace. It has been structured according to the historical trends of women in the workplace, which were summarised in chapter 1. I take a more detailed look at the studies of intersectionality and the areas and countries on which these studies have focused. The chapter ends with a review of the issues of leadership and authority in the workplace.

### 3.2 Feminism and its implications for women in the workplace

*"Women fought for their rights throughout the twentieth century. In the past several decades, their struggle has become truly global, but it is far from won."* (Sophie Bessis, 2000)

A study of the workplace dynamics that affect women cannot be conducted without an understanding of the historical context of the women's movements that have fought to recognise the rights of women in society, politics and the workplace. According to Bessis (2000), "the twentieth century was marked by [the] struggle [of women] to leave the home, where they were confined by ancestral divisions of roles along gender lines". The earliest feminist movements, which first appeared in the West in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, focused on workplace and civil rights issues. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the initial struggle was for education and was followed by the second objective of participating in public life, that is, the right to vote. Finland, in 1906, was the first country where women won the right to vote and run for election into political office.

In 1918 and 1919, most women in Europe won the right to vote, although French and Italian women were recognised as citizens only after the Second World War. Outside Europe, women were fighting for the right to "be just like men" (Bessis, 2000). Right up to the 1960s, women distinguished themselves in the struggles against fascism and colonialism, but these victories were not sufficient to establish their rights as a gender (Bessis, 2000). In the first wave of feminism, women simply wanted equality. In the USA, "women wanted to be able to have credit in their own names, have an equal opportunity to be a plumber or President and, please, please, not have to do the ironing" (Amiel, 1989:23). So initially the first phase of feminism was to recognise women's right to education, vote and career options that were not limited by the fact that they were not men!

The second wave of feminism in the USA brought about new concepts and vocabulary to American women: "equal pay for equal work; Affirmative action; Title IX; The Politics of Housework; The Glass Ceiling; Men's only clubs; the concept of Gender Privilege; Domestic Workers' Unite; Date Rape; Roe v. Wade; and the

personal is political" (Biklen et al, 2008). Second-wave feminism forced many women to choose between fighting the racial battle or the gendered one (Biklen et al, 2008). Second-wave feminism grouped women into one category (regardless of race or social class) and while it accomplished important goals for all women, it "marginalised the perspectives of Black women and women of colour so that they could never be the women whose lives feminism either narrated or were generated from ... Simultaneously, second-wave feminism, in its emphasis on gender, obscured the intersectionalities of race, gender and other aspects of identity that affect our lived experiences" (Biklen et al, 2008:460-461). This led to the racial split of feminism in the US due to the bias towards middle class, white women in the research and the narrative.

According to Mann and Huffmann (2005), the discourse on the third wave of feminism was informed by the following four perspectives:

- Intersectionality theory as developed by women of colour and ethnicity;
- Postmodernist and poststructuralist feminist approaches;
- Feminist postcolonial theory (global feminism);
- The agenda of the new generation of younger feminists.

The concept of waves has been used by researchers to describe the history and evolution of feminism. It is aimed at conveying the notion of there being "ebbs and flow, rise and decline and crests in some of the historical accomplishments and defeats" (Mann and Huffmann, 2005:57). The waves do not mean that there were periods without feminist activism. Rather it is meant to show the periods where feminism had a mass base that arose from the ideas and actions that were being advanced at that time. The feminist movements (especially the second wave) have been important in leading to certain questions being asked such as "does the fact that I am a woman mean that the experiences of all women are a mirror of my own?" and "does the fact that I am Black mean that the experiences of all Black people mirror my own?". Clearly the answers to both questions was no and hence researchers started to bring race, gender and class into the studies (Biklen et al, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989).

### **3.3 Women and the workplace**

The segregation of the roles of the man and woman with regard to work dates back to the Judeo-Christian Bible in which God told the woman that she would bear children in great pain while the man would eat by the sweat of his brow (Holy Bible). This may have been the driver of the societal hierarchies which have emerged over the years. The role of women as the domestic keeper seems to refuse to move since those words were first pronounced more than six millennia ago. During the agricultural period when economies were predominantly farming related, the role of the woman was basically a domestic one where she kept the home and raised the

children while her husband went out to work in the fields and provide for the family. Then and even now, women performed certain aspects of agricultural work which included milking livestock, making cheese and butter and disposing of the surplus for a profit (Alesina et al, 2013; Chen, 2008; Fuchs, 1971; Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Seidman, 1984). They did not plough the land – that work was left to the men in the household – but women could and can still be found in subsistence farming environment, sowing the seed and harvesting the crops.

In the USA, as early as the 1800s, women could be found in the industrial workplace (<https://www.iuc.edu.orgs.cwluherstory/CWLUArchives>). Women started being employed in the cotton mills in 1787 when the factory system was first introduced, but this did not lead to the displacement of men by women in the workplace, as at this time they were doing what was considered to be “women’s work” (Abbot, 1908). They were weaving, which was what they had been doing when the industries were still home-based. However, the number of women in the cotton mills started dwindling in the 1900s while that of men was increasing. These changes were driven partly by the increase in the number of men (mainly immigrants) who were looking for work in the cotton mills and partly by the widening fields of employment for educated women. Moreover, cotton machinery had become heavier and needed greater strength and energy to be operated (Abbot, 1908).

The first all-women strikes took place in the 1820s in New England, with women demanding better conditions, decent wages and shorter hours – to the amusement of the local community. These were followed by the 1834 Lowell Cotton Mills strikes in Massachusetts in 1834. Following several wages cuts, the women in these mills walked out, only to return a few days earlier, at reduced rates and the victory of the company. 8 March 1857 saw garment workers in New York City picketing and demanding improved working conditions, a ten-hour day and equal rights for women. These strikes were broken up by the police. On 8 March 1908, the women in the needles trade in New York City marched in honour of the 1857 march, demanding the vote and an end to sweatshops and child labour (<https://www.iuc.edu.orgs.cwluherstory/CWLUArchives>). International Women’s Day, celebrated on 8 March, is in honour of the marches of 1857 and 1908 and the struggles of working women.

The increasing number of women who entered the workplace after the World Wars led to studies on the reasons for women working and the impact on the families of mothers working outside the home (McKay, 2007; Toossi, 2002; Wang, 1989). In the USA, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 went a long way to create workplace opportunities in the workplace (Guy and Fenley, 2014). Prior to 1970, mothers in the USA joined the workforce after the youngest child reached the age of 12 (except in black families where mothers with 5 year olds were

working) (McKay, 2007; Wang, 1989). This trend has changed dramatically over the years, not only in the USA but globally. Mothers are returning to the workplace when the children are a few months old.

The primary driver of working mothers being in the workplace has been financial – to either avoid poverty, to supplement the family income or to achieve financial freedom and an improved quality of life for the family (Fuchs, 1971; McKay, 2007; Patrick, Stephens and Weinstein, 2016). With the passage of time, other factors have crept in to add to the reasons why women are working, such as personal satisfaction, social prestige and changes in societal attitudes (McKay, 2007; Patrick et al, 2016). Nowadays, being a working woman is seen as the norm. A few decades ago, a married woman in the workplace was seen as a sign of the husband’s failure to provide for the family. Working mothers were either single women or widows (Chen, 2008; Fuchs, 1971; Kazi, Raza and Aziz, 1988). Society believed in these roles and unfortunately this belief became entrenched in organisations due to the patriarchal nature of society and its translation into the workplace.

### **3.4 Women in the workplace and occupational segregation**

*“The division of labour by sex appears to have been universal throughout human history” (Hartmann, 1976).*

This view has been echoed by various researchers in the area of occupational segregation (Finsley, 1984). As far back as the pre-Industrial period, women have always worked and the work they did was occupationally segregated (Alesina et al, 2013; Fuchs, 1971). Research into the origins of the different cultural beliefs on the role of women in society tested the hypothesis that the agricultural period is the one that birthed the gendered role when it comes to work (Alesina et al, 2013). In the latter research, Boserup (1970) used the different types of cultivation (shifting and plough) to account for the different roles played by men and women in agriculture. Shifting cultivation used handheld tools and could be done easily by both men and women, while plough cultivation required “upper body strength, grip strength and bursts of power to pull the plough and control the animals” (Alesina et al, 2013). Hence societies in which plough cultivation was prevalent developed the belief that women should stay at home. Alesina et al (2013) tested that hypothesis and found that this belief has been carried into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in those societies. Hartmann (1976) reviewed the history of job segregation by sex and explored the development of a “sex-ordered division of labour”. She argues that patriarchal systems in which men controlled the labour of women and children taught them the techniques of hierarchical control. When capitalism came to the fore in the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, men already had the upper hand with the gendered division of labour as well as hierarchical experience. Her research concludes that the current status of women in the labour market was created by men and continues to be sustained by them. She further advocates that an equalisation of roles in the labour market would require men to give up their privileged position.

Therefore, segregation of roles by sex in work effectively requires an overthrow of the patriarchy which has been deeply entrenched in societies for centuries. Her conclusion on the matter: “it will be a long, hard, struggle” (Hartmann, 1976).

In the 1980s, a workshop was commissioned in the USA to report on the different areas of occupational segregation including trends as well as remedies. One of the key findings was that occupational segregation by gender has played a role in the continued pay parity between the sexes. Sociologists also found that people with limited opportunities for career advancement (in most cases women) experienced socio-psychological effects such as job disengagement and reduced career aspirations (Fuchs, 1971; Kanter, 1977).

According to the Finley report (1984), researchers have identified different reasons for the occupational segregation by gender which continues to be found in “different occupations, industries and specific jobs within firms”. Some researchers have suggested that occupational segregation is due to organisational processes for hiring and managing employees. They advance that most organisations do not have the means to segregate positions as they become available. Other researchers say that occupational segregation is due to choices or options of female workers in terms of occupation. Women choose jobs that put bread on the table rather than careers in which they can have long-term career growth (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). While there can be debate as to why it exists, the undeniable reality is that occupational segregation exists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and continues to divide workplace roles and remuneration according to gender.

### 3.5 Equal Work for Equal Pay

*“Women are still faced with the most vital of inequalities - that of the pocketbook”* (Hager, n.d.: pg 65)

Following rapidly on the debate about “women in the workplace” was whether or not they should be paid the same as men for the same work (Berger, 1971; Guy and Fenley, 2014; Hogg, 1921; Mavin, 2006). The issue of women’s wages in relation to those of men has been on the radar since the 1920s, when wages were based on the level of expenditure of the recipient (Hogg, 1921). Up until the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 in the US, women were paid lower wages than the men with whom they worked side by side (Berger, 1971; Hager, n.d.). After the passing of the Equal Pay Act, a differentiator other than sex was required for the payment of different wages for the same work. This differentiator could be, but was not limited to, merit, seniority and so on. Berger (1971), purports that women were underpaid because men wanted a cheap pool of labour and to keep well-paying jobs for other men. The situation was exacerbated by legislators not advancing the cause for equal work for equal pay.

The issue of equal work for equal pay is not one that is limited to a few countries. I have already mentioned that when I was seeking employment after completion of my articles, on a few occasions the men that I supervised were offered higher pay for work that I was equally qualified to do. There is a global trend in terms of differences between pay for men versus women for similar work. In the list below, the percentages indicate in a descending order by how much men are paid more than women for similar work: South Korea - 39%; Japan - 28% Germany - 22%; Canada -20%; UK -20%; Australia - 16% and France - 13%.

International bodies and various countries have passed statutes to address the issue of pay disparity for equal work. Listed in [Table 7](#) on page 53 is the legislation that has been passed and the respo.

Gender pay parity is a global problem and continues to exist despite efforts to eradicate it through various international statutes and country-specific laws. The continuation of this problem is shown in the annual world economic forum reports. This area continues to be studied in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in an effort to find a solution to the problem (Berger, 1971; Finley, 1984; Guy and Fenley, 2014; Seligman, 2005). Despite all these efforts, in 2016 the world economic forum reports estimated that it will take up to 170 years to close the gender pay parity gap (<https://www.theguardian.com>).

Table 7: International and country-specific legislation related to pay parity

Name of legislation/ international norm	Country/ Organisation	Description	Comments in terms of countries in this study
<b>Convention 100 – Equal Remuneration, adopted 29 June 1951</b>	International Labour Organisation	Art 2(1): “Each member state shall promote and ensure the application to all workers of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value”	Ratified by Zimbabwe on 4 December 1989 & South African Parliament on 30 March 2000
<b>Convention 111 concerning discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, adopted 4 June 1958</b>	International Labour Organisation	Art 2: “Each member state shall pursue a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment of employment with a view to eliminating any discrimination”	Ratified by Zimbabwe on 5 June 1999 & South African Parliament on 5 March 1997
<b>Universal Declaration of Human Rights - 1948</b>	United Nations	Art 23(2): “Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work”	Membership of UN makes it binding
<b>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted 1966</b>	United Nations	Art 7(a) guarantees the right to “fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work”	Ratified by Zimbabwe on 13 May 1999 & South African Parliament on 18 January 2015
<b>European Social Charter - 3 May 1996</b>		Art 4(3): “With a view to ensuring the effective exercise to a fair remuneration, the Parties undertake to recognise the right of men and women workers to equal pay for work of equal value”	Not applicable to countries in study
<b>USA: Equal Pay Act (1963)</b>	United States	Employers must provide equal pay for men and women who perform equal work, unless the difference in pay is based on seniority, a merit system or some other factor other than sex	Not applicable to countries in study
<b>US: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964)</b>	United States	Prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex or national origin	Not applicable to countries in study
<b>EUROPE: Treaty of Rome (25 March 1957)</b>	Europe	Member states must ensure and maintain the application of the principle that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work	Not applicable to countries in study
<b>European Equal Pay Directive (1975)</b>	Europe	Equal pay: for the same work or for work to which equal value is attributed	Not applicable to countries in study
<b>UK Equal Pay Act (1970)</b>	United Kingdom	This Act inserts an implied equality clause into contracts of employment where a woman is (i) engaged in like work with a man in the same employment; or (ii) is performing work which has been rated equivalent to that of a man in the same employment; or (iii) • is performing work of equal value to a man in the same employment	Not applicable to countries in study
<b>Canadian Human Rights Act (1977)</b>	Canada	Section 11: It is a prohibited discriminatory practice to establish or maintain differences between male and female employees employed in the same establishment performing work of equal value	Not applicable to countries in study

Name of legislation/ international norm	Country/ Organisation	Description	Comments in terms of countries in this study
<b>Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998</b>	South Africa	Section 6: "No employer may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against any employee (includes job applicant), in any employment policy or practice, on a wide variety of grounds, such as race, sex, gender, HIV status, language, political opinion, age and religion or any other arbitrary ground.	SA specific

Source: Bow Gilfillan Africa Group and [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org) and [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

### 3.6 Queen Bee Syndrome

The dynamics between women themselves in the workplace cannot be ignored as they form an integral part of the journey of women who report to other women as part of their career navigation. The "queen bee syndrome" is a term which was first used in 1973 by Staines et al to describe "women who were actively opposed to any changes in traditional sex roles" and later by Abramson (1975) to describe "women in senior management who denied that there was systematic discrimination against women and argued that fewer still were willing to do anything about it, so that queen bees would not accept that women who are capable of a management career are unable to progress due to discrimination" (Mavin, 2006:352). It has since come to mean "women who behave badly" and serves to perpetuate the belief that the role of senior women is to assist other women to climb the corporate ladder, a burden that has been unfairly placed on senior women who want "recognition for their own talents, abilities and knowledge and not for being representatives of the interests of other women" (Mattis, 1993). The queen bee syndrome continues to be a feature in the workplace with women not being willing to create opportunities for each other (Braun et al, 2017) and not creating internal networks among themselves to help each other up the corporate ladder.

Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) carried out a study of the queen bee syndrome in South Africa. The main findings of the study were that the syndrome - the reluctance of executive women to promote other women in the workplace – did indeed exist. The executive women who were interviewed for that study felt that their role in the organisation was to deliver on targets and that women in middle management would need to work their way up the ranks - just as they did. The consequences of the existence of the syndrome were that middle management women were unable to find mentors in their organisations and the possibility of forming a "girls' network" was reduced.

While it is true that the onus of helping women navigate the labyrinth of career progression does not lie with senior women, it does not prevent women from seeking out mentors within and outside their organisations. In my MBL research, I found that the women in middle management complained about not having anyone to mentor them, whereas the executive women were actually keen to mentor them but had never been approached. The former had not engaged the latter in conversations around mentoring and were waiting for mentoring opportunities to just present themselves (Nkomo, 2006).

The other findings of the study by Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) on the barriers to the advancement of women were consistent with those of other researchers (Braun et al, 2017; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Patrick et al, 2016; Ryan et al, 2011; Wirth, 2003) and included the stereotyping of management/leadership styles as well as the formation of old boys' clubs and other exclusive networks. Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) also

found that male traditions, legislation that has tended to focus on racial rather than gender imbalances, the glass ceiling, women's immobility and unwillingness to relocate and other personal barriers served to be a hindrance to women's career advancement. These findings were in line with those of previous researchers in this area.

There is an unspoken expectation that the social dynamics of women in terms of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour will translate into how they relate to each other in the workplace. Solidarity behaviour is the opposite of the Queen Bee syndrome and it is the expectation that once women are in management, they will gravitate towards and support other women (Mavin, 2006). Further studies have found that solidarity behaviour is complex in that it assumes that women view other women as their natural allies, regardless of hierarchical differences (Mavin, 2008; Jogulu and Vijayasingham, 2015). It further assumes that senior women should view the "women in management mantle" as their individual responsibility. However, solidarity behaviour may set expectations of senior women in management which may not be fulfilled and may be unrealistic.

The assumption does not take into account the "complexity of women's experiences in senior management and the negative relations between women. (Braun et al, 2017; Mavin, 2006). The assumption of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour assumes that the male behaviours that women in senior management tend to adopt in order to make it to those positions will change and that the women will adopt a less competitive way of management (Mavin, 2006). argues that "the assumption of women as natural allies is particularly challenged once a woman destabilises the established order "The nature of senior management for women and the behaviours and actions required to gain entry and remain in this environment do little to sustain the notions of sisterhood or solidarity behaviour" (Braun et al, 2017; Mavin, 2006:267). Furthermore, women in middle management often see those in senior positions as queen bees who "pull up the drawbridge for other women once they have reached the senior levels" (Braun et al, 2017; Mavin, 2006:269). My supervisor used an interesting phrase in isiXhosa to describe this notion: "*bema emnyango, bedunuse*", meaning that once women get into senior positions, they stand at the door and bend over, exposing their behinds. In most African cultures, this is an unacceptable position. Finally, female misogyny which manifests itself as women move into the "predominantly male world of senior management" (Braun et al, 2017; Mavin, 2006) can be a barrier to women forming alliances in the workplace.

### 3.7 Affirmative action and employment equity

Affirmative action has been implemented in many countries over the years, including the USA, Canada, India, Australia, Malaysia and indeed the countries being studied (Ayob, n.d.; Bush, 1998; Clark, 1992; Jaunch, 1999; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012).

Affirmative action first emerged in the USA during the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and was seen as one of the most profound public policies introduced (Soni, 1999) as well as one of the “most controversial since the abolition of slavery” (Leonard, 1990:43; Rubinstein, 1985) The aim of the initial policy mandated federal contractors to take affirmative action to ensure that applicants were employed without regard to their race, creed, colour, or national origin (Leonard, 1990; Shaw and Barry, 2004), thus consequently attracting and retaining “minorities who were previously underrepresented in the workplace relative to the population in the country” (Ayob, n.d.). The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in the idea to “reform US society in such a way that Blacks and other minorities would finally be regarded and treated as equals” (Esposito and Romano, 2014:72). The minorities were mainly Hispanics and African Americans as well as women who were being discriminated against by white employers (Ayob, n.d.; Ciocchetti and Holcomb, 2010). Prior to the passing of the affirmative action executive order, minorities and women had been passed over in recruitment and education opportunities and so this injustice was being corrected by affording these groups preferential treatment (Ayob, n.d.; Rubinstein, 1985). Australia had its own affirmative laws to address discrimination against women as well as racial discrimination (Bush, 1998), while Malaysia’s affirmative action policy addressed discrimination against its majority people and gave them preferential treatment in terms of corporate equity as well as providing them with access to higher education (Ayob, n.d.).

In the USA, affirmative action was intended to integrate minorities and women into the workplace and educational institutions (Rubinstein, 1985) and ensure that American institutions of education and workplaces were reflective of the American population. The result was that the racial inequality in America shifted and became a class inequality as the gap between groups was narrowed, but that within groups increased. In Africa and Asia, it was and is intended to be a “tool for transformation” (Jaunch, 1999). In Zimbabwe, it was implemented in a country that had an ethnically heterogeneous population (Jaunch, 1999). The result of implementing affirmative action in Asia (Sri Lanka and Malaysia) was to benefit the major ethnic groups. In Malaysia, affirmative action was a balancing act between creating opportunities for the ethnic groups that were previously disadvantaged without “creating undue hardship for the non-beneficiary groups” (Jaunch, 1999:7) and it successfully reduced socio-economic inequalities. However, similar to the USA, while interethnic inequalities were addressed, affirmative action led to class inequality within the tribes, an inherent problem with affirmative action policies that focused on redressing race, gender and ethnic

balances without taking into account the class inequalities and thus creating economic inequality (Jauch, 1999).

There are two schools of thought as to whether or not affirmative action has been successful in the countries in which it has been implemented (Charlton and Van Niekerk, 1994; Clark, 1992). The proponents of success have considered the increase in the number of the beneficiaries as a mark of the success of affirmative action policies (Clark, 1992). In the United States, success was defined as the increase in the number of black females and males in organisations and positions that were previously not open to them.

Different reasons for seeing affirmative action as having failed have been given in the different countries where it has been implemented (Clark, 1992). Affirmative action has incurred the criticism of the non-beneficiary group, who see it as reverse discrimination that it discriminates against white people and thus perpetuates discrimination (Rubinstein, 1985; Durrheim, 2003) despite the fact that its intent is to address discrimination. The reverse discrimination supporters have argued that it is unjust because the people paying the price are actually not the perpetrators, but their descendants and so they are being made to pay for what they did not enjoy (Groarke, 1990). The generation that is receiving the benefits is not the generation that did not enjoy the benefits of the perpetrators (Ayob, n.d.).

The beneficiaries should be the generation that suffered and not their descendants. Furthermore, the discrimination ended at a certain point in time (Ikuenobe, 2010) and would no longer be exercised; therefore the preferential treatment should not be open-ended (assuming that following the enactment, discrimination would eventually be eliminated from the workplace) and the playing field would be levelled. (Ayob, n.d.; Seekings, 2008). Other criticisms of affirmative action policies include the fact that appointments are not merit-based (Ciocchetti and Holcomb, 2010; Esposito and Romano, 2014; Rubinstein, 1985), and the beneficiaries are then likely to be assumed to be inferior and not competent for the roles to which they have been appointed (Ciocchetti and Holcomb, 2010; Rubinstein, 1985).

Those who oppose affirmative action have suggested (gender) neutrality and colour-blindness as a way to “dodge, deny or defend the racialised social systems” (Esposito and Romano, 2014:70; Rubinstein, 1985) instead of acknowledging that it exists and being part of a solution to correct its skewedness to one racial group at the expense of others. There have even been calls for the abolition of affirmative action as it is seen not to have worked (Leonard, 1990), while other calls, still from its critics, are that it should be abolished because it has led to the elimination of racial discrimination in US workplaces.

In Zimbabwe, prior to 1980 when the black majority came into political power, the ruling white minority enjoyed access to education and workplace opportunities that were not available to other race groups (Van Hook, 1994; Ncube and Greenan, 2003; Seidman, 1984). Post-independence, economic wealth continued to be concentrated in the hands of the white minority and did not transfer to the indigenous black majority (Jaunch, 1999). Affirmative action in the form of preferential policies led to increased employment of black Zimbabweans in the civil service and the consequence of the white government employees leaving to either join the private sector or leave the country (Jaunch, 1999).

The Presidential Directive policies giving effect to the preferential appointment of black Zimbabweans were binding only on the Public Service Commission and so the private sector and parastatals were not directed in the same manner. The Directive clearly spelt out that black Zimbabweans had to qualify for the positions in the public sector as well as ensuring that existing public servants continued to be enabled to be efficient and having their career aspirations satisfied (Jaunch, 1999). The roll out of affirmative action to the private sector was gradual as government bought time to ensure that enough black Zimbabweans were sufficiently capacitated to take over its leadership, while that of parastatals fell under its responsible ministry; however, there was no legislation to guide the process (Jaunch, 1999). There was a risk of a white skills flight to South Africa (which was still under white rule) if the changes were sudden and threatening to the white corporate leaders.

The policies around affirmative action and the manner in which they were implemented resulted in the successful racial transformation of the civil service in four years (Jaunch, 1999), with the result that the white bureaucratic elite was replaced by a black bureaucratic elite and white human resources were replaced by black ones, creating interracial economic equality (Jaunch, 1999). The main beneficiaries of Zimbabwe's affirmative action programmes were black men. Post-independence, black women did not see a change in occupational status, whereas Coloured and Indian Zimbabweans continued to experience exactly the same marginalised life as they had during white minority rule (Jaunch, 1999).

Similarly, in South Africa, the apartheid government ensured that economic wealth resided in the hands of the white minority population (Jaunch, 1999; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Seekings, 2008). The attaining of political leadership by the black majority in 1994 did not mean an automatic transfer of economic power to Blacks and as a result, it required the ANC-led government to start finding means of addressing the economic imbalances that they inherited (Coetzer, 2009; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Nkomo, 2011).

The Constitution of South Africa sought to bring about substantive rather than formal equality. The former would take into account the structural inequality and seek a remedy for it (Coetzer, 2009). The Employment Equity Act of 1998 was promulgated to achieve employment equity with the outcome of a workforce that was reflective of the demographic profiles of the “national and regional economically active population” among designated employers (Nkomo, 2011). The previously disadvantaged population groups, women and people with disabilities were to be the beneficiaries.

A survey of the attitudes of South Africans that was carried out annually by the HSRC (Roberts, Weir-Smith and Reddy, 2010) during 2003-2009 showed that:

- The rate of transformation was slow, especially in the private sector and beneficiaries were the elite and middle class and not the lower class members of the disadvantaged groups.
- At national level, there was support for affirmative action as a means of redressing the labour market.
- In the 2003-2009 period there was support by 60-70% of adult South Africans that there should be racial- and gender-based affirmative action.
- The intended beneficiaries evaluated affirmative action more positively than the non-beneficiary groups; therefore black respondents were more in support of race-based discrimination than the other population groups, especially whites, while women were more in favour of gender-based affirmative action than men. Furthermore, the support for gender-based affirmative action exceeded that for race-based affirmative action by a significant margin for all race groups, except the black respondents.
- The younger age groups (16-24 years) as well as the population members who had no schooling or primary level education, the unemployed job seekers, those with low living standards and residents of informal settlements and rural traditional areas had positive attitudes towards affirmative action.

The same survey showed that black respondents had positive views about the outcomes that affirmative action was yielding, whereas the Indians were most sceptical. The more educated and affluent members of the population groups were less supportive of affirmative action and overall, self-interest seemed to inform the evaluations among the intended groups (Roberts et al, 2010).

Nkomo (2011) carried out a study whose results may provide insight into why economic equality and workplace diversity are not being seen almost twenty years after the Employment Equity Act of 1998 was promulgated. The experiences of two organisations that were part of a case study of twelve organisations in the public and private sectors across a range of industries were shared. These experiences could very well be extrapolated across designated employers’ workplaces. The case studies showed that overall, there was a

“minimal understanding of the importance of the value of equality and diversity in organisations”, and that the dominant approach of organisations to the Employment Equity Act of 1998 was compliance (Nkomo, 2011). This resulted in transformation efforts that “for the most part, focused on numerical targets”, meaning that it was the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law approach to the Employment Equity Act (Nkomo, 2011). The two most significant obstacles to the spirit of the law approach were found to be the culture of the organisation as well as the larger context in which the organisation operated (Nkomo, 2011). The culture of the organisation is shaped by the values of its dominant group, the key decision-makers (Bass and Avolio, 1993; George, Sleeth and Siders, 1999). The language and behaviours of the dominant group are likely to permeate the organisation and exclude the members of the workforce who are not part of that culture, therefore requiring any equity and diversity interventions to be cognisant of the broader organisational context (Nkomo, 2011).

Another crucial but overlooked obstacle to embracing the spirit of employment equity was the resistance of middle managers to the employment equity interventions. Middle management is key to the implementation of any intervention and if they do not buy into it, the likelihood of success is compromised. The white-dominated management of South African organisations cannot be expected to drive the transformation of organisations from white to black, as the status quo favours them. It goes without saying that, in South Africa, as in other countries where beneficiaries of privileges must be part of the process of change, self-interest and self-preservation will affect the process and in the case studies, it resulted in a focus on transforming the lower levels of management (Nkomo, 2011).

The study had a constant theme of white employees being in denial about the continued apartheid in the workplace and without acknowledgement of this fact, there could be no finding of a solution to the problem. In line with the sentiments of the beneficiary groups in other countries, the white employees saw employment equity as reverse discrimination (Esposito and Romano, 2014; Rubinstein, 1985) and held the perception that transformation of the workplace would lead to white employees eventually facing career stagnation and being permanently excluded. Their sentiments were that everyone should compete for the job and not just black candidates. These obstacles in South African workplaces mean that white employees do not see the limited opportunities that black people had under apartheid as justifying affirmative action and they have “apartheid fatigue” (Nkomo, 2011). Dominant group employees do not seem to be willing or able “to recognise the continued effects of racial segregation in organisations” and seem to want to keep past injustices in the past (Nkomo, 2011).

The implications of this study are that there is still a great deal of work to be done to get organisations on board with regard to equality and racial diversity in the workplace. The attitudes of the dominant group clearly spell out that if institutionalised power and privilege are not addressed, the status quo will remain and the inequalities from the past will be perpetuated. The uncomfortable topics of apartheid and its legacy must be included as part of the formal education and training offered in organisations. Cultural diversity training is not as important. Part of the deliverables on which managers of organisations are measured should be achievement of transformation, including the training and development of employment equity employees.

South Africa is going through the same pain that the countries that have walked the path of addressing inequalities faced being supported by the beneficiary groups (Jauch, 1999) and facing resistance by the previously advantaged who are crying reverse discrimination (Esposito and Roman, 2014; Rubinstein, 1985) (even though they may not have cried discrimination when they were the sole racial group enjoying the benefits of apartheid). There needs to be a recognition in workplaces that transformation contributes to diversity in the workplace and lends itself to the creation of diverse work teams that are more valuable than homogeneous teams (Ayob, n.d.; Ciocchetti and Holcomb, 2010).

In summary, white men, in all parts of the world where it has been implemented, do not support affirmative action (Esposito and Romano, 2014). This is possibly linked to the race order in most countries, where systems have been created to create economic benefit that is linked to race (Esposito and Romano, 2014) and white people are the beneficiaries of such inequalities (white privilege) (Green et al, 2007; Grubbs, 2008; Kendall, 2002; Ratele and Laubscher, 2010) and hence the need to defend or lose the privileges that they have enjoyed for centuries (Green et al, 2007; Ratele and Laubscher, 2010).

### **3.8 Think manager, think male**

The “think manager, think male” phenomenon first surfaced in the USA in the 1970s (Brenner et al, 1989; Klatt et al, 2016; Schein, 1973; 1975; Schein and Mueller, 1992). A study of male managers (Schein, 1973) and later female managers (Schein, 1975) showed that both sexes held the view that a successful manager needed “characteristics, attitudes and temperament” that were commonly ascribed to men (Brenner et. al, 1989). This became known as the “think-manager, think-male” phenomenon. The 92-item Schein index was used to define the sex role stereotypes and the characteristics of a successful manager. The index included items such as “leadership ability, analytical ability, intuitive, aggressive, emotionally stable, dominant, curious and competent” (Schein and Mueller, 1992:439). The initial studies were conducted at a time when the number of women in the workplace was starting to increase but their numbers in management positions were few.

Fifteen years later, the “sex typing” of management roles was revisited to establish if there had been a change in attitude since the initial research in the 1970s. By this time, women in the workplace had become normal, although their numbers in positions of management still lagged behind those of men. The later study was also carried out in the US, among male and female managers of companies in various industries. Using the same 92-item Schein index as had been used in the earlier study, the results showed that the men still perceived managers as possessing characteristics that were more commonly ascribed to men than to women (Brenner et al, 1989). The men in the study did not attribute these characteristics to women in management.

The views of the women in the later study had changed, compared to those of women 15 years earlier. The female managers no longer held the view that the characteristics for success as a manager were more commonly ascribed to men than to women. They were of the view that successful managers had characteristics, attitudes and temperaments which could be ascribed to both men and women (Brenner et al, 1989). The fact that men still held a stereotypic view of the role of manager was a red flag to the progression of women in the workplace. Men were the majority in the management and leadership roles in organisations and if their view was that the requisite attributes for successful managers were ascribed to men, then it stood to reason that they would overlook women when recruiting or promoting for management positions.

In the 1990s, Schein and Mueller carried out a study of the “think-manager, think-male” syndrome outside of the US to establish whether or not “sex typing” of the role manager could be found in other countries. The study was among male and female management students in the US, Germany and Great Britain using Schein’s 92-item index. In Germany, both men and women held the view that managers were perceived to possess characteristics more commonly ascribed to men than to women (Schein and Mueller, 1992). The results for Great Britain were quite similar to those of Germany but not overwhelmingly ascribing the characteristics to men only. The results of the US sample were consistent with those of the earlier study by Brenner et al (1989).

On the one hand, the attitudes of men in the US remained unchanged, with them ascribing the characteristics for successful managers more to men than women, while on the other hand, women continued to be of the view that these characteristics could be ascribed to both men and women. Hence the cross-cultural study showed that across three countries, the males perceived successful managers as having characteristics more commonly ascribed to men than to women (Schein and Mueller, 1992). Among the females, the US results showed a weak pattern of sex stereotyping of the role of manager while Germany showed very strong ones. In fact, the German females’ sex typed the managerial role almost to the same extent as their male counterparts (Schein and Mueller, 1992). This study was at a time when the number of women in

management positions in Germany was very low and hence German women would have had extremely limited opportunities to see women in management positions in the workplace. The researchers found that the German language does not have a gender-neutral word for manager and supervisor and hence the word itself would have a “male” connotation. This situation could therefore have contributed to the perception of German women that management was male.

The think-manager, think-male phenomenon is one that continues to contribute to the glass ceiling phenomenon that sees the number of women dwindle as they go up the corporate ladder (Brenner et al, 1989; Braun et al, 2017; Klatt et al, 2016; Ryan et al, 2011; Schein, 1973; 1975; Schein and Mueller, 1992). This poses a problem as men are a critical part of the process of breaking the glass ceiling. Until their attitudes change (and these can only change by men working with women and seeing that they are good at managing and leading without being men), the role of manager will continue to be equated with maleness.

### 3.9 Tokenism

The term token reflects one’s status as a symbol of one’s kind and tokenism is being members of a subgroup who constitute less than 15% of the main group Kanter (1977). The number of people in a group who are socially and culturally different is deemed to be critical in shaping the interaction of the group. The group that forms the majority is known as the dominant and the others are tokens. Tokens are seen as being representative of a group and not as individuals. They can also be seen as solos if there is only one of their kind in a group (Kanter, 1977). It is important to note that tokenism is not necessarily something that is done deliberately by an organisation. It is a reflection of being one of a kind in a situation, unless the minority are incorporated into the dominant culture. The phenomenon observed with tokens is that they are visible (that is, they stand out), polarised (the differences between the dominants and the tokens are exaggerated) and assimilated (the attributes of a token are generalised across their group).

Kanter (1977) carried out a study in a US-based industrial corporation that had a salesforce of 300 staff, 20 of whom were women. A theoretical framework was developed that considered the perceptual tendencies that determine the interaction dynamics between dominants and tokens and the latter’s response to these. Her findings 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 puts pressure on them 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.

Kanter (1977) argues that these issues are a result of being in the minority in terms of the numbers and that if the numbers were balanced, these experiences would disappear. She proposes that numbers over 15% would lead to a group no longer being a token. Stichman et al (2010) confirmed some of these findings in a study of men and women in the police force. In this study, women constituted 17% of the workforce and this number could therefore be tested against the 15% threshold suggested by Kanter (1997) as being the token threshold. In that study, it was confirmed that the negativism associated with visibility and assimilation was not experienced by both the male and female officers. There was some support for Kanter (1977) that tokens may deal with the negative consequences of tokenism by choosing to be invisible. This was shown in that the female officers preferred not to apply for promotion opportunities as they felt that they might be promoted simply because they were women. Despite women being beyond the 15% point advanced by Kanter (1997), they still perceived gender bias in their departments while their male counterparts did not experience it. Among the male officers, though, the married ones tended to perceive gender bias more than their single colleagues.

Subsequent reviews of Kanter's (1977) study (while not undermining the value of her contribution) found that attributing the negative consequences of tokenism to pure numbers may have been a rather simplistic approach (Stichman et al, 2010; Yoder, 1991). These later studies proposed that the issue of gender discrimination needed to be considered when dealing with the results of tokenism and therefore the consequences of tokenism could be not reduced to a numbers game. Kanter's study considered only women as the token group and this could be the reason for the types of findings in her work. Yoder (1991) further attributes Kanter's findings to the fact that the token women were in male-dominated occupations, which was considered inappropriate at that time. It is interesting to note that men in female-dominated occupations, such as nursing, did not experience the negative consequences that Kanter found. On the contrary, being male in a female-dominated occupation tended to accelerate the promotion of men, in a phenomenon known as the "glass escalator" which is discussed later in this chapter. Yoder (1991) concludes that in addition to numbers in the work group, negative consequences of tokenism could be also be compounded by gender status, occupational appropriateness and occupational prestige.

### **3.10 Sexual harassment**

Violence against women cuts across nationalities, age, social class, race, ethnicity and religion and "is the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world today" (Akhtar, 2013; Yoder and Aniakudo, 1995). Sexual harassment has been a fixture of the workplace since women first began to work outside the home and continues to be prevalent in the workplace (Bingham and Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Schneider, Swan and Fitzgerald, 1997). Long before there was a term for it, women were sexually

harassed. White slave masters sexually (ab) used their black slaves. When women started entering the workplaces during the age of industrialisation, they had to endure sexual comments and demands to secure their jobs. As students, they have fallen prey to teachers for wanting an education (Akhtar, 2013). There are very few women, if any, who have not experienced sexual harassment either at school or in the workplace (Akhtar, 2013; Fasting et al, 2007; Fitzgerald, 1993). In fact, studies show that one in every two women will be harassed at some point in their school or work life (Akhtar, 2013; Fitzgerald, 1993; Schneider et al, 1997).

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines sexual harassment as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” that interferes with one’s employment or work performance or creates a “hostile or offensive work environment” (Fasting et al, 2007; McLaughlin et al, 2012). Fitzgerald et al (1995:128) define sexual harassment “psychologically as unwanted sex-related behaviour at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding her resources, or threatening her well-being”. It also includes “sexually oriented gestures, jokes or remarks that are unwelcome; repeated and unwanted sexual advances; touching or other unwelcome bodily contact; and physical intimidation” (Akhtar, 2013:55). Sexual harassment can therefore be summarised as being *quid pro quo* harassment, meaning sex for a job or promotion or whatever the harasser wants from the victim, or sex-related behaviour that creates a “hostile work environment” (Fasting et al, 2007; McLaughlin et al, 2012; Schneider et al, 1997).

Research has advanced quite a few reasons as to why sexual harassment is a problem. It is not only a school or workplace problem; it is a universal, societal problem and starts in the societies from which schoolboys and workers emanate (Akhtar, 2013; Quinn, 2002; Yoder and Aniakudo, 1995). One of the findings of the research on sexual harassment has been that men and women do not quite see it in the same light. Previous research has shown that women are more likely to define more acts as sexual harassment while more men are likely to blame and not empathise with the victim of the harassment (usually a woman) (Quinn, 2002). Most of the time, men write it off as harmless fun that women are overly sensitive to, while women are of the view that men just do not understand it and there is really no middle ground between the two. This is more pronounced in patriarchal societies when men are expected to be “sexually aggressive” and be pursuers while women remain inscrutable and seemingly coy. Another problem is double standards when assessing sexual harassment. Williams et al (1999) advance that some women may object and claim being sexually harassed not because of the behaviour, but because of the characteristics of the person doing it.

Although men who display signs of being effeminate may be targeted, it is usually women who are subjected to sexual harassment (McLaughlin et al, 2012). It is a global problem that attacks the rights and dignity of

women (Akhtar, 2013). At the heart of sexual harassment is usually power and status differences as “harassers have a desire to exert control, humiliate and achieve and maintain dominance” (Akhtar, 2013; Gruber and Bjorn, 1986).

Scholars have suggested two distinct positions on the harassment of women in the workplace (McLaughlin et al, 2012). The first position is the vulnerable-victim hypothesis, which suggests that it is the most vulnerable workers such as women and minority groups who are subjected to greater harassment. The second position is the power-threat model, which suggests that women in positions of authority, who are seen to be threatening the dominance of men, are the more frequent targets. The perpetrators use harassment to penalise gender “non-conformity” (McLaughlin et al, 2012). Women who hold management positions are perceived to be challenging the “supremacy” of men and be holding positions that they do not deserve. McLaughlin et al (2012) do, however, concede that it is possible that more women in positions of authority report sexual harassment simply because they are aware of it due to their advanced learning and responsibilities. Both men and women see it as sexual harassment when it is “a directed act of power against a particular woman or women” (Quinn, 2002). In this behaviour, men openly gaze at women and send out the signal that they have a right to sexually evaluate women. Through the look, the targeted woman is reduced to a sexual object and is not seen a competent subordinate, peer or boss and her organisational power is undermined. When the man looks, everyone, including the targeted woman, knows he is looking and why. How the woman feels about being looked at in such a manner is irrelevant. From a man’s point of view, this is simply a game played with an object: a woman’s body (Quinn, 2002).

While the initial definition of typical sexual harassment spoke to male authority figures harassing their subordinates, over the years, contrapower harassment has become a feature of the workplace (McLaughlin et al, 2012). This speaks to women experiencing harassment at the hands of their male subordinates in an attempt to de-authorise them (McLaughlin et al, 2012; Quinn, 2002). The harassment of women by men has less to do with sexual attraction and more with protecting their turf (McLaughlin et al, 2012; Quinn, 2002). A disputable form of sexual harassment is “girl watching” which simply means “sexually evaluating women” and is usually done by men in the company of other men and includes behaviours such as openly gazing, catcalling, gestures and comments about a woman’s body (Quinn, 2002). This is considered normal behaviour by men - “a man watching girls – even in his workplace - is frequently accepted as a natural and commonplace activity, especially if he is in the presence of other men” (Quinn, 2002:387).

The common question asked in respect of sexual harassment is why the victim does not report it (Fitzgerald et al, 1995). The literature on victims’ responses to sexual harassment has offered frameworks for dealing

with sexual harassment but the major gap is that they are not based on the reactions of real victims. These frameworks have been based on either hypothetical situations or “rational derivation” with the result that they focus on action-oriented, problem solving and neglect the psychological elements (Fitzgerald et al, 1995:119). Women are expected to react to sexual harassment in ways that do not take into account its psychological impact on the victims (Fitzgerald et al, 1995) and are expected to cope with it by being assertive (Fitzgerald et al, 1995) and fighting it head-on.

The framework of Fitzgerald et al (1995) was based on the coded actual responses of real victims of sexual harassment. The researchers considered the strategies used by victims of sexual harassment to cope and arrived at ten strategies that can be divided between “internally focused which consists of endurance, denial, detachment, retribution, and illusory control and externally focused strategies of avoidance, appeasement, assertion, seeking institutional or organisation relief, and seeking social support” (Fitzgerald et al, 1995:119). Other researchers have come up with different names for the coping mechanisms used by women, which include advocacy seeking, social coping, avoidance/denial or confrontational/negotiation (Knapp et al, 1997), as well as formal reports, informal complaints, social support seeking and strategies for communicating with the harasser (Bingham and Scherer, 1993), indirect strategies of ignoring, joking about inappropriateness and other behaviours that are not aggressive, assertive strategies such as asking or persuading the perpetrator to stop and aggressive behaviours such as anger, hostility and threats (Yoder and Aniakudo, 1995) , among others.

Gruber and Bjorn (1986) examined the sociocultural, organisational and personal resource model’s influence on how women respond to sexual harassment. The findings of the research were that perpetrators tend to target women who are most vulnerable (low skill, low status) and also that women in male-dominated environments where male power is threatened report more problems with sexual harassment. The study found that sociocultural factors do not affect how women respond to sexual harassment and that the reactions of low status, low skill women and those of high status, high skill women are similar in that they react in passive and placating ways to the harassment. The reaction of women is more likely to be influenced by a woman’s personal resources, namely her internal evaluation of herself; including her “self-esteem, personal control and level of life satisfaction” (Gruber and Bjorn, 1986). Women who have high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction tend to respond assertively to sexual harassment.

Although formal reporting to organisational authorities is an available option for dealing with sexual harassment, most women do not report it for a number of reasons. These include the fact that they believe nothing will be done about it and they do not want to cause problems for the harasser (Fitzgerald et al, 1995).

The main reason, however, is fear – fear of losing a job, retaliation, not being believed or making the situation worse or of being ashamed and humiliated (Akhtar, 2013; Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Schneider et al, 1997). In some instances, women respond to this type of behaviour by negotiation or by giving in to the demands of their abusers. This makes the situation worse for those women who do speak out about the sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment comes at a cost to organisations and to the victims. Organisations pay the price in the form of declining productivity, increased absenteeism, impaired health, and turnover and in some case litigation (Cortina and Wasti, 2005). Sexual harassment presents a chronic stressor (Cortina and Wasti, 2005) and has psychological, medical, social, political, legal and economic effects on the women who have experienced it in their lives – whether at school or in the workplace (Akhtar, 2013; Bingham and Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1993; Quinn, 2002; Schneider et al, 1997). Schneider et al (1997) conducted a study using a general stress framework to examine sexual harassment experiences. They found that women who had experienced sexual harassment were negatively impacted in terms of their psychological well-being, especially their attitudes to the job and work behaviours. Even at low frequencies of sexual harassment, the outcomes were negative. They also found that sexual harassment incidents were rarely isolated and could last for up to 6 months, thus exacerbating the impact on both the employer and the employee (Fasting et al, 2007). Sexual harassment constrains the ability of women to make choices related to their careers or educations and creates a hostile environment that impacts their ability to deliver at their best.

### **3.11 The glass phenomena**

Research on gender dynamics has revealed quite a few phenomenon which have had the name “glass” attached to them. Terms are glass ceiling (Bridges, 1997; McLaughlin et al, 2012; Wirth, 2001, 2003); glass escalator (Maume, 1999; Smith, 2012; Williams, 1992), glass cliff (Haslam and Ryan, 2008: Ryan et al, 2011) and glass partition (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006). These phenomena have been classified under the heading “glass phenomenon” and really show the evolution of the barriers and obstacles that women face moving from being at ceiling level to being all around in the workplace environment.

#### **3.11.1 Definition of the Glass Ceiling and its Characteristics**

From the time that women started entering the workplace in significant numbers, this increase has not filtered beyond a certain level of seniority in the workplace (Bridges, 1997; Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Klatt et al, 2016; McLaughlin et al, 2012; Wirth, 2001, 2003). They seem to remain at junior and middle management levels. The glass ceiling as a phenomenon was first acknowledged in the 1970s after the US government commissioned a federal study to investigate why there were so few women in managerial positions when

their numbers in the lower ranks of the labour force were growing. Wirth's study (2001) found that two decades later, the phenomenon still remained and it was global.

As indicated in chapter 2, Eagly and Carli (2008) are of the school of thought that there is more than a glass ceiling that obstructs women in their quest for the executive floor, but this perception is far from what international trends and research reflects. In chapter 2 of the book *Breaking through the glass ceiling*, the most recent version of 2003 shows that the overall employment situation of women did not change significantly since 2001 (Wirth, 2003). (For each of Wirth's findings on the glass ceiling, I will reference any similar findings by other researchers in brackets.) The International Labour Organisation's global employment trends are that "men are still in the majority among managers, top executives and higher levels of professional workers while women are still concentrated in the lower categories of managerial positions. Both visible and invisible rules have been constructed around the 'male' norm, which women sometimes find difficult to accommodate: male and female colleagues and customers do not automatically see women as equal with men" (Wellington et al, 2003). Wirth (2001, 2003) found that women tend to have to work harder than men to prove themselves, and sometimes have to adapt to "male" working styles and attitudes. Furthermore, women tend to be excluded from the informal networks dominated by men in the workplace, which are vital for career development (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Metz, 2011; Neck, 2015; Wellington et al, 2003).

It is possible that women themselves deliberately avoid male-dominated social environments. This could be for a wide range of reasons ranging from the cultural unacceptableness of mixing with them socially to not being interested in the social activities that draw men together such as watching a soccer match in the pub. The problem is compounded by employers' perceptions that women, unlike men, are not able to devote their full time and energy to paid work because of family responsibilities (Felmee, 1984; Wellington et al, 2003). Consequently, women are not given as many opportunities as men to do more demanding responsible jobs, which would advance their careers. However, there is evidence to show that once women attain the upper levels of management, attitudes towards them are not much different from those towards men (Wirth, 2003).

The other barriers faced by women in running organisations, are that women tend to have support function experience which is sufficient for them to be appointed as the heads of those support functions, but lack the general (line) management experience that is required for chief executive positions (Eagly and Carli, 2007 ;Wellington et al, 2003). They further found that the lack of role models and mentoring (due to the number of women chief executives being very few) also serves as a barrier. The final barrier that holds women back is the fact the women themselves lack awareness of organisational politics (Wellington et al, 2003).

Wirth's report (2003) goes on to make recommendations to facilitate women's progression to management and executive positions. High-level (executive) commitment is required to change the existing culture within a firm or organisation. This commitment consists of sensitisation programmes within the organisations to refute myths about the capabilities of women and their dedication to work as well as improve the understanding of managers on gender and family issues and the value that women bring to an organisation's image, productivity and bottom-line (Catalyst, 2007; Cook and Glass, 2011; Johansen, 2007; Rose, 2007). There is a need for equal employment opportunity policies which are transparent, objective, fair and closely monitored. The HR policies should not only consider issues of equal opportunities, pay, transfer and promotion, but also ensure that women are not penalised when they take career breaks to raise children or choose to work part time to balance the needs of work and family life (Metz, 2011; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004).

Family-friendly policies such as flexible working hours, childcare facilities and parental leave for both men and women will facilitate the drive to encourage and improve career progression for women with young children (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Greenhaus et al, 2010; Scheer and Rietman, 1993). Eagly and Carli (2007) encourage organisations to enforce anti-discrimination legislation to ensure that women have equal access to jobs, implement punitive sexual harassment policies as well as provide education about sexual harassment to create a culture of respect in the workplace and finally, to provide forums for women to discuss issues that affect them in the workplace.

The career choices made by men and women have an impact on their career progression. Although in 2000-2001 women make up 40 and 60 percent of all tertiary education in the countries studied, their high level of education was not directly reflected in the positions they occupied in the labour market. The main reason for this is that women students tended to choose study courses that were is often influenced by gender role socialization. They are also inclined to have weaker aspirations for career advancement than male students. Consequently, they tend to choose study areas that do not give them the qualifications to enable them to follow more ambitious career paths and advance into higher professional and managerial positions. Women are also aware that employers tend to categorise jobs as more 'suitable' for men or women; for this reason, women tend to adapt the subjects they study and their choice of profession accordingly, thus perpetuating occupational sex segregations"(Wirth, 2003).The report encourages the following to dispel gender stereotypes and assist female students in widening their career choices:

- Elimination of stereotyped images of professions such as men being doctors and women being nurses in school curricula and discouraging of discriminatory practices and attitudes from teaching

and career guidance. This would “normalise” career choices and make them suitable for both males and females;

- Awareness campaigns to be held in the community at large. Engagements with communities would also enable the dispelling of myths around career options;
- Programmes to increase the visibility of women mentors and role models in the academic hierarchy;
- Employers having programmes that create awareness of the benefits that women bring to a business. The starting point for business could very well be the acknowledgement of the strategic imperative of having women as part of leadership teams. The growing of a talent pool of women from which to choose leaders will come naturally from this realisation (Booyesen, 1999; Jackson, 2004; Nkomo and Ng’ambi, 2011).

These findings are consistent with those of Eagly and Carli (2007) on the career labyrinth. The glass ceiling is one of the realities that women continue to face in the workplace. It has been diagnosed and remedies prescribed to how to deal with it, but it refuses to go away and the issue of the few numbers of women at the top persists.

### **3.11.2 The Glass Cliff**

Another of the "twists and turns" that professional women must navigate is the "glass cliff". This phenomenon manifests itself in women being appointed to leadership positions “associated with the increased risk of failure and criticism because these positions are more likely to involve management of organisational units which are in crisis” (Haslam and Ryan, 2008:530; Haslam et al, 2011). As part of their research, Haslam and Ryan (2008) examined the circumstances surrounding leadership positions or the nature of the positions themselves. In times of crisis, it was found that the attributes and characteristics most associated with women were the most appropriate for organisations (Haslam and Ryan, 2008). Their study provided evidence that glass cliff appointments are associated with beliefs that they suit the distinctive leadership abilities of women, provide women with good leadership opportunities and are particularly stressful for women. These appointments often lead to the high performers "crash landing" due to the undue stress that comes with being in the spotlight of an organisation that was already performing poorly at the time of the appointment. Furthermore, the turnarounds are usually expected to be seen in a short space of time.

In the last five to seven years (at the time of the study), this conclusion regarding the glass cliff has been seen in South Africa. Women were appointed as CEO in two organisations that were in trouble, namely South African Airways and Telkom, and in which government was a major shareholder. Both women were highly qualified and at the time of their appointments were hailed as being highly experienced and suitable

for the task at hand. These women had been high performers in previous organisations. However, they were put on sinking ships where more time than they had was required to bring about an organisational turnaround. Extensive shareholder involvement led to the women resigning from the respective organisations before their contracts ended. One of the recommended areas for future research is to identify interviewees that have had “glass cliff” appointments and investigate how they managed to move on with their careers after such experiences.

### **3.11.3 The Glass Partition**

Another "twist" that women must navigate in the workplace is the "glass partition". Organisational practices that heighten workers' fears about sexual harassment and proper conduct on the job may create barriers that inhibit male and female employees from crossing the gender line to form cross-sex relationships. These barriers to cross-sex friendship in the workplace are known as the glass partition (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006). "Workplace friendships are important because they can provide benefits which promote career success" (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006:1078). The support provided by friends in the workplace can lead to career progression (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006). This has been found to be the case with close male relationships (Markiewicz, Devine and Kausilas, 2000; Williams, 1992). Friends can act as a second pair of eyes and ears by providing information and work-related assistance. They also provide psychological support in times of personal and professional stress (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006).

Friendships with more senior employees can be of value in advancing the careers of junior employees and could lead to informal mentoring (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). "Given the substantial advantages that friendships in the workplace offer, those not able to form friendships are at a career disadvantage (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006). A preference for same-sex friendships restricts an individual's pool of potential friends although research has shown that same sex ties tend to be stronger than those of the opposite sex and that cross sex relationships tend to be influenced by the work context (Markiewicz et al, 2000). This preference may have the most impact for women in male-dominated work environments who need to befriend men in order to develop both peer friendships and mentor-like relationships" (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006). It may also be a problem in organisations that are not necessarily male-dominated but where the leadership teams are predominantly male. Both men and women face barriers in forming cross-sex friendships at work but women would seem to be more affected by this than men. Women in male-dominated professions are adversely impacted if they do not form cross-sex friendships but men in female-dominated professions do not face the same obstacle as they tend to befriend men in supervisory positions.

The biggest concerns with regard to cross-sex friendships are that other co-workers can misconstrue cross-sex friendships and that a potential cross-sex friend can misinterpret friendliness (Elsesser and Peplau, 2006). In addition, fears related to possible accusations of sexual harassment lead to concerns around workplace friendships with the opposite sex. It is interesting to note that while females being friends with a male in a higher position lead to concerns about misconceptions about the relationship, the issue of men being friends with women in senior positions does not seem to be important. In fact, friendships with senior members of either sex could be used as a rung to climb up the corporate ladder.

I am of the view that neither men nor women are to blame for the existence of the glass partition. It is the nature of human dynamics that it is easier to form relationships with those most similar to ourselves and with whom we have more in common. However, women who do not gather the courage to start engaging men in senior positions put themselves at a career disadvantage as it is at senior levels that promotion decisions are made and if you are an unknown in those circles, no one will speak for you.

#### **3.11.4 The Glass Escalator**

The glass escalator refers to the phenomenon that is seen in the career progression of men in female-dominated professions such as nursing, social work, librarianship and primary school teaching (Williams, 1992). It is facilitated by those factors which would ordinarily work against women in a male-dominated environment. In an effort to determine whether or not men face the same barriers as women when they enter female-dominated professions, Williams (1992) carried out a study in four major cities in the US. The research was qualitative in nature and consisted of in-depth interviews of 66 men and 23 women in the fields of “nursing, social work, librarianship and elementary school teaching” (Williams, 1992).

Quoting Kanter (1997), and Reskin (1988), Williams (1992) advances that the arguments presented by these researchers were that people who form the minority in any organisation experience the same discrimination as would be faced by women in a male-dominated environment such as barriers to entry into the professions and hostile “poisoned” work environments as well as barriers to promotions. Williams’ research was to establish whether or not a glass ceiling existed for men in these professions. What she found was that, contrary to there being a glass ceiling, there is a glass escalator which facilitates the promotion of men in these occupations to positions of authority and prestige and ultimately better monetary rewards.

Williams (1992) found that the hiring practices in her study had an escalator effect. These occupations actually showed a preference for hiring men and the men interviewed seemed to think that being male in a female-dominated environment was actually an advantage. The men, however, seemed to think that being male in these occupations made them feel pressurised to apply for administrative positions even if these were

not necessarily what they enjoyed. These attitudes and practices often led to men being over-represented in the supervisory and management positions even though they were in female-dominated environments and in professions that were seen to be “female”. The prevalence of men in supervisory positions, more often than not, led to the men being supervised by other men and a consequent development of strong working and often social relationships. This supervisor-manager rapport invariably led to mentor-mentee relations and career pathing became a natural outcome of the relationships. The findings were that the men developed a camaraderie that had an escalator effect. Usually the supervisor would tend to see his male subordinate as the “other man” to whom he could talk and an ally rather than a foe (Williams, 1992). This is an interesting contrast to the queen bee syndrome where women in senior positions in male-dominated environments do not support their female subordinates. The survey also showed that men experienced stereotypical behaviours from their colleagues, such as male teachers being expected to discipline problematic students and male nurses being expected to lift heavy patients. They were not excluded from social activities and found themselves being invited to social events such as bridal parties and baby showers.

There is positive discrimination in the treatment of men in female-dominated environments (Williams (1992). The discrimination had an escalator effect, in that it took the men to the top. The discriminatory practices in hiring led to them being hired over females to improve the number of men in the professions. The prevalence of male supervisors and the resultant bonding also worked in their favour. Interestingly, the negative discrimination came from outsiders (such as parents in schools who tended to see male teachers as paedophiles and the general public who seemed to think that male nurses were gay). Society tended to treat men in female-dominated occupations as if they could not get real jobs (Williams, 1992). The stigma attached to men in these professions had an escalator effect in that it pushed these men upstairs into administration roles which were prestigious and paid more than being in the ward or the classroom. These administrative positions were not client facing and so the men did not have to deal with the stares and negative comments.

Maume (1999) and Smith (2012) conducted further research on the glass escalator and the findings were consistent with those of Williams. Maume (1999) tested the hypothesis that “the percentages of workers who are female in an origin occupation will negatively affect women’s chances of moving into managerial positions but will positively affect men’s promotion chances” and found that “the higher the percentage of females in an origin occupation, the higher the chances of men enjoying mobility opportunities” (Maume, 1999:504). Smith (2012) further corroborated the findings with evidence that in settings where white men

reported to female or minority supervisors, a glass escalator helped white men. This work extended previous research in that it considered the race of men and found that the glass escalator did not exist for black men.

It is important to note that the research referred to in the above section was carried out in the US. Research in other countries was not reviewed as the glass escalator is not the focus in this research. My intention in this study was to introduce the glass escalator as part of the glass phenomenon.

### 3.12 Stereotyping and gender bias

*"Gender stereotypes can become a powerful yet invisible threat to women leaders and the organisations in which they work and lead (Catalyst, 2007)*

Stereotyping leads to decisions that are based on misperceptions rather than reality and as a result, competent females are overlooked for positions due to bias. Stereotypes lead to women being cast as being better at stereotypically feminine "care-taking skills" such as supporting and encouraging skills, (Booyesen, 1999; Fuchs, 1971; Klatt et al, 2016; Rosener, 2000; Ryan et al, 2011; Schein, 1973, 1975.) whereas men are perceived to excel at more conventionally masculine "taking charge" skills.

Stereotypically masculine behaviours such as assertiveness and competition are often seen as prerequisites for top-level positions (Klatt et al, 2016; Ryan et al, 2011; Schein 1973, 1975). Stereotypes cause further barriers in the advancement of women in that they are difficult to combat or even detect (Catalyst, 2007). Perceptions are in the mind and unless a person changes the way they think about certain issues, there is very little that can be done about them. Stereotypical thinking puts women in a double-bind, in which they cannot win regardless of the course that they choose to follow as they find themselves having to operate from one of two mutually exclusive leadership styles. The leadership styles are perceived to be gender consistent and cannot co-exist. A woman can either have a transformational style (which is expected of her as a woman) and be seen as too soft, or she can have a more transactional style (which is perceived to be masculine) and be seen as too tough. There is no room for both styles in the minds of many and the result is that women leaders are seen as being "too soft or too tough and never just right" (Catalyst, 2007).

Stereotypes create a high competence threshold where women face higher standards and lower rewards than men leaders (Braun et al., 2017; Catalyst, 2007). Research has shown that women have to work harder than men to prove themselves and this leads to them being labelled as not wanting to delegate. Women leaders are perceived as competent or likeable but rarely both. The issue of not being liked has serious consequences for a leader as existing research (Catalyst, 2007) suggests that individuals are less likely to trust or follow the instructions of a leader they do not like. It has been my experience and observation in the workplace that a leader who is not liked can be sabotaged by a team that does not follow them.

Elsesser and Lever (2011) researched whether or not gender biases against female leaders exist and report some interesting findings which both confirm and contradict those of the Catalyst (2007) study on stereotypes and biases. The researchers found that "stronger gender differences may emerge from studies of hypothetical or laboratory leaders" than from using actual bosses (Elsesser and Lever, 2011). In their research, subordinates were asked to evaluate their actual bosses and the results were therefore based on real-life work relationships as opposed to students being asked to complete surveys on hypothetical or ideal leaders (Elsesser and Lever, 2011). Descriptive bias occurs when female leaders are stereotyped as possessing less potential for leadership than men. Prescriptive bias occurs when actual female leaders are evaluated less favourably because leadership is seen as more desirable for men than women (Braun et al, 2017; Elsesser and Lever, 2011).

One of the commonalities of the studies was that where descriptive and prescriptive biases occur, they leave women with a double-bind: "if they conform to their traditional gender role, women are not seen as having the potential for leadership; if they adopt agentic characteristics associated with successful leaders, then they are evaluated negatively for behaving in an unfeminine manner" (Elsesser and Lever, 2011). Elsesser and Lever's study found that "participants were less likely to show gender bias when evaluating their own boss thereby indicating a minimal prescriptive bias" but a high level of descriptive bias existed when dealing with an ideal manager. The study also found no differences between the likeability of competent female managers and competent male managers. The rating of quality of relationships for women leaders who adopted "counter-stereotypic" styles was found to be lower than for men leaders who did the same, thus confirming the findings of the Catalyst study (2007), namely that women are penalised for adopting leadership styles that are contrary to the "norm".

### **3.13 Importance of Women in Leadership**

*"The key for the future of any country and any institution is the capability to develop, retain and attract the best talent. Women make up half of the world's human capital. Empowering and educating girls, women, and leveraging their talent and leadership fully in the global economy, politics and society are thus fundamental elements of succeeding and prospering in an ever competitive world. In particular, with talent shortages projected to become more severe in much of the developed and developing world, maximising access to female talent is a strategic imperative for business"*

(Klaus Schwab , 2012)

Over the years, researchers (Hausmann, Tyson, Bekhouche and Zahidi, 2012; Johansen, 2007; Mattis 2001; Wirth, 2001, 2003) have researched the importance and value that women in leadership positions bring to the

corporate table. Women have been applauded for their leadership style which, while distinct from that of men, is as essential in bringing results to the table (Simpson et al, 2010). In addition to leadership style diversity, it is important to note that there is agreement with the fact that women add value to organisations.

I have divided this section of the report into two parts, namely the importance of having women in positions of leadership in organisations and the importance of having women on the board of directors.

### **3.13.1 Women as Managers and Organisational Leaders**

The importance of women in leadership cannot be understated. As the opening quote to section 13.3 states, the inclusion of women in management positions is a strategic imperative for business. This view is supported by Nkomo and Ng'ambi (2009), who agree with Jackson (2004) that, with the challenges faced by Africa for the sustainable development mandate, all the available leadership talent (male and female), needs to be developed and used to ensure organisational and institutional prosperity. The traits that researchers have identified as being found in women, such as encouraging participation, sharing of power and information, transformational leadership styles, encouraging self-worth etc. (Booyesen, 1999; Brenner et al, 1989; Klatt et al, 2016; Rosener 2000; Schein, 1973; 1975; Schein and Mueller, 1992), are critical to the success of organisations. These characteristics are actually strengths which balance the leadership styles that are predominantly associated with men, such as focus on transactions, principles and rights etc. (Brenner et al, 1989; Klatt et al, 2016; Rosener 2000). An organisation that focuses on giving equal opportunities regardless of sex opens itself to ensuring that its talent is selected from the maximum pool of human capital that is available.

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 to effect a change. The extent to which women can positively impact performance is strongly dependent on the strategy they select. The results of Johansen's study show that women have a positive influence on organisational performance. This impact is seen where the defender strategy (which is concerned mainly with the improvement of processes) is employed. Paying attention to process is a strength that many women bring to organisations. Women are also successful in using the prospecting strategy and were more effective at it than the men in the study.

Some studies have yielded mixed results on the impact of having women in leadership positions (Cook and Glass, 2011). A study of US firms determined the impact of the announcement of women into senior leadership positions on the firm's share prices. Senior leadership positions were defined as those of CEO,

president and C-suite appointments into positions such as chief finance officer and chief marketing officer. The results were that there was a positive impact on the share price (sharp increase) immediately following the announcement of a woman into a position of senior leadership, whereas the appointment of a man into a similar position had a non-significant increase (Cook and Glass, 2011). The increase in the share price was found to be sharper in female-dominated industries. The appointment of women to senior positions was found to have a negative impact on the share price in industries that were seen to be male dominated. This introduced the notion of an external glass ceiling that is driven by investors in a world where shareholder returns reign supreme. While the importance of women in leadership cannot be over-emphasised, it is equally important to be cognisant of the fact that it can lead to a decrease in the share price, depending on investor perceptions, and so it is important to ensure that adequate information is made available about the capabilities of women being promoted into positions of senior leadership.

### **3.13.2 Women as Members of Boards of Directors**

The research on the importance of women in the boardroom has shown different and sometimes conflicting viewpoints on the value that women bring to boards and their impact on an organisation's bottom line (Rose, 2007; Simpson et al, 2010; Wirth, 2010; [www.catalyst.org](http://www.catalyst.org), 2009). Wirth (2010) advocates three reasons for having women on the board of directors of a company. The labour pool is shrinking and organisations cannot consider only males to sit on their boards. She further advocates that lack of women in the leadership dampens the productivity of the female workforce who start to feel that their voice is not heard, and finally that bottom-line results are better for organisations with women on the board. Wirth (2010) goes on to say that the move from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age requires that leaders lead with heart and head. Leading from the heart is a quality that is found naturally in women. The case for improved bottom lines of corporates with women on the board is in line with the findings from the Catalyst study, which found that the return on equity, return on sales and return on invested capital was stronger across industries for companies that had three or more women on the board ([www.catalyst.org](http://www.catalyst.org)). Simpson et al (2010) investigated the business case for having women on boards by studying the performance of 1500 Standard and Poor companies for the years 2003-2007. One of the key findings of their research was that women should not be seen as a substitute for male directors, but that it be recognised that they bring unique attributes that may enhance the performance of the board and ultimately that of the firm (Simpson et al, 2010). They advance the case for women on boards because this “may create value for shareholders and other corporate constituencies” and “given the role of women in modern society, competent women deserve equal opportunities to serve as directors and executive managers” (Simpson et al, 2010).

The case for women adding value in terms of profitability of organisational value is theoretical and Simpson et al (2010) examine why the theory may or may not be true. There is an argument that the growing number of qualified women means that they have developed the required education and experience that would enable them to be competent directors who can add value to a board. The counter-argument to the theory is that their experience is not of the right kind. In the research carried out, they found that for the period under review, the majority of women had education and experience that was related to medicine or academics but not high business level experience. The data they reviewed showed that women directors were less likely to come from a business background or to be the CEO of a company. Hence being a board member without a business understanding could be seen to be a barrier to adding value to the board and the firm.

I agree with the view that having a woman (or man for that matter) on a board whose education and experience do not add value is a waste of resources. It is important that women be brought onto the boards of directors to add value and not just because they are educated if their education does not add value or enhance the levels of relevant expertise on the board. Having said that, nobody is born with board experience. Nothing stops an organisation from bringing on board a person who may not have the right experience, but has the aptitude to learn and understand their role and responsibility as a board member. Unbiased eyes can ask questions that are pertinent and yet can remain unconsidered by those who have become accustomed to the way things are done.

Another argument regarding the value that women bring to the board is that women tend to be more independent and to increase monitoring of CEO performance. However, the counter-argument is that women tend to be a minority whose views could be overridden. Furthermore, factors such as ownership position in the firm may have a more powerful influence on board monitoring than independence (Simpson et al, 2010). Boards need strong women who realise that being in the minority should not erode the value of the input that they bring to the table. I think that ethical board members, regardless of their numbers, do prevent otherwise risky board decisions by forcing members to stop and reflect on the different contributions being made. An argument revealed in the research, which I think is valid, is the fact that women form the majority of consumer markets and “may have a unique knowledge of some consumer markets and certain markets because of their participation in these markets” (Simpson et al, 2010:35).

It is from their position as consumers that women may be able to provide important information to the board which results in better decisions and improved financial performance. Hurn (2012) found that the value of women in management could be seen by the value that they bring to the boardroom. He found that they have a calmer approach and are less driven by power and ambition. Women are risk averse and do not make quick

and rash decisions. This finding is supported by the comments made by one of the interviewees in Dlamini's study (2013) of senior women with board positions. The interviewee said that whenever the board wanted to rush through a decision, she would ask for her reservations to be minuted. This request, more often than not, would lead to the item under discussion to be debated more thoroughly before a final decision was made.

It has further been suggested that women directors have a positive impact on group dynamics (Hurn, 2012). I must hasten to add that some of the dynamics may be driven from a cultural perspective. As previously mentioned, the research by Simpson et al (2010) was done in the USA whose cultural dynamics may be different from those in Southern Africa. I have had the opportunity to attend four board meetings of the subsidiary of a global telecommunications company. One of the directors was a woman who had previous experience as a CEO and was the director of several companies. In all the board meetings that I attended, I only ever heard her make one comment and it was to point out that the date on one of the slides that the CEO had put up was incorrect. None of her business experience or her knowledge of telecommunications ever came out in the board meetings and it was quite difficult to see the value she brought to the board. It is crucial that women who are invited on boards have a sound grasp of business issues and are not "token" appointments. This value can be assessed if there is a way of evaluating the performance of members and establishing the value provided to the firm by all board members.

### **3.13.3 Women in Political Leadership**

From a national perspective, the equal treatment of women enables an economy to make use of two of its core drivers of sustainable economic growth: people and their talents ([www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org), 2014). Women hold half of the required talents for economic growth. Educated and healthy women raise healthier and more educated children, thus creating a virtuous cycle of development. Having women in political leadership enables decision-making that is reflective of the needs of more members of society; it also enables the equal treatment of women and ensures that the political leadership is aware of the issues that affect half of its citizens.

## **3.14 Work-life Balance**

*"Work and family lives touch each other in so many ways"* (Greenhaus et al, 2010)

The interest in the issue of work-life balance has been growing since the 1980s (Greenhaus et al, 2010) and the need to balance work and family life has not abated in the new millennium. It has become more intense as individuals and families seek to juggle their home and work responsibilities without dropping one or the other. The increase of women in the workplace, especially those who were married with children, began in great earnest in the 1970s, as has been mentioned in an earlier section (Alesina et al, 2013; Schmeer and

Reitman, 1993; Toossi, 2002; Wang, 1989). This increase led to changes in the traditional family structure which had previously consisted in the main of a man with a wife who stayed at home and looked after the family. Organisations were geared towards this traditional family and the structures and policies supported this societal set-up.

Married men with working wives and children, the “post-traditional families”, were not adequately catered for in these structures, women even less so (especially those who were married with children). With this change in the family structure, organisational research was initially directed at considering how organisations needed to adapt in order to accommodate employees that came from dual-income homes and had children. Initially the call was for the balance between work and family responsibilities and formed part of the studies related to the advancement of women in their careers (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Wirth, 2001). One of the recommendations from the research was that companies start to introduce family-friendly policies that would enable working parents to meet their family demands (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Greenhaus et al, 2010; Scheer and Rietman, 1993). The two-career family model is forcing more men to start playing a bigger role in family chores than ever before (although this may not be the case in patriarchal societies). Advancements in technology have made employees available 24/7. This situation has been exacerbated by the global economy and the need for people in different time zones to communicate. At the same time, the need for leaner organisations has meant that fewer people are carrying the workloads and they must be able to get it all done (Greenhaus et al, 2010).

Work-life balance speaks to the intersection of work and personal life and the two are intertwined in both positive and negative ways (Greenhaus et al, 2010). If not properly managed, work responsibilities can interfere with family life. These conflicts are seen in three main areas. Time-based conflict arises when an employee needs to be at work at a time when family requirements (such as attending a parent-teacher meeting) need the person to be at home and they must choose one over the other. Time-based conflicts are most prevalent in two-career homes with small children. Stress-based conflict occurs when the stress from one role impacts the other. This role cross-over can be from work to family and vice versa. The third conflict is a behaviour-based one where the behaviour styles exhibited at work are brought into the home environment. When work and family are adequately balanced and feeding off each other, work-family enrichment can be experienced and enjoyed. Skills that are acquired in one role can be satisfactorily used in the other role. Balancing work and personal life to achieve harmony rather than conflict requires effort on the part of both the employer and the employee.

### **3.14.1 Role of Employer in Achieving Work-Life Balance**

Organisations need to assist employees in balancing their work commitments and family responsibilities. There are several areas that have been identified in which organisations can play a role in this. They can provide or assist with dependent care (such as providing childcare facilities at the workplace or nearby) or alternatively assisting with the cost of child and elderly care so that employees can 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 promote an organisational culture that is supportive towards being a committed employee and an equally committed parent or elderly caregiver (Eagly and Carli, 2007). The introduction of a family leave policy will also assist employees in being able to balance their work and life commitments. In South Africa, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act makes provision for three days of family responsibility leave in a calendar year, as well as sick leave in the event that the employee is ill. The company environment can augment existing legal provisions for family responsibility-related time off with policies that provide time for employees to attend to their personal commitments. Companies can also consider offering part-time employment to employees that would be prepared to work part time in order to meet their personal life commitments. Flexible career paths (those that allow for employees to choose an alternative to the linear progression path) would be of great assistance to employees who want to remain with an organisation, but for whom the traditional career path creates a conflict with the personal life responsibilities (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Miller and Wheeler, 1992; Thompson, 1904; Wilhoit, 2014).

Organisations that do not provide an environment that will enable their employees to balance their work and family responsibilities will find themselves dealing with highly stressed employees, which can lead to increased levels of stress and absenteeism and ultimately reduced productivity as employees try to cope with the demands of work and family with the support of the organisation (Greenhaus et al, 2010). Resistance to changing the traditional worker model will impact the ability of organisations to attract highly talented people who have dual-career homes and must balance the responsibilities of home and work without compromising one or the other.

### **3.14.2 Role of Employee in Achieving Work-Life Balance**

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 can impact family life and communicating the boundaries to both the employer and the family. If an employer sees a worker being prepared to work long hours and come in over the weekends, they will (rightly so) assume that the employee has no problems with that kind of arrangement.

Employers are not likely to expect that of employees who make their boundaries clear from the start (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 the partner). That way, the family can work together in supporting the career aspirants and hold them accountable when they renege on the agreed-upon extent to which work can affect the life of the family.

### **3.14.3 Pitfalls of Work-Life Balance Discourse**

A key assumption has been made around the work-life balance for career women. This assumption is that they can have it all and that organisations and society will ensure that they have it all: “executive success, loving spouses, wonderful children, lovely homes, good friends, cared-for parents and all the rest” (Hall, 1989). With this assumption in mind, the belief has been that work-life balance is achievable and that women need to find the right formula to achieve the balance. Caproni (1997) uses her roles as a wife, mother and professional to discuss the practicality of the work-life balance discourse and highlights its pitfalls. She uses the critical theory approach, which encourages the asking of questions such as:

1) What is the current version of reality promoted by the discourse on work-life? 2) Whose ends are served and not served by this version of reality? 3). Are there alternative discourses that may better serve individuals, countries, communities and societies? She further found, in line with other researchers (Greenhaus et al, 2010), that women do the lion’s share of the household work and that the starting point of achieving work-life balance needs to be a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities. In her review of her own attempts to find balance in her life, she found that the efficient use of time was key but efficiency in one area could be problematic in another area. Clarity of values is also another requirement for achieving work-life balance. This refers to being able to identify key life priorities. Caproni (1997) found that in her life, this meant prioritising between work and family when both were important and, in a way, interdependent. Lastly, she found that in “trying harder, smarter and faster” to balance her new life, it created rather than solved a problem and led her to question whether or not work-life balance was achievable and indeed desirable.

In examining work-life balance from a critical perspective, Caproni (1997) asks whether everyone has the flexibility to work certain hours and whether work-life balance encourages selfishness, in that each person focuses on their own personal circumstances but not on those of the group. Organisations are not geared to afford every employee the ability to work flexible hours. Certain roles, even those within organisations that offer flexi-time, cannot work flexi-time. Caproni (1997) cites an example of the faculty staff where she worked being able to take annual leave on a Friday following a public holiday while the secretaries had to

come to work. She further questions whether or not the certain assumptions made in the work-life balance discourse may undermine the individual's efforts to improve the quality of their lives.

The language in relation to the personal life that is used in the research on work-life balance is similar to that of organisations. As previously indicated, work-life balance requires a goal-oriented approach to life, with a clear vision of what needs to be accomplished and an action plan, similar to that found in a boardroom. A goal-oriented strategic approach to life would require extensive scenario planning and the ability to control life's circumstances, which obviously is not possible. Work-life literature further advocates "systematic, rational planning that human beings may not be capable of since they live and work in social systems and need to balance ambivalence, engagement and disengagement as part of their lives" (Caproni, 1997). Therefore Caproni (1997) argues that if balance requires an unpredictable life and a lack of ambivalence, then it is an unachievable goal, and setting it out as achievable is a recipe for frustration. In addition to setting out the impossible as achievable, there are unintended consequences to the discourse on work-life balance.

### **3.15 Why women leave the workplace**

The reasons for women leaving formal employment have been written about for as long as women have been working (Armknrecht and Early, 1972; Daniel, 2004; Felme, 1984; Martin, 1916, Neck, 2015; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004). Most of the research on this topic has been done in the USA and Australia and examines the experiences of white women in those countries. Women have a higher turnover rate than men and reasons advanced for them leaving the workplace include the negative effect of working on their health (Martin, 1916) and marriage (Marsh and Mannari, 1977; Thompson, 1904). Felme (1984) studied women in the US who left work for reasons other than having found alternative employment, such as a change in marital status (usually to get married), falling pregnant and having young children.

Young children place additional pressure and increased household responsibility on women (Fuchs, 1971). Involuntary terminations of employment are often seen in women who are perceived to be less productive when their children are younger. Daniel (2004) found that women leave the workplace due to barriers to advancement that lead to dissatisfaction with corporate life. These barriers include the glass ceiling, layoffs, sexual harassment as well as the conflict between work and family responsibilities (Miller and Wheeler, 1992). Women want more flexible work schedules and control over their time. Others leave because they want more challenges than they are getting in their workplace roles. Other reasons are lack of mentors to groom them and prepare them for senior roles and having to work with chauvinistic males who believe that women should stay at home and raise children. Gender stereotypes also lead to women wanting to leave corporate careers.

In recent years, studies have started to focus on the reason for high-achieving career women leaving their successful careers and becoming full-time mothers, in a phenomenon known as opting out (Daniel, 2004; Neck, 2015; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004; Wilhoit, 2014). The frequency of competent female professionals dropping out of the workplace started increasing and being a concern in the late 1980s (Rosin and Korabik, 1991). This exodus of women has triggered debates as to whether or not women are reverting to their traditional gender roles, which begs the question whether the feminists' cries for women's economic emancipation have been misplaced (Stone and Lovejoy, 2004).

Although the term "opting out" has been used to mean women leaving their corporate careers to have children, the reality is that women are actually being pushed or forced out of the workplace and maternity reasons have been used to cover the real issues (Wilhoit, 2014). If childcare were the sole driver, mothers would leave the workplace and non-mothers would stay (Patrick et al, 2016). While the 2000s saw a growing trend in the US of women leaving their jobs to look after their children and introduced another area of research on women in employment, there was a realisation that maternity was a key motivator but it was not the only reason that women left employment and successful careers. Examining the reasons for non-mothers leaving employment, Wilhoit (2014) found that, after considering many factors about their careers and working environments, they make a choice to stop working. Gendered organisational cultures affect and frustrate them. Excellence in these organisations is defined around the male model who can work long hours and focus on his career (while his wife attends to the home and family) (Wilhoit, 2014). The women leave formal employment because their work lacks meaning and they do not get any fulfilment from what they are doing (Miller and Wheeler, 1992; Rosin and Korabik, 1991). They feel a need to have control over their time and work and to integrate their careers with other aspects of their lives (Wilhoit, 2014).

Studies carried in Australia, although focusing on the banking and investment sectors, found that women often leave formal employment when they are in senior positions (Metz, 2011; Neck, 2015). The reasons for leaving are generally related to a combination of frustration, wanting some form of change and having the choice to leave (Neck, 2015). Generally, the main finding from the studies was that women as the primary caregivers usually leave employment after having children, which is similar to the US findings from both the initial research (Thompson, 1904) on women leaving the workplace as well as contemporary studies (Felmeé, 2004; Wilhoit, 2014). Additional findings are similar to those found in the glass ceiling and labyrinth studies (Eagly and Cauli, 2007; Wirth, 2001) and include lack of line experience, lack of social capital due to the difficulties of networking and finding suitable mentors and inhospitable work environments as they advance. The inhospitable work environments tend to consist of long hours that affect work-life

balance, driven by the importance of the need to be seen working long hours regardless of output. The work environments are found to be unfriendly and inflexible when it came to working flexi-time (Metz, 2011; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004). The hours put in outside the office are often overlooked and this leads to women who leave the office early to attend to family responsibilities but then log on and continue working from home being frustrated as their efforts are not recognised.

Homogeneous male environments tend to result in an exclusionary culture that is “created for men by men” and results in boys’ clubs (Metz, 2011; Neck, 2015; Wilhoit, 2014). Gender bias, leading to lack of opportunities and women being overlooked for promotion is another reason that women leave employment to stay at home. Further discriminatory practices are the display of superiority attitudes by male supervisors and women finding their roles have been made redundant or their responsibilities diminished when they return from maternity leave (Metz, 2011; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004).

Workplace variables such as income, age, tenure, experiences and unmet expectations play a major role in the decision to leave the workplace (Rosin and Korabik, 1991). Women leaders are likely to leave jobs which they feel do not offer “responsibility, independence, variety, time, and flexibility as well as leadership opportunities” (Rosin and Korabik, 1991:325). Daniel (2004) found that women who leave companies to start their own businesses find more satisfaction in doing so than in working for corporates.

Another common belief about women leaving the workforce is that it is an easy choice and women who make this decision show an individual preference for the home over career. The findings of Stone and Lovejoy (2004) contradict this notion. 95% of the women in their study shared that the decision to leave the workplace was not made overnight. It was a slow and agonising decision and they were conflicted in the process. The decision had cost implications for the women, namely a lost salary as well as slow career advancement. They also felt a loss of identity and of the investment that had been made in their careers. Only 5% of the women in the study were “new traditionalists” who had preferred full-time mothering to being in the workplace. They were women who had intentionally delayed starting families, knowing that they would eventually become full-time mothers. The major reasons for leaving work were the workload and pace, inflexibility of hours and the workplace expectations set by men whose wives were full-time mothers, children and husbands.

The narrative of women leaving the labour market needs to continue being unpacked and corrected, because if it is left at the level of working mothers leaving to look after their children (Miller and Wheeler, 1992; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004), it will tend to absolve organisations from the responsibility for increasing the

number of women in senior positions (Metz, 2011). This will lead to their development and progression being ignored or kept at minimal levels and create statistical discrimination (Stone and Lovejoy, 2004).

### **3.16 Contemporary studies on women in the workplace**

The studies on women in the workplace continue and the areas of interest have not changed drastically. Some of the current studies are a continuation of the work and the questions that have been the focus of attention for the past few decades. These studies seem to continue to reveal the same and frustrating findings on the role of women in leadership. While the history of women working dates back to the agricultural age, the issues are still similar in the technology age. The work of men and women still has a gender bias and the “think manager, think male” syndrome persists. Gender pay parity is still an area of concern and the glass ceiling still has to be broken. Work-life balance continues to be a challenge for working women. The importance of women in leadership is no longer disputed, but all these studies are of little value if they do not result in a change of the mind-sets and policies which are the necessary ingredients for the advancement of women, whether in homes, work or society.

### **3.17 Leadership barriers**

There are certain psychological and organisational barriers to career advancement. It is important to consider these barriers as they could possibly give insight into why the number of women in senior and executive positions in workplaces is low when there is no shortage of women who have the necessary qualifications and experience to occupy these positions.

#### **3.17.1 Authorisation processes in the workplace**

The authorisation processes involve both internal and external authorisation as well as de-authorisation. The internal barriers are those which are self-imposed by the holder of a position of the authority and manifest themselves in ways such as the impostor syndrome (Clance and Imes, 1978; Kets de Vries, 1990; Schein, 2001). The external barriers are principally the policies, processes and cultures of organisations and these have been the focus of some studies on the glass ceiling. The queen bee syndrome studies (Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006, 2008), referred to in an earlier paragraph, speak predominantly to how women “de-authorise” each other and how this de-authorisation process is predominantly top down. I consider the extent to which women have been empowered by themselves as well as the organisations they work for to make decisions in the roles they occupy or have occupied. I will also examine the issue of how women have been able to manage and exercise authority.

### **3.17.2 Definition of authority and leadership in the workplace**

The words “power” and “authority” are often used interchangeably but they are not the same thing. Some sociologists define authority as a subset of power (Coleman, 1997). In this section, power and authority and their characteristics are defined.

For power to exist, there must be a dyadic relationship between the holder of the power and recipient of the requirements of the holder (French and Raven, 1959). The Weberian definition of power is the ability to control the behaviour of others, with or without their consent (Weber, 1947). Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) define it in three approaches, namely personal property – an individual’s ability to influence others and this ability is one that is a trait or a learnt skill; property of interpersonal relationships – the hierarchy of an individual in relation to others with whom there is a relationship; and property of an organisation – power is a function of the position held in an organisation and entails control over “people, information and resources” (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

Power can be summarised to be “influence by one person over others, stemming from a position in an organisation, from an interpersonal relationship, or from an individual characteristic” (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989:51). Positional power, which is a result of the position held in an organisation, gives leaders access to five different types or bases of power (French and Raven, 1959; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). Legitimate power is based on the perception that the follower has of the holder of power to legitimately prescribe behaviour for them. Reward power refers to the extent to which there is a perception by the subject that the holder of the power can mediate rewards for the follower. Expert power is based on the perception that the holder of power has special knowledge or experiences. Referent power is based in the holder’s identification with the follower, and coercive power is based on the perception held by the follower that the holder can mediate punishment for them (French and Raven, 1959). Three of the five common bases of power as advocated by French and Raven (1959) and Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), namely reward, coercive and legitimate power, are derived from position power. Reward and coercive power are linked to the ability to reward and punish those who are the recipients in the relationship.

It has been proposed that power grows over time during the career journey and there are three levels of career transition in the journey to developing power, namely entry into the labour market, entry into an organisation and promotion into a powerful position once in an organisation (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). The journey is affected by resources that are accumulated over time, such as education and training, a position in a department and development of influential networks, and there are different opportunities and hurdles between men and women that must be navigated during this journey (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

In order to analyse the evolution of the power journey in organisations, four levels of analysis, namely social systems, organisational analysis, interpersonal relationships and individual level of analysis, are necessary.

The social systems are related to the societal views of power and gender and they start to operate prior to entry into the labour market. The societal beliefs and expectations may contribute to the development of organisational power in the sense that the choices made by women may be as a result of the society in which they operate. The choice of a job versus a career, the choice of a gendered occupation and the choice of a gendered speciality are decisions made well before entering the labour force, but they all have the potential to influence the development of power once in an organisation.

Once an individual has entered the labour market, the practices of organisations such as advertising for vacancies (or the use of informal networks), promotion practices and affirmative action quotas may affect the opportunities for women to be in organisations where they can grow to the level of having powerful positions.

Interpersonal influences are not necessarily within the control of the organisation. These range from perceptions about the individual's power (which may not necessarily be related to their positional power), stereotypes, prototypes and attributions (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). Important to the development of power in an organisation are three interpersonal relationships. Relationships with peers can grant an individual access to informal networks and coalitions, whereas a relationship with a supervisor can result in mentoring and increased autonomy in the role. The relationship with subordinates is key to developing a power base within an organisation (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). A mentor or sponsor, especially one who is an influential decision-maker, can aid the development of power and this is more important for female managers than for males (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

The ability to manage these different factors effectively from the time of decision-making prior to entering the job market all the way to being appointed into a position of power will assist a person in building power throughout the career journey.

When power is given legitimately, it becomes authority (Schieman et al, 2013; Weber, 1947) and hence some sociologists define authority as a sub-set of power (Coleman, 1997). Authority enables control over the work of others as well as being able to do one's own work without close supervision and control from the line manager authority (Schieman et al, 2013). In an organised setting, control is "legitimized through formal positions and roles in a workplace's structure" (Smith, 2002).

Authority “involves hierarchy, obedience and command” (Coleman, 1997). It is relational and exists even when it is not explicitly exercised. The range and scope of authority is always specific. There are three major sources of legitimate authority. Traditional authority is grounded in the past and can be based on traditions and precedents. Most authority has some link to one tradition or another. Charismatic authority is based on some special gift of an “extraordinary” individual and their followers (Coleman, 1997). This authority enables the breaking of traditional authority and is a catalyst for change in traditional authority. Rational-legal authority is the ideal type and is “embodied in formal bureaucracy, the rule of law, the appeal to efficiency, and the rational fit between means and intended goals” (Coleman, 1997:36). Any changes to legal-rational authority need a clear procedure or scientific calculation. The differences between power and authority as described by Coleman (1997) are shown in [Table 8](#) below.

**Table 8: Power versus Authority**

Power	Authority
The probability that the actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.	Probability that a command with a given context will be obeyed by a given group of persons.
Is tied to the personal characteristics of individuals or groups.	Is tied to a social person.
Is a factual relation.	Is a legitimate relation of domination and subordination.
Does not need to be consensual.	Is consensual.

Source: Coleman (1997)

Gould (1993:50) describes contemporary organisations as being "unstable, chaotic, turbulent, and often manageable ... In the absence of prescriptions, orders, commands, standardised structures and well-defined hierarchal structures ... unprecedented levels of self-management will be necessary ... and a strong sense of personal authority [will] be the crucial determinant of self-management" (Gould, 1993:50). The future organisation is one in which "hierarchal structures and clear lines of command will give way to self-management" (Gould, 1993). The authorisation process in organisations starts with the authorisation of self. In order to understand the role of authority with regard to self and to the organisation, the difference between the two must be understood.

Gould (1993:51) defines personal authority as the "central aspect of one's enduring self of sense no matter what the role one may occupy. It is therefore defined as the ‘right-to-be’ - that is, the right to exist fully and to be oneself-in-the-role". Organisation authority is defined as delegated authority that defines the boundaries for that role. The ability to take up this authority will be affected by “a sense of one’s personal authority” (Gould, 1993). Hence the ability to take the initiative and execute having been given the authority to do so will be impacted by self-authority. In the absence of a healthy sense of self-authority, an individual will struggle to “take the initiative and manage the corresponding anxieties of being accountable for the discretion

one has been delegated" (Gould, 1993:51) and since this is a prerequisite for effective management in a flat structure, strong leaders will need to have a strong sense of self-authority.

### **3.17.3 Impostor Phenomenon (Syndrome)**

Closely linked to both personal and organisational authority is the issue of authenticity in the role and the impostor syndrome. This phenomenon was first identified by Clance and Imes (1978) as presenting among high-performing women who do not embrace their abilities and their success and consider themselves to be impostors. The impostor phenomenon or syndrome refers to the "internal experience of intellectual phonies which seems prevalent and intense among a sample of high achieving women" (Clance and O#Toole, 1987:51). Quoting Deutsch, Kets de Vries (1990:671) refers to "individuals who, after having achieved success, are troubled by the feeling that they are impostors". He refers to these as "neurotic impostors" - these individuals feel fraudulent and imposturous while actually being very successful in their pursuits. They feel that they have fooled everybody and that they are not as competent or intelligent as others think they are. Success is attributed to luck, compensatory hard work or "superficial" external factors such as physical attractiveness, or likeability. Some of them are incredibly hard workers; they are always over-prepared. However, they cannot accept that they have intellectual gifts and ability. They experience a constant fear that their imposturous existence will be found out, that they will not be able to live up to others' expectations and catastrophe will follow (Clance and Imes, 1978; Kets de Vries, 1990). Repeated success does not break the cycle of feeling like an impostor (Clance and Imes, 1978).

Early family history seems to play a part in the development of the impostor syndrome as the women who manifest it typically come from one of two groups. The first group is usually from a family in which there is a sibling or close family member who is considered the "intelligent one" in the family and so the achievements of the women in this group are never recognised no matter what she accomplishes. The women partly believe the family myth but also believe that they are equally capable and so work hard and achieve academic honours in the hope that the family will acknowledge those achievements. The lack of acknowledgement leads to feelings of getting high marks because the teachers liked her, or reasons other than being intelligent (Clance and Imes, 1978). The second group of women that exhibit the impostor phenomenon are considered by family members to be superior in every way: "intellect, personality, appearance and talents" (Clance and Imes, 1978). The expectation placed upon them is that their abilities enable them to achieve without effort because they are gifted. The women in this group, however, know that they have to work hard to achieve good marks and hence the disconnect between their reality and the expectations of the family leads them to feel like impostors (Clance and Imes, 1978).

Kets de Vries (1990:677) notes that "for the neurotic group, it seems to be exceedingly hard to accept their own talents and achievement". He makes the following interesting observation regarding gender, sexuality and imposture: "While it is almost impossible for a man to fake orgasm, this form of imposture is quite easy for women. Women who experience difficulties in reaching an orgasm and for various reasons take recourse to shamming it, may feel imposturous in other parts of their lives" (Kets de Vries, 1990:678).

The impostor syndrome is more of an internal rather than an organisational barrier to advancement. However, it is important to note its role in career advancement especially as regards issues of authorisation. As noted earlier, career success is going to depend increasingly on individuals being able to make calls on issues in the organisation rather than being a "good soldier" or team player (Gould, 1993).

#### **3.17.4 Tiara Syndrome**

The tiara syndrome first coined by Carol Frohlinger and Deborah Kolb, the founders of negotiating Women Inc. (Fitzpatrick and Curran, 2014), refers to capable, competent and qualified women who expect their performance to speak for them and lead to career promotions (without them applying). It is basically expecting someone else to place a tiara on their head. This syndrome is very closely linked to the impostor syndrome and manifests itself in senior women needing the endorsement of another person (usually a boss) before they will apply for a role that is senior to what they are currently occupying. More often than not, it is accompanied by a sense of feeling "not ready for the role" and seeing other colleagues as being more suitably qualified (Fitzpatrick and Curran, 2014). Women who feel like impostors are highly unlikely to self-promote in terms of getting the organisations to recognise their achievements, or to apply for promotions as they already feel that the positions that they hold are a fluke (Vachon, 2014).

#### **3.17.5 Not Knowing One's Place**

*"The nail that sticks out gets hammered down"* Japanese proverb (Kane, 2012)

Kane (2012) discusses the question of whether or not organisations are kind to employees who "don't know their place" and how this dynamic plays itself out around meeting tables. The issue of not knowing one's place and needing to be put in one's place can play itself out in many ways and affects both men and women. "Organisational ranking and the concept of allocated 'place' in organisational hierarchy are powerful ... dynamics in organisational life ... There can be strong and punitive reactions, often resulting in envious attacks, to a perceived disturbance in this implicit ranking order" (Kane, 2012:194). The issue of not knowing one's place leads to a disturbance in the "pecking order". Human behaviour is like that of "primates jockeying for their positions" (Kane, 2012). The minute a person climbs higher than the rest, even though the latter are

not affected by it, it can lead to a disturbance of the hierarchy and subsequently to envy. "The operation of envy is a feared and powerful dynamic that also serves to disempower individuals" (Kane, 2012:199). Expressions of personal and indeed organisational authority can lead to envy even if this is done in the course of a person's duties and for the good of the organisation.

I have witnessed the destructive effects of envy on a former colleague, in a listed organisation, one that has won Employer of Choice awards. The colleague was a high-performing individual with a depth of technical and commercial knowledge and, to quote a former executive of the organisation, "one of the most competent chartered accountants ever produced in South Africa". She ranked high on the list of those identified in the talent pool to be the next chief financial officer. She made the "mistake" of calling to order certain influential executives whose failure to give her critical information was impacting on her deadlines. Underground conversations about "who does she think she is?" and "she needs to be put in her place" led to her exit within months of the incidents. Everyone, including her boss, knew that she had been managed out for doing her job well and no one said a word. A highly competent individual left an organisation, battered and broken, because of envy ... no questions asked. This phenomenon has probably played itself out countless times in the organisation space and leads to the question which needs to be researched on its own: how do broken eagles rise (if they ever do) and soar again?

The other side of the coin of "not knowing one's place", which can be equally detrimental to an organisation and career progression, is over-deference to authority. Mitigation, is "a concept which occurs when, for reasons of deference to authority and rank, we sugar-coat or mitigate the 'impact' of what we need to say" (Kane, 2012). The employee, who wants to avoid career suicide, has to find the balance between over-deference and keeping their place or idea in the organisation.

### **3.18 Leadership and Organisational Culture**

Culture is an abstract concept which, in an organisation, is manifested in three ways, namely artefacts, values and underlying assumptions (Desson and Cloutier, 2010; Hatch, 1993; Schein, 1990). These levels of culture exist simultaneously. While artefacts can be seen through the symbols within an organisation, stories and myths, its values are usually the written "values, norms, ideologies, charters and philosophies", and the assumptions are usually unconscious and "determine perceptions, thought processes, feelings and behaviours" (Hatch, 1993; Schein, 1990). The culture of an organisation can be defined as its identity and it defines how an organisation behaves and does business (Barney, 1986). It is learnt over time by a group as it faces external problems of survival and internal problems of integration (Schein, 1990).

The culture of an organisation is an important factor for its success (Warrick, 2017). The culture is defined, formed and shaped by the leadership, the “power centre” of the organisation (Bass and Avolio, 1993; George et al, 1999; Lok and Crawford, 1999; Schein, 1990; Warrick, 2017). Culture develops from leadership and, in turn, affects the development of leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1993). Culture building is as an important a role for the leadership to play as the strategic and tactical thinking (George et al, 1999). Five primary behaviours of leaders which shape the culture of an organisation are those areas to which leaders pay attention as well as their reactions to critical incidents. The role that is modelled by leaders, the manner in which rewards and status are allocated and the way in which recruitment and promotion decisions are carried out in organisations all point to the culture of an organisation (George et al, 1999). The culture of the organisation supports the vision that has been crafted by the leaders. Culture not only affects the behaviour and attitude of an organisation’s employees, but also its performance (Barney, 1986; Desson and Cloutuier, 2010; Warrick, 2017). Hence it is important that the leadership clearly articulate the culture of the organisation and consistently reinforce it by behaviour (George et al, 1999).

Cultural forces play an important role in the implementation of change in an organisation and can either support or hinder achieving the organisation’s objectives that require change (Hatch, 1993; Schein, 1990). Often change, whether in the internal or external environment of an organisation, may require a change in culture as maintaining the status quo may be an impediment to progress (Desson and Cloutuier, 2010). Just as the culture of an organisation is built over time, a change of culture cannot happen overnight. Change in the culture of an organisation is a result of change in the processes and behaviours and requires employees to be “informed, trained and equipped to do things in new ways” (Desson and Cloutuier, 2010). The successful implementation of change processes takes place over 3-5 years depending on the nature of the change. A reactive change in response to external triggers will normally take a shorter time than a proactive one that is planned and managed by the organisation.

During the developmental stages of an organisation, culture is the “glue” that gives the organisation a sense of identity and it can become a hindrance in future years (Bass and Avolio, 1993). Organisational culture is inherently resistant to change and requires the buy-in and ownership of the leaders (Desson and Cloutuier, 2010). Any successful change initiative requires the full commitment (in word and deed) of the leader(s) of the entity. In addition to committing to being part of the change, the leadership needs to insist that the middle management understand the need for change and own the process as well; a transformational leadership is likely to be more effective as transactional leaders tend to work within the existing culture (Bass and Avolio,

1993; Desson and Cloutuier, 2010). If the leaders do not believe in the required change, it will not work (Bass and Avolio, 1993).

An often overlooked fact is the existence of a subculture which is independent of the organisational culture and may play an even bigger role in the organisation when it comes to behaviours and commitment (Lok and Crawford, 1999). Where an organisation has subcultures, members are likely to buy into the one that is dominant in their popular space. In most cases this will be the culture in the department, and so it is important for the message of the organisational culture to be one that is seen and lived by leaders throughout the organisation (Lok and Crawford, 1999).

### **3.19 Intragroup Dynamics in the Workplace**

Intragroup dynamics play a role in the work-life experiences. The dynamics among women in the workplace in terms of the queen bee syndrome and solidarity behaviour have already been discussed in an earlier section and will not be repeated here.

The "think managers, think male" socialisation impacts upon women's behaviour in senior management (Brenner et al, 1989; Catalyst, 2007; Klatt et al, 2016) as well as the attitudes of their followers, both male and female (Braun et al, 2017). The gender bias in implicit followership theories categorises women as being implicitly ideal followers thus pulling them toward the follower role (Braun et al, 2017). This bias can lead to women, consciously or unconsciously undermining the authority of other women (Mavin, 2006). Research further notes that various constructions of femininity which women deploy in relating to men in power, involving being flirtatious, admiring and generally supportive actively, reconstitute heterosexualised forms of dominance and subordination (Mavin, 2006). Therefore, women find it difficult to deal with senior women because the strategies they are accustomed to using with men are inappropriate for women. This can lead to another authority dynamic where female reports de-authorise female leaders. Direct female reports consistently undermine the female leader and seek to turn the other team members against her. The researcher has personally experienced this phenomenon and witnessed it happen to fellow female peers.

### **3.20 First-Time Managers in the Workplace**

Any person appointed to be a manager for the first time will experience problems which, if not addressed adequately, can cause the manager to fail. Most organisations promote employees based on technical competence and personal management without necessarily having previous people management experience (Plakhotnik, Rocco and Roberts, 2011; Walker, 2002). New (or "rookie") managers struggle to work with their superiors if they are of a different sex, younger and with a higher level of formal education (Pearce, 1982). They also struggle in building relationships with older subordinates (Plakhotnik et al, 2011). Rookie

managers are not taught critical management skills and this can cause their performance and that of their staff to suffer (Plakhotnik et al, 2011; Walker, 2002). Typically the problems faced by first-time managers are in three categories, namely unmet expectations, which include understanding the new role and what is expected of them, and uncertainty about the extent of authority that they have (Pearce, 1982; Plakhotnik et al, 2011; Sillett, 2015; Walker, 2002; Wilson, 1970); relationships with subordinates, which include having their authority challenged and difficulty in disciplining subordinates (Gaster and Gaster, 2006; Pearce, 1982; Walker, 2002); and relationships with seniors, which include lack of assistance in adjusting to the new role and hampering of work (Pearce, 1982; Plakhotnik et al, 2011; Walker, 2002).

The transition to management can be a welcome challenge or a daunting experience (Plakhotnik et al, 2011) and there are interventions which can be used to help new managers to adjust. Both the organisation and new manager would benefit if clarity on the role were provided and the manager were clear about what is expected of them (Walker, 2002; Wilson, 1970). It is also important to clearly define the limit of the manager's authority (Wilson, 1970), provide mentorship (Sillett, 2015; Wilson, 1970), give constructive feedback (Walker, 2002), provide training and development after promotion (Plakhotnik, 2017; Sillett, 2015), coaching and encourage informal online support and training (Sillett, 2015).

Failure to help new managers (especially rookies) may lead to them being frustrated and leaving the organisation (Plakhotnik, 2017). This comes at a cost to organisations; therefore, it is important for organisations to help employees to make a successful transition to management (Plakhotnik et al, 2011).

### **3.21 Intergenerational dynamics in the workplace**

The demographics of the workplace have changed over the years and now some workplaces have three or four generations in the workplace (Hart, 2006; Johnson and Lopes, 2008). Using the American naming convention, the oldest generation, known as the "silent generation", would have been born before 1945 and is characterised as being "practical, dedicated, respectful of authority and disciplined"(Hart,2006). Furthermore, they tend to have a strong work ethic, be conscientious about timelines and have a preference for face-to-face meetings as opposed to emails and conference calls as they are not comfortable with technology. Their numbers are dwindling in the workplace as the majority of them are retiring or have retired. The Boomers are the post-World War 2 to 1964 generation who came into the workplace with the expectation of working for the same employer for all of their working life as they had watched their parents do. They are driven, loyal to an organisation, challenge authority and want a "pay your dues" kind of leadership (Hart, 2006). They are prone to struggle with work overloads and juggling work-life balance and need help with technology and flexible hours (Hart, 2006).

The generation X workers were born between 1965 and 1981 and are the children of the Boomers, born into a world of technological advances and working mothers (Hart, 2006). They are entrepreneurial and prefer to work independently. They are “unimpressed with authority and prefer leadership based on competence ... and being given constant feedback” (Hart, 2006). Recreation is important for Generation Xers and they are not loyal to organisations, having watched organisations retrench their Boomer parents from jobs. Millennials or Generations Yers were born between 1982 and 2000 to “soccer mums” and fathers who took great pride in their children. As a result, these workforce members are self-confident, goal-oriented, accustomed to technology and giving feedback, value speed over detail, prefer to work in groups, are achievers and have a “hop scotch” approach to careers (Hart, 2006; Johnson and Lopes, 2008). Millennials want to find meaning in and fulfilment from their work.

With these very different characteristics and approaches to work, conflicts will arise in the workplace between the employees themselves as well as between the employees and the culture of the organisations for which they work. The existence of these multiple generations in the workplace brings about a new phenomenon of the younger supervisor, older worker, thus reversing the more common trend of older, more experienced supervisors with younger, entry-level workers (Collins, Hair and Rocco, 2009). This is known as the older worker, younger supervisor dyad. It brings about problems of older workers being reluctant to take instructions from managers as young as their children or grandchildren, and the younger supervisor being unwilling to give instructions to a subordinate the same age as a parent or grandparent (Collins et al, 2009). Both the worker and the supervisor see this as being outside societal and “normal” workplace practices. The age differences can lead to workplace dynamics such as younger supervisors thinking that they do not have the support of the older workers and the latter thinking that the younger supervisors do not have the experience and wisdom required to do the job. As a result, even when the younger supervisor has a more advanced education than the older worker, the subordinates tend to think that the supervisor has little experience and, as a result, tend to support them less (Collins et al, 2009).

### **3.22 Intersectionality literature**

Much of the literature in intersectionality has tended to focus on race and gender (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Richardson and Loubier, 2008) and often has not examined more than two identities at the same time. This should not be surprising as the very birthplace of the term “intersectionality” was out of the frustrations of black women in the United States. They felt that their issues were addressed under the banner of “blacks” and black men were the dominant representative of black OR women, in which case the experiences of white, middle class women were generalised across all women (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Black women began to advocate to be recognised as being both black and women at the same time and for those attributes to be acknowledged and addressed simultaneously.

### **3.22.1 The Intersection of Race and Sex**

The term “intersectionality” was first used by Crenshaw (1989) in a critique of “antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics”. In chapter 2, as well as in the opening paragraph above, I shared briefly the problem that arose in using the experiences of black men to deal with issues of race and assuming that black women had similar experiences, as well as using the experiences of middle class white women when dealing with issues of sexism and assuming that they were representative of all women. This use of a “single axis” approach that treated race and gender as being mutually exclusive distorted the experiences of black women (Crenshaw, 1989) and failed “to reflect the interaction of race and gender in the experiences of Black women”. This eradicated the experiences of black women, which meant that black women were effectively erased in the “conceptualising, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination” by focusing on the experiences of the dominant members of the group (either black men or white women) who were otherwise privileged (Crenshaw, 1989:140). Crenshaw advanced the recasting of the “one size fits all” framework of feminist theory and racist discourse to include the experiences and concerns of black women. The recognition of the intersection of race and gender in the case of black women would lead to their experiences being recognised as being more than the sum of racism and sexism, and needing to be focused upon as having the effects of the intersections of race and gender.

In order to demonstrate the limitations of the “dominant group representing other group members’ approach”, Crenshaw (1991) used American case law to reveal the shortcomings of the antidiscrimination framework in not recognising the reality of the intersections of race and gender where the employment of black women was concerned. In *DeGraffenreid v General Motors*, a suit filed by five black women against the company for having a seniority system that perpetuated the discrimination against black women, the court ruled in favour of General Motors. It rejected the attempt by the plaintiffs to bring a suit on behalf of only black women. Although General Motors did not hire black women prior to 1964, the fact the white women were hired meant that there was no discrimination against women and therefore there could be no claim of perpetuating past discrimination on the basis of sex. The fact that black men were not affected meant that there was no race discrimination. Hence, as far as the court was concerned, the case could be upheld only “to the extent that [Black women’s] experiences coincided with those of either of the two groups” (Crenshaw, 1989:143).

The case of *Moore vs Hughes Helicopter Inc.*, in which the plaintiff alleged that the defendant practised race and sex discrimination in promotions, the plaintiff brought statistical evidence which showed “a significant disparity between men and women and less of a disparity between Black and white men in supervisory positions” (Crenshaw, 1989). The court refused to certify the plaintiff as the class representative of all women in the discrimination case. The court used discrimination against white females as the standard for discrimination against females and failed to acknowledge that white females experienced sexism but enjoyed race privilege.

In the case of *Payne v Travenol*, the black female plaintiffs failed in their bid to be class representatives in a race discrimination lawsuit. Two black women brought a class action on behalf of all black employees at the plant. In the said case, the sex disparities between black men and black women were so significant and created such conflicting interests that the black women could not adequately represent black men. Although the court found that, indeed, there was extensive racial discrimination at the plant and “awarded back pay and constructive seniority to the class of Black female employees” (Crenshaw, 1989), the same remedy was not extended to black men.

Although the plaintiff in *Moore* and those in *Payne vs Travenol* brought similar suits to the courts, they were treated quite differently and the outcomes of the cases were similarly different. In summary, the antidiscrimination law under discussion reflected the inability of the courts to deal with the intersections of race and sex as far as minorities in the US are concerned. In *DeGraffenreid*, the courts refused to recognise the possibility of multiple discrimination for black females and used the employment of white women (at a time when they did not employ black women) to rule that there was no perpetuation of discrimination against women. In the case of *Moore*, the court held that “the plaintiff had not claimed discrimination as a woman but ‘only’ as a Black woman” and hence discrimination experienced by black women was not sex discrimination.

In *Travenol*, the court ruled that black women “could not represent an entire class of Blacks due to presumed class conflicts where sex additionally disadvantaged Black women” (Crenshaw, 1989:148). Crenshaw (1989:144) used the cases to demonstrate “the centrality of white female experiences in the conceptualisation of gender discrimination” and the grounding of white female experiences in the doctrinal conceptualisation of sex discrimination. They failed to recognise that white women did not experience race and that the discrimination they faced was purely on grounds of gender, while black women simultaneously experienced both race and gender discrimination.

While the criticism of the treatment of black women in antidiscrimination law may seem inconsistent, it proves the limitations of the single axis analyses and why intersectionality is important as a framework. Intersectionality acknowledges the fact that black women can be discriminated against either due to their sex or their race. Crenshaw (1989) therefore suggested that black women sometimes experienced discrimination in ways that were both similar and different from the experiences of white women and black men. However, they often faced double discrimination – “the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race and on the basis of gender” (Crenshaw, 1989:149).

Crenshaw (1989, 1991) went on to further explore battering and the treatment of rape by the courts and the experiences of black women, in which they experienced domestic and sexual violence not only as women but as black women. Women started to organise against the violence that they were experiencing, and recognised that their united voice was louder than a few isolated voices (Crenshaw, 1991). Violence against women became a political issue and led to it being recognised as a social and systemic issue and not a domestic issue to be kept behind closed doors.

“Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices” (Crenshaw, 1991:1242). The efforts of feminists to politicise the experiences of women and the efforts of antiracists to politicise the experiences of people of colour have often treated these identity categories as mutually exclusive. The focus on the experiences of minority groups, such as people of colour, gays and lesbians, has led to identity politics which tend to ignore intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, it tends to be shaped by race and class, in addition to gender. In a review of the profile of women who sought protection in battered women’s shelters in Los Angeles, most of the women were either unemployed, under-employed or poor. These women faced both gender and class oppression as well as employment and housing practices that discriminated on grounds of race (Crenshaw, 1991). Including the experiences of foreign nationals in the women’s shelters brought another dimension to the experiences of women who faced domestic abuse. Some of them spoke little English and could not be helped by shelters with policies that required an interpreter. These women did not understand the American legal system or the Immigration Act and feared deportation; hence very few of them reported the abuse to the authorities. Furthermore, some of them came from cultures where marital affairs were not discussed. Intervention strategies therefore needed to take into account those different obstacles brought about by race and class among other identity categories, failing which they could be ineffective.

In the case of rape, racially privileged women (white) experienced the courts very differently from women of other races. The criminal justice system tended to treat the rape of white women differently from that of

women of other races. There was a “sexual hierarchy that held certain female bodies in higher regard than others” (Crenshaw, 1991). A review of rape sentences in Dallas showed that the average prison term for raping a black woman was two years, five years for a Latina and ten years for an Anglo woman, showing a lower regard for black women who were victims of rape. The race of the rape victim as well as that of the offender mattered more than the fact that a woman had been raped by a man (Crenshaw, 1991). The rape of white women by black men has always resulted in convictions (and not so long ago, the lynching) of the rapist whereas the rape of black women by white men rarely resulted in a conviction

In both articles, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) was able to demonstrate that without examining the categories of race and gender simultaneously when dealing with the issues of racial discrimination and sexism, the experiences of black women continued to be marginalised and their voices diluted by those of group members who, except for being either female or black, were actually privileged. Regarding the employment, battering and sexual violence experiences of black women, they continued to experience domination in spite of antiracist and feminist efforts since being black and a woman was not part of mainstream conversations.

### **3.22.2 Intersection of Race and Social Class**

The use of the intersectionality framework in research has expanded into other fields and countries (Dlamini, 2013; Groenmeyer, 2011; Holmes, 2006; Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009; Moolman, 2013; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Richardson and Loubier, 2008; Smuts, 2011; Vaught, 2006). Much of the research on intersectionality has been in the social sciences in the US. Holmes (2006) addresses the issue of the wrecking effects of race and social class on self and success from a psychoanalytic perspective and in an American context. This entails the relationship of the woman with herself. She discusses how "success neurosis" can wreck the success of an individual when success triggers a childhood memory which wrecks the success. She deals with how "experiences with race and social class can damage the self ... thereby making both the achievement and maintenance of success difficult" (Holmes, 2006:219). She discusses how being an oppressed, either racially or societally, leads a person to believe that they are not good enough or do not deserve certain things. She argues that in people of colour and lower class there is an internalised message “that they are not to succeed, that they are not worthy of success” (Holmes, 2006).

She goes on to share the observation that among her patients, the damage caused to self by internalising these types of messages causes “fundamental doubt of one’s capacities. Such doubt can lead to stunted use of one’s abilities, limitations in actual success achieved, or the eventual actual wrecking of a high level of success” (Holmes, 2006:221). The author also observed that some of her patients “brought trouble [to themselves] for daring to escape the chaos and poverty of [their] youth”. One of her patients felt that they needed to keep

themselves in poverty so as not to “experience the somewhat disorganised, grandiose, excitement, narcissistic self-sufficiency and manic exhibitionism, signified by success” (Holmes, 2006:231). As has been previously stated, this research was from a clinical perspective and was carried out in the US. This study was about race and class. It would be interesting to see how non-white women with lower class backgrounds would have navigated past this type of internal message and escaped the disadvantages of their social class.

Very little research exists on intersectionality in the business leadership context. Richardson and Loubier (2008) studied intersectionality and leadership, acknowledging the lack of the study of more than two attributes in the existing body of leadership studies. In their research, the focus was on the differences between a male and female leader who were successive presidents of an American-based university. The purpose of the research was to “examine the interaction between gender, race, context and professional occupation in the subordinates’ perceptions and the lived experience of leader identity and leader accomplishments” (Richardson and Loubier, 2008:143). The research found some of the external barriers to career advancement to be societal role expectations, work environment, men’s organisations, the old boys’ network, gender-based stereotyping, promotion philosophies where female attributes are ignored and the gender composition of organisations

These findings are in line with previous research (Eagly and Carli, 2007) on the barriers to the advancement of women in the workplace, as discussed in chapter 2, as well as the reasons why women leave the workplace and labour force (Armknecht and Early, 1972; Daniel, 2004; Felme, 1984; Martin, 1916; Neck, 2015; Stone and Lovejoy, 2004).

The study was of a qualitative nature and involved interviewing academic staff who had worked for both university presidents. The findings were that “leadership style and identity developed from a combination of surface level and deep level psychological and social factors” (Richardson and Loubier, 2008:154). The subordinates concurred that the leader consisted of the sum of education, work experience, values as well as the core identities of race, gender, age etc. In this case, intersectionality could successfully be used to explore the impact of the multiple attributes that the leader brought to the table and their impact on the organisation. The male leader was from academia and focused primarily on the sports programmes in the college. The female leader, on the other hand, had corporate experience and her focus was on streamlining processes and running the university like a profitable organisation.

### 3.22.3 Intersectionality in Europe

In Europe, the research has centred on issues of how intersectionality has played out in practice, especially in equality bodies and law (Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009). In this research, European Union (EU) member states have been trying to “unify provisions on discrimination on grounds as gender, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, age, disability and sexuality which have previously fallen under different pieces of legislation” (Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009:460). The purpose of the research was therefore to examine the ways in which “intersectionality is being institutionalized in equality bodies and law in Europe” and what political and legal implications this has for tackling inequalities.

The research shows that EU member states set up bodies to monitor discrimination, resulting in an integrated equalities agenda. These reforms addressed the various inequalities that prevailed within the EU. The research shows that previously, anti-discrimination and equality policies were directed at specific groups and focused on political intersectionality, which describes how intersectionality is relevant to political strategies and policies (Crenshaw, 1991). The EU had adopted a multi-discrimination approach to tackling the different areas of discrimination. Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam enshrines the “commitment not only to tackle separately each of the six grounds – gender, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation – but also to look at combating discrimination across inequalities” (Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009:467). It was the debate on intersectionality that led to acknowledgement of the fact that “when it comes to discrimination, there can be no hierarchy”, and this led to the need to extend the scope of protection against discrimination beyond employment on grounds of religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation (Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009).

Four main problems were found in the use of the multi-discrimination approach versus an intersectionality approach to dealing with inequalities. The first problem was that the concept of multi-discrimination promises that the different axes of inequality are similar to one another, matter to the same extent and can be treated with an anti-discrimination approach (Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009:468). This ignores the fact categories of inequality differ, for example, a person can choose their religious beliefs but has no influence on their age or disability (Verloo as quoted by Kantola and Nousiainen (2009)). The second issue was that a multiple approach implies that categories matter equally in a predetermined relationship to each other. This is in contrast to an intersectional approach which would let the relationship between the categories be determined by the interplay between individual and institutional factors. A third problem Kantola and Nousiainen (2009) found was that the use of a multi-discrimination approach narrowed the anti-discrimination frame and made it more difficult to explore other measures to address intersecting inequalities.

The final criticism of the EU multiple discrimination was its omission of class. With an increase in economic inequalities with the EU (and globally), the authors were of the view that the anti-poverty policies needed to be considered alongside anti-discrimination law. The study concluded that there is no intersectionality in the EU discourse on multiple discrimination.

#### **3.22.4 Intersectionality in Africa**

**South Africa:** In South Africa, there have been several studies on intersectionality (Dlamini, 2013; Groenmeyer, 2011; Moolman, 2013; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Smuts, 2011; Vaught, 2006). The studies have been in various fields such as African identities, gender studies, sociology and psychology.

Vaught (2006) studied the intersectionality of being black, lesbian and an activist. This was a qualitative study which was done by interviewing one person and considered the interviewee's experiences of race, class and sexuality. The multiple oppression of different identities was prevalent in the study. "There is still a lot of abuse of women in the townships and now it's more on lesbians" (Vaught, 2006:24). The study shows that discrimination can be found on the race and class fronts as well as the sexual orientation front. So within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual community, black people do not "hang out" with whites although a "well dressed, articulate, educated, black person living in the suburbs could be accepted by South African whites" (Vaught (2006). Smut's study of intersectionality (2011) focused on the experiences of lesbians coming out in social spaces in South Africa. The study was of a qualitative nature and considered the impact of race, religion and social space on the extent to which lesbians "come out". Her findings were that "multiple identities, in fact, do intersect in each of [the] stages [of coming out] and this resulted in respondents having different experiences and making different decisions in the process of coming out publicly" (Smuts, 2011:37).

Two South African studies were on intersectionality in the workplace. Hunter and Hachimi (2012) studied the intersectionality of language, class and race in the call centre industry in South Africa. This study was under the field of social and cultural studies and was of a qualitative nature. It concentrated on the relationship between race and class inequalities. The researchers did, however, acknowledge that other forms of identity, such as gender, sexuality and age, intersect with race and class but had excluded them from this study due to the need to keep the study focused and the space limitations. Their study found that the call centre industry had a preference for black employees who spoke fluent English in the lower paid call centre positions. Given South Africa's history of apartheid, fluency in English is a function of the ability to attend English-medium schools. These schools tend to be more expensive than government schools and are not in the rural areas or the townships where most of the working class populace resides. The findings showed that

black Africans who had attended English-speaking schools and, as a result, had acquired an “accent” that was not influenced by their mother tongue were better able to secure call centre employment than heavily accented English speakers. They further found that high-paying call centre positions were predominantly held by white employees who did not have to attend training or oral tests. The study was able to establish at an aggregate level the relationship between background (class), English language competence and call centre employment.

Groenmeyer’s study (2011) focused on two identity categories: race and gender in the fishing and construction industries of South Africa. The study was qualitative (case study) and conducted through interviewing two women and recording their narratives. Post-apartheid, these industries have adopted policies that prefer women as employees (in the construction sector) and as part of the team that applies for a licence in the fishing industry. “The South African Public Works Affirmative Action Program encourages women’s engagement as construction workers and provides an opportunity for women to build sustainable assets such as roads that link schools and clinics” (Groenmeyer, 2011:258). The researcher found that although the women in the study had premises from which to operate and owned equipment, they had to rely on short-term contracts. Men continued to oppose women entering the formal construction sector due to it being seen as “an industry based on strength and skill - traits seemingly held only by men” (Groenmeyer, 2011). Interestingly, some of the opposition came from women themselves who, on the construction sites, kept saying “we can’t manage this type of job”. In the fishing industry, the interviewee could only get short-term contracts. So both women had to vary between being an employer during times that they had contracts and working for someone else between contracts.

The study was able to demonstrate how being a black woman entrepreneur played itself out in the workplace for business owners in the fishing and construction industries. Here the importance of intersectionality as a lens of study is once more demonstrated. A focus on one or the other of the core identities would have meant a loss of the narrative that emerged from studying both categories of identity.

Booyesen and Nkomo (2010) used intersectionality to study the combined effects of race and gender on the think-manager, think-male phenomenon. Previous studies of this phenomenon focused only on gender or race but not both at the same time (Schein, 1973). This is an area that has been researched extensively. This was the first study of its kind to be carried out in Africa and that considered more than one category of identity. The black feminist theory that “everyone has race and gender” led to the choice of intersectionality as the framework used for the study. The objective of the research was to examine the combined effects of race and gender on gender role stereotypes. The research did not investigate how the respondents

experienced race and gender, but rather how their race and gender affected their view of gender role stereotypes. Hence the research gap that I seek to address was not covered by this work.

Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike (2012) used intersectionality as the framework to study the intersection of race and gender in respect of the appointment or promotion of women into key decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors in South Africa. The study found that while women of all races were to be found in reasonable numbers in middle management positions, there was an absence of African women at professional management levels in organisations. White women formed the majority of women in key positions leading to the suggestion that wherever the issues of the advancement in the promotion of women were raised, it was important to ask the question, which women?

Dlamini's study (2013) focused on business and leadership and is the only one of its kind in Africa. The study was qualitative and focused on women CEOs and female chairpersons in South Africa. In the section of the report that deals with her positionality within the study, Dlamini (2013) comments that "there is no sisterhood across race". I found that an interesting and stark contrast to my working experiences. In the lower levels of management, I did find that there is indeed no sisterhood across race. However, as I climbed up the corporate ladder, I did find sisterhood across race, in fact more than within race. One of my closest friends is Indian and a former colleague. She and I established a rapport from the first day that I walked into the offices of our mutual employer. We formed a bond that has outlived our employment at that organisation. I could go to her for advice (and tissues if need be). I think we intuitively realised that "girl power" requires solidarity if we were to survive in the corporate sea with sharks all around!

Dlamini (2013) found that race, gender and class influence the role experience of women leaders. Race was the biggest influence, followed by gender, for the black participants but it was the reverse for the white participants. She attributes the finding on race as the dominant oppressive social identity to South Africa's recent history of apartheid laws. During the apartheid era, everything was based on race from "health access and quality of education to where you worked and lived; class was automatically based on race" (Dlamini, 2013:126). Her findings indicate that "race is the core of who you are and how you are perceived followed by gender. Generations and class are an overlay of everything else" (Dlamini, 2013:126). Her findings show that white women were promoted to leadership positions at a younger age than their black counterparts. The former received their promotions when they had junior degrees, whereas the African women (except for one) had postgraduate qualifications at the time of their first promotion to a leadership position. She found that it was easier for upper class women to progress in their careers. Being upper class enabled them to study and/or

work overseas and get an education that was superior to that which had been available to Africans under apartheid.

Dlamini's (2013) study focused on women in executive positions. The experiences of women who started their careers in post-apartheid South Africa were missing. My study provided an opportunity to see if race still remains the dominant oppressive identity. It also unpacked the impact of an improved educational system for black women and the influence on the power dynamics in the workplace. The incorporation of Zimbabwe provided the opportunity to make an original contribution to the field of study. I felt that it would be interesting to see if the apartheid-related race experiences of women in the South African group would lead to a different view of success and self when compared to Zimbabwe where racial oppression of black people is not a part of recent history.

**Zimbabwe:** There is no record of studies on intersectionality being done in Zimbabwe.

**Other parts of Africa:** The database search for publications on intersectionality in other parts of Africa revealed that the only study done was in Tanzania (Elu and Loubert, 2013). It was workplace related and sought to investigate the extent to which intersectionality of ethnicity and gender was a source of earnings equality in the manufacturing sector of Tanzania. The study was qualitative and carried out through interviews. The results were statistically analysed and showed that gender alone was not a source of inequality. It was the combination (intersecting) of gender and ethnicity which led to pay inequalities for female members of five ethnic groups.

### 3.23 Conclusion

The literature reviewed shows that indeed "African women and leaders have been largely invisible in [the] accumulated body of knowledge" that exists on women leaders and managers (Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009). This paucity extends to studies on intersectionality in the workplace and its impact on career progression and authority dynamics. Studies in this area have not been brought into the workplace but have been restricted to the field of gender studies and psychology. The literature emphasises the gap that is being filled by this study on the career dynamics of women and how they are impacted by the race, gender and social class from which they come. In the next chapter, I discuss the research methodology that was used for the study as well as the data collection and analysis processes.

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

Research is carried out using either quantitative or qualitative methods or a combination of both (Atieno, 2009; Berg, 1998; Collis and Hussey, 2009; Cooper and Schindler, 2003; Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005). The choice of method is dependent on the research problem, the design of the study, as well as its purpose (Atieno, 2009; Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005). In this chapter the research methodology used in the study is described. The research design and the two main research paradigms of positivism and interpretivism are discussed, as are the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods. The research method, data collection strategy and the methodological challenges of the selected data collection strategy that I employed are described. I discuss the population, units of analysis and the data analysis methods that I used for my research. I introduce grounded theory and explain how my study was influenced by social constructivism. The chapter ends with the ethical considerations that I took into consideration in carrying out the study. Figure 3 below is a pictorial summary of the research process. In it, I demonstrate how the different elements were covered in my study and follow with a detailed discussion of each.

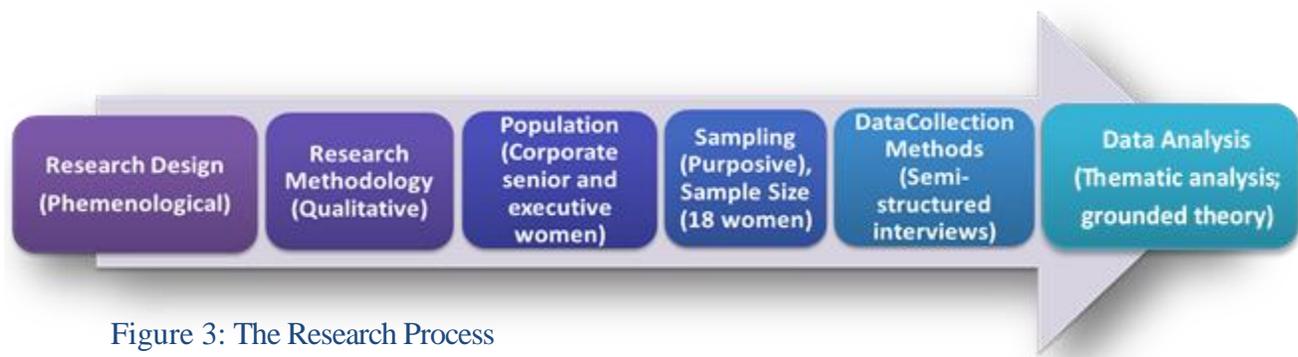


Figure 3: The Research Process

### 4.2 Research Design

The research design is the blueprint for fulfilling the research objectives and answering the research question (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). It is informed by the objectives of the study and the questions that the researcher seeks to answer. It takes into account; inter alia, the budgetary and time constraints that the researcher faces (Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005). The design for this study was phenomenological. The phenomenological approach in research assumes the importance of the perspectives of the study subjects and acknowledges that the “social world is socially constructed” (Aspers, 2009). Phenomenology started as a practice in philosophy in which there was an attempt to get to the heart of the matter and to describe a phenomenon as it appears to the one who experiences it (Kawulich, 2004; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Moran 2000; Quinney, Dwyer and Chapman, 2012).It sought to avoid pre-empting experiences and imposing explanation of phenomena without first understanding them from within. Phenomenology sought to take philosophy back to “the life of the living human subject ... to return to concrete lived human

experiences ... to capture life as it is lived ...” (Moran, 2000:5). In the first use of the term, it was described as “a science which enables us to move from appearances to truth” (Moran, 2000).

An important part of a phenomenological study is memo writing and reflexivity. It is important that reflexivity is incorporated as a strategy at the design phase of the study (Finefter-Rosenbloh, 2017). Reflexivity allows the researcher to position his or herself in the study and to monitor the potential impact of their own “biases, beliefs and experiences” on the research (Finefter-Rosenbloh, 2017). This study has incorporated reflexivity by the positioning of the researcher from the start in chapter one. The extent to which reflexivity was undertaken is explained under the data collection and analysis sections.

### 4.3 Research paradigm

The starting point in research design is to determine the research paradigm. A research paradigm is an approach or framework that guides how research should be conducted (Atieno, 2009; Collis and Hussey, 2009). With the passage of time, two research paradigms, namely positivism and interpretivism, have emerged. The two main paradigms are underpinned by five philosophical assumptions:

- a. Ontological assumptions which are concerned with the nature of reality;
- b. Epistemological assumptions which are concerned with what is accepted as valid knowledge;
- c. Axiological assumptions which are concerned with the role of values in the research;
- d. Rhetorical assumptions which are concerned with the type of language used in the research;
- e. Methodological assumptions which are concerned with the process of the research.

Positivism provides the framework for the way research is conducted in the natural sciences. It is underpinned by the belief that reality is independent of the researcher(s) and the goal is the discovery of theories, based on empirical research (observation and experiment). It is associated with quantitative methods of analysis (Atieno, 2009; Collis and Hussey, 2009). Interpretivism is the framework that is used in qualitative research. It is underpinned by the belief and rests on the premise that social reality is not objective but highly subjective because it is shaped by our realities (Atieno, 2009; Collis and Hussey, 2009). The philosophical assumptions found under each research paradigm are compared in Table 9 on page 112.

The current research falls within the interpretivist paradigm with the focus of the study being the lived experiences of the subjects. Their realities of the workplace will be subjective and peculiar to each individual. The study met the philosophical assumptions in the following ways:

- a) Ontological assumptions: The reality of how gender, race and class impact the career progression of women is subjective and differed from participant to participant. There were therefore multiple versions of reality as experienced by the individual participants.
- (b) Epistemological assumptions: The researcher interacted directly with the participants during the interview process. The use of semi-structured interviews was intended to facilitate conversation between the researcher

and the participants. While the interview schedule guided the research conversation and provided some structure for the interview, some of the questions asked were not pre-scripted and were informed by the conversation as it developed.

c) Axiological assumptions: The research was affected by the researcher's values, and biases were present. I am a black (African) woman who has held senior leadership positions in corporate organisations. My investment in the research question was both academic and personal.

d) Rhetorical assumptions: The report is written in a conversational or “informal” style and the personal voice "I" is used from time to time. Where necessary and relevant, direct quotes from the interviewees are used in the findings. Additionally, and consistent with the conversational approach to the interview, the language used during interviews, while professional, was less formal.

e) Methodological assumptions: The research is inductive and multiple identities were studied. The research studied a small sample of women who occupied or had occupied senior and executive leadership positions over the past five years. The results of their experiences were analysed to establish if there were patterns that emerged and categories were identified during the data analysis process. The findings are a direct reflection of the data that was gathered during the interview process.

#### **4.4 Research methodology**

Although research can be undertaken using either quantitative or qualitative methods, depending on the research objectives (Atieno, 2009; Collis and Hussey, 2009), there are a few studies that use qualitative research methods (Dlamini, 2013; Kawulich, 2004; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Nkomo and Ng'ambi, 2009). For a long time, quantitative methods were preferred over qualitative ones as they were seen to be more “scientific” (Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005). However, qualitative methods are popular and have grown in visibility in the social sciences (Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005; Kawulich, 2004; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The advantages associated with the use of qualitative methods are that they provide naturally occurring information that enables and increased understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Qualitative research is done in close proximity to the subject and provides data which allows for rich, thick description which can be contextualised. The focus on lived experiences allows for interpretation based on meanings people bring to them (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

With the current study falling within the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative research methods were used. Qualitative research methods enable the expression of experiences which cannot be expressed by numbers. These methods are used when the researcher is required to find out about people's thoughts and emotions (Berg, 1998; Kawulich, 2004; McDermid, Peters, Jackson and Daly, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). They are appropriate in research that is focused on lived experiences and that is not intended to be generalised across a population but is to be explored to understand certain phenomena and add to the depth of

understanding (Kawulich, 2004; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Qualitative methods are also appropriate for use in studies that are difficult to carry out using quantitative methods.

This study entailed establishing the subjective experiences of women who had held or were holding positions of senior or executive management in corporate organisations in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The study also sought to probe the experiences and the emotional and psychological journeys of these women on the way to positions of senior and executive management. These could not be extracted effectively through quantitative methods. Hence a qualitative approach was most appropriate for the study.

**Table 9: Positivism versus Interpretivism** Source: (Collis and Hussey, 2009:58)

Philosophical Assumptions	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological: the nature of reality	Reality is objective, singular and separate from the researcher	Reality is subjective and multiple, and informed by participants' perceptions
Epistemological: what constitutes valid knowledge	Researcher is independent of what is being researched	Researcher interacts with what is being researched
Axiological: the role of values	Research is value free and unbiased	Researcher acknowledges that research is value laden and biases are present
Rhetorical: the language used in the research	Researcher writes in a formal style and uses the passive voice, accepted quantitative words and set definitions	Researcher writes in a less formal style and uses the personal voice, accepted qualitative terms and limited definitions
Methodological: the process of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process is deductive</li> <li>• Study of cause and effect with a static design (categories are isolated beforehand)</li> <li>• Research is context free</li> <li>• Generalisations lead to prediction, explanation and understanding</li> <li>• Results are accurate and reliable through validity and reliability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process is inductive</li> <li>• Study of mutual simultaneous shaping of factors with an emerging design (categories are identified during the process)</li> <li>• Research is context bound</li> <li>• Patterns and/or theories are developed for understanding</li> <li>• Findings are accurate and reliable through verification</li> </ul>

Qualitative research has three components namely, data collection, procedures to analyse and organise data and reporting. The data can come from various sources, while the report can be verbal or written (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The manner in which these components were addressed is discussed later in the chapter.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are important and none has an added advantage over the other (Atieno, 2009; Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005). The main determinant of the research method to be followed is the research question. This will guide the researcher in selecting the most appropriate method to be used in the study. **Table 10** below summarises the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods in research.

**Table 10: Differences in emphasis between qualitative and quantitative methods.** Source: (Collis and Hussey, 2009:58)

Qualitative methods	Quantitative methods
Emphasis on understanding	Emphasis on testing and verification
Focus on understanding from participants'/informants' point of view	Focus on facts and/or reasons for social events
Interpretation and rational approach	Logical and critical approach
Observations and measurements in natural settings	Controlled measurements
Subjective "insider view" and closeness to data	Objective "outsider view" distant from data

Qualitative methods	Quantitative methods
Explorative orientation	Hypothetical-deductive; focus on hypothesis testing
Process oriented	Result oriented
Holistic perspective	Particularistic and analytical
Generalisation by comparison of properties and contexts of individual organism	Generalisation by population membership

It was the objective of obtaining the subjective views of women leaders on their workplace experiences that guided my decision to use qualitative methods for this study.

## 4.5 Population, sampling strategy and sample size

### 4.5.1 Study population

A population is “the total collection of elements about which we need to make some inferences” (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). For the purposes of this study, the initial target population was all executive and middle management women, of all races and backgrounds, in corporate organisations in Johannesburg and Pretoria, South Africa and Bulawayo and Harare, Zimbabwe. The population also included women who had previously held executive and middle management positions in corporates within the countries but had since left formal employment. These populations are infinite and hence it was difficult to identify all the individuals who would form part of the population. The final population consisted of all women in senior and executive level positions in corporates in Johannesburg, South Africa as well as Bulawayo and Harare in Zimbabwe.

### 4.5.2 Sampling Strategy

Sampling is the collection of information from elements of a population (Cooper and Schindler, 2003; Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005). The use of an entire population in research is costly and time-consuming, oftentimes not even necessary; hence the use of a sample. In some instances, it might be impossible to include all members of the target population. Various sampling procedures exist and the type chosen is dependent on the nature of the research.

In quantitative research, probability sampling is used to select the sample that would be used for the study and the results are then generalised across the population (Berg, 1998). This gives each element of the population an equal chance of being selected and used in the research. The available sampling strategies are simple random (where each element of the population has an equal chance of being selected to be in the final sample), systematic random (where there is a random starting point of selection and every *n*th item is included in the sample) and stratified random methods (where only a certain segment of the population is selected to be in the sample) (Berg, 1998).

In qualitative research, non-probability sampling is often used (Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005). In non-probability sampling, there is no requirement for all the elements of the population to have the potential of

being in the sample (Berg, 1998). The results of the sample are not used to generalise across the population (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). There are four main types of samples which can be used in qualitative research. Convenience samples rely on the available subjects based on proximity and ease of access. Purposive sampling selects from a group that meets certain criteria and in snowball sampling, the initial sample of respondents in the study recommends other people who could form part of the study. In a quota sample, a matrix or table is used to create cells, which are filled through non-probability methods (Berg, 1998). The type of sampling method and size depends on the data collection strategy as well as the resources that are available for the research.

This study required the use of purposive sampling. There are two major types of purposive samples: judgemental sampling and quota sampling. I used judgement sampling in order to ensure that the criterion of being women who had held or were currently in executive and middle management positions in corporates was met by the participants. The reason for choosing the purposive sampling strategy was that the sample needed to be selected from women of all races who met the criterion of working in senior and executive management positions or having had worked in such positions in the past five years. From this initial sample, I was able to identify further members of the population through network referrals (Cooper and Schindler, 2003).

In qualitative research, the sample is known as the unit of analysis (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). The unit of analysis enables the researcher to get insight into the subject of study. For the purposes of this study, the units of research were the women who currently occupied or had, in the last five years, occupied senior and executive managerial positions in corporates in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The target sample size was a minimum of one woman of each race and at each level. Table 11 below reflects what the ideal sample would look like for each country. The final sample consisted of twelve women from South Africa and six women from Zimbabwe. The detailed information on the makeup of the samples is given in chapter 5 of the thesis.

Table 11: Target sample for each country

	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
Middle management	1	1	1	1	4
Executive management	1	1	1	1	4
Total	2	2	2	2	8

#### 4.6 Data Collection Methods

The process of data collection in a phenomenological study is a reflective one that is aimed at getting the insights of participants on their lived experiences (Quinney et al, 2016). There are several ways in which qualitative data can be collected, including interviewing, focus groups, ethnography, sociometry, unobstructive measures, historiography and case studies (Berg, 1998).

**Interviews:** The data collection strategy that was used was interviewing. Interviewing is a method of collecting data from selected participants and includes asking questions on what they think, how they feel and what they do (Bryne, Brugha, Clarke, Lavelle and McGarvey,2015; Collis and Hussey, 2009). Interviews

are considered suitable in research that investigates opinions and values as they allow the researcher to probe and tease out information (Bryne et al, 2015; Quinney et al, 2016). Interviews require interaction between the researcher and the participants and can be conducted with individuals or groups and can be done face to face, via telephone or video-conferencing (Berg, 1998; Collis and Hussey, 2009). An interview schedule or questionnaire is used to conduct the interview.

There are basically three types of interviews (Berg, 1998; Collis and Hussey, 2009). The standard interview (also known as the formal or structured interview) consists of a standard set of questions with predetermined answers or a fixed category of answer (Berg, 1998; Collis and Hussey, 2009). These types of interviews are usually associated with the positivist approach. The unstandardised (informal or non-directed interview) does not have a standard set of answers and the participants can freely discuss a topic without a predetermined frame from which to answer. The semi-standard or semi-structured interview is guided but has a free-flowing element. The semi-structured interview requires that topics, sample sizes and people be interviewed and questions asked be determined beforehand (Collis and Hussey, 2009). The last two types of interviews are associated with interpretivism and allow the interviewer to probe and ask follow-up clarifying questions. Successful interviews require that participants provide “vivid, rich and authentic” accounts of their experiences (Quinney et al, 2016). I used semi-structured interviews to gather the data for the study as these would enable me to ask open-ended questions and probe for further details if I deemed it necessary to do so.

The researcher needs to gain the trust of the participant if the desired outcomes of the interview are to be achieved (Harvey, 2010; Quinney et al, 2016). The location of the interview is crucial to the process of gaining trust. Participants needs to be in an environment that enables them to feel comfortable and confident when talking about the personal aspects of their lives. In this regard, the researcher needs to be mindful of carrying out an interview at a place of work as this has been seen to have a negative impact on the researcher’s ability to “step out” of the professional role (Quinney et al, 2016).

Interviews require the researcher to obtain permission from the participants to take notes and make use of a recording which can be transcribed after the interview. Interviewer bias is a risk in this type of data collection strategy. In a positivist study, interview bias may be reduced by ensuring that all questions are asked in exactly in the same way and ensuring that each respondent will understand the question in the same way (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Table 12: The advantages and disadvantages of using interviews as a data collection method

Advantages of Personal Interviews	Disadvantages of Personal Interviews
Good co-operation from respondents.	High costs of getting to respondents.
Interviewer can answer questions about study, probe for answers, use follow-up questions and gather information by observation.	Not all respondents are available at a time that is mutually suitable to both researcher and participant.
Interviewer can pre-screen respondents to ensure that they	Longer time in the field gathering the data.

fit the population profile.
Responses can be entered onto a computer to reduce error. Follow up is labour intensive.

Source: (Cooper and Schindler, 2003:324)

Table 12 above lists the advantages and disadvantages of using personal interviews to collect data. The use of personal interviews did indeed yield good co-operation from the respondents as I met them face to face and could establish a rapport with them. During the course of the interviews, I was able to probe where necessary (Cooper and Schindler, 2003; Shenton, 2004) and to ask further questions if I felt the necessity to do so. Getting the respondents at the same time was a challenge and at one point, I had to consider the possibility of using Skype to conduct an interview. In selecting the potential participants, I was able to use internet resources to ensure that they met the criteria for the study. The duration of the face-to-face interviews varied from person to person and time spent in the field was quite extensive. I describe this more in the section that deals with the data gathering process.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, in qualitative research, computer software can be used to sort and analyse data. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of using computer software, I chose not to use computer software to sort and analyse the data. I discussed the issue of using software with my supervisor who strongly recommended that I transcribe the data myself. This would enable me to listen to the interviews more than once and thus immerse myself in the data. Manual analysis of data is recommended for novice researchers (Webb, 1999) and by doing this myself, I was able to remember information from the data and could easily link quotes to findings when writing up the findings chapter. The follow up was quite limited as the interview process enabled me to get as much clarity as I needed and there were only three respondents to whom I needed to go back for additional information.

As has already been indicated, I used purposive sampling to identify the participants for the study. My target population and final sample included elites and peers and I needed to be aware of the methodological challenges of interviewing these groups of people.

**Methodological challenges of interviewing elites:** While I am a professional and have held executive-level positions in the workplace, this was my first doctoral research and I am therefore an inexperienced and junior researcher. It was in the role of the researcher that I was interacting with the senior and executive women in the workplace. Some of these women met the definition of elite as given by (Harvey, 2010; Kvale, 2011) as being “those who currently occupy senior management positions” or people in powerful positions. Harvey (2010) advances five areas which need attention when interviewing elites and could, in fact, have been written with this group of research participants in mind. It must be pointed out; however, that Harvey’s counsel is equally relevant to all interviewing, irrespective of social status of the participants. The researcher needs to be organised when contacting respondents and attending interviews and thoroughly prepared for the

meeting with the participant. In choosing the participants, the researcher needs to be aware of “research fatigue” and try to avoid interviewing those who have participated in a similar study before. It is important that the researcher be able to explain the difference between any studies that the participant may have been interviewed for before and the current one.

The researcher needs to be able to clearly articulate to both the participants and any gatekeepers the reasons for wanting to meet and the objectives of the meeting. This can be done in the form of an email in which the researcher introduces himself or herself, the institution represented the type of study, manner in which information will be disseminated as well as the extent to which information will be kept confidential. The researcher needs to be very familiar with the interview questions (Harvey, 2010; Kvale, 2011) and the order in which they come so that if a question is answered as part of another question, the interviewer does not repeat that question. It is also important for the researcher to do some homework on the elite participant and not ask obvious questions that can be answered through other data sources (Harvey, 2010; Kvale, 2011).

Researching elites requires that the researcher be flexible in terms of research design and time. Due to the demands on time and the criticality of the positions that participants hold, the researcher should be prepared for appointments to be confirmed or cancelled at the last minute. The elite participant may want to dictate the terms of the interview and the researcher needs to be prepared for this and have a strategy for responding to it. The researcher needs to ensure transparency when communicating with elite members before and during the interview and during the analysis of the data. Trust is important in getting high-quality data as it enables the participant to open up and be authentic (Harvey, 2010; Quinney et al, 2016). It is also important to maintain good etiquette with all participants to ensure the highest professional standards. The final area addressed by Harvey (2010) is perseverance with the difficult stages of the research such as interview rejection and uncomfortable meetings. Often, an elite will not be available at the first attempt to secure a meeting but lack of time does not mean no. The researcher needs to persevere until a meeting is secured.

Other issues to be considered when interviewing elites are power relations and managing them diplomatically, bearing in mind that they are used to being the boss and asking the questions! Gaining access to an elite participant depends on “serendipity, social networks as well as the particular circumstances at the time” (Harvey, 2010; Kvale, 2011). The researcher needs to pursue as many avenues as possible and be prepared to use personal contacts to open doors. As previously indicated, my subjective experiences of the research relationships, in particular the interviews, are treated as valid data. As well as adhering to Harvey’s counsel, I also documented these in a research journal.

I dressed formally for each interview as I need to create a professional tone from the onset. I ensured that I prepared myself adequately as per Harvey’s recommendations. I went through the interview questions before each interview to familiarise myself with the contents. The power dynamics referred to by Harvey (2010) did

not come into play at all and the participants allowed me to direct the interviews. I found every single one of the participants to be highly professional and respectful of my study and my process.

**Methodological challenges of interviewing peers:** The orthodox literature on interviewing makes certain assumptions around the interviewer- interviewee relationship including that of being a process between strangers who will not meet again (Platt, 1981). Usually in interviews, there is a power disparity between the interviewer and the interviewee (Coar and Sim, 2006). My final list of participants included women leaders who were my peers. When reviewing the final report in order to integrate my findings with existing literature, the gap in the methodology chapter to address the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing peers was identified. This situation then led me to research on interviewing peers post the data collection process so that I could compare my experiences with research on the same. Peers in this context does not mean youth or being the same age, but rather that we belonged to the same networks (Bryne et al, 2015; Coar and Sim, 2006; Platt, 1981). A peer can also be an informant who occupies a similar role or status and shares an ongoing professional relationship (Coar and Sim, 2006). Some of the participants had been my colleagues at one point or the other and hence met the definition of peers.

The biggest advantage with interviewing peers is ease of access to them as they can be contacted directly without the need to go through a gatekeeper as would be the case with elites (Bryne et al, 2015; Coar and Sim, 2006). The second advantage is that there is already an existing relationship and hence there is no need to win their trust and establish a rapport. This lends itself to interviews that are richer and in which participants share with more candour especially on sensitive topics which would not necessarily be the case under impersonal conditions (Bryne et al, 2015; McDermid et al, 2014; Platt, 1981). There is also the advantage of being able to gauge the “honesty and accuracy of responses” which an outsider may miss (Bryne et al, 2015).

Peer interviewing also comes with challenges with the main ones being bias, the detachment of the researcher from the subject of the study and “over familiarity” or maintaining of boundaries (Coar and Sim, 2006; McDermid et al, 2014) which leads to not interrogating deeply due to a shared understanding. There is also the risk of the personal-professional conflict as well as fear of over-disclosure due to potential repercussions especially where the interviewee is a colleague (McDermid et al, 2014) .Some of the suggested interventions which may help to overcome the challenges are training of the interviewer to “address apprehension, anxiety and fear of the unknown” (Donnelly, 2005). This can also be mitigated by recording which provides evidence of the data collected. Reflexivity which includes reflecting on the interview will help in identifying any areas of the interview guide which may need to be adapted. Voluntary consent is another intervention which required the written consent of the participant as well the details of the research including the risks and benefits on the consent form (Donnelly, 2005; McDermid et al, 2014).

As research already indicates, I had easy access to my peers and could contact them directly without going through gatekeepers in order to request their participation in the study. The disadvantages associated with interviewing peers were really minimal in this particular study. The main reason for this was that my peers in this instance were former colleagues with whom I now had little contact. This meant that the risk of personal-professional conflict as well as the fear of over-disclosure were not risks to them. I had to manage my own biases and tried to limit my probing to the information that they shared during the interview. I think the fact that I had already interviewed four people before my peers meant that I already had some experience in directing the interviewing and knowing when I needed to probe and when to let the “story” flow without interruption. I probed only when I felt the need to get more information on what had been shared.

**Interview schedule design:** As previously stated, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. I adapted the interview schedule that was developed by Dlamini (2013) for a similar study focusing on women at CEO level in South Africa. I further developed questions that dealt with sexual harassment and authorisation experiences as these were the other areas that my study focused on. While a semi-structured interview schedule was used, I also asked probing questions to draw out more information on the issues that were mentioned by various participants. The interviews were divided into four broad categories as per the interview schedule (Appendix 2). The categories were:

- **Family origins and early life experiences:** This first part of the questionnaire enabled me to determine the necessary context about each participant’s personal foundational blocks. The questions enabled me to get information that would inform each person’s internal narratives on matters such as family background, childhood social class, gender dynamics at home and school, the influences on career choices and so on.
- **Career experiences:** In this part of the questionnaire, I asked the participants to take me through their career journeys in terms of the organisations they had worked for and the roles they had occupied. I also asked the participants about their career highlights, challenges and the lessons they had learnt from both the positive and negative career experiences. I questioned the participants on the extent of support or hindrance they had experienced from the various organisations over the years.
- **Leadership experiences:** The interview questions were aimed at revealing the journeys of the women as managers of people and their experiences in terms of authority as leaders. The interviews focused on the self-authorisation processes of women and how they were able to move to being confident authorised leaders.
- **Organisational dynamics:** In this part of the interview, I asked the participants about the workplace dynamics in terms of race and gender dynamics. I also asked them about their experiences with sabotage from other women and sexual harassment as these are issues that women face in the workplace.

- **Understanding self and lessons learnt from the career journey:** The last part of the interview schedule was an introspection on the career lessons learnt and it is from this section that the theoretical framework was derived with career strategies for women in corporates.

**Preparing for the field:** In my initial proposal, I had indicated that I would carry out the study in three countries, namely South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. South Africa was an obvious choice as it is my country of residence. I have lived and worked in both Zambia and Zimbabwe and I thought that including them in the study would be enhance the knowledge on the dynamics that African women find in their career journeys. While working on the methodology chapter, I realised that while doing a study that examined three countries sounded like an easy task, the practicality of doing so for a part-time student in full-time employment would be a different matter. It was at that time that I realised I needed to reduce the study to two countries. Keeping South Africa as one of the countries was obvious and I needed to make a choice between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Fate, as it were, made the decision for me.

As soon as the SBL Research Ethics Committee approved my application, I started to contact the people whom I thought could help me access executive women. In Zambia, I asked a friend of mine, who had been a top civil servant and had extensive networks, to introduce me to eight women who met the profile of the women that I wanted for my study. As indicated earlier in the chapter, purposive sampling was necessary for this type of study and the women had to meet certain criteria. He was quite excited about the study and immediately started to contact the women that I wanted to meet. Unfortunately, my friend collapsed and died at the end of April 2016. Attempts to contact the women directly, including those whom I had met during the time I had worked there, proved fruitless and I had to drop Zambia from the study.

In Zimbabwe, I made contact with a former colleague and with a friend from university days who were both executives at their respective organisations. They are both male. My friend from university days is the Marketing and Sales Director at his organisation and in his response to my email, he jokingly wrote “[name supplied] is very bad like that, there’s only one woman on the Exco!” He was based in Harare and he introduced me to his colleague. My former colleague was also based in Harare and the Group Finance Director of one of the few remaining blue chip companies in Zimbabwe.

He introduced me to two women in his organisation, one of whom was interested in being a part of the study. However, once I asked for a date and time within the period that I was intending to be in Zimbabwe, I got no responses from her personal assistant and eventually dropped her from the list of potential participants. I also asked a female friend who was based in Harare to introduce me to women in her networks and she was able to put me in touch with two women. Five of the women that I interviewed in Zimbabwe were introduced to me by family, friends and former colleagues.

South Africa was the easiest country in which to find participants who were willing and able to find the time to participate in the study. I made a list of the people I could potentially interview and started to contact them by telephone, email and LinkedIn. Initially I was reluctant to interview someone that I knew on a social basis as I thought it would be difficult to focus on the interview without being distracted by the social dynamics. However, after using my sister's sister-in-law for the pilot study, I realised that my fears were unfounded and that it was possible to conduct the interview as long as I set a "professional tone" from the onset. Most of the people who made it onto my list as potential participants were women that I had previously worked with and whose direct contacts I had. I had worked with them at a telecommunications company and hence I had direct access to them without having to go through gatekeepers (Bryne et al, 2015; Sim and Coar, 2006). When I discussed the potential sample of women in South Africa with my supervisor, she was initially sceptical about using people from the same organisation and cautioned me about the risk of their experiences being coloured by the culture of the one organisation. When I made contact with them, I was pleasantly surprised to find that all of them had moved on to other organisations and so I would be able to hear about their career experiences outside of our common employer.

**Data gathering process:** I piloted the study by interviewing a junior manager who was in the financial services sector. The aim of the pilot was to assess the suitability of the existing instrument and to get feedback on the interview schedules, eliminate any ambiguity that may have existed in the questions and identify any questions that could be condensed and any that could be added (Kawulich, 2004; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Roulston, 2014). It also helped me to recognise and manage the dynamics for conducting the interviews in a restaurant, as well as identify any emotive or double-barrelled questions (Berg, 1998) and to get an idea of the time that I would require to spend with each interview respondent. The interview took place at a Mugg n Bean in the South Rand. We met on a Sunday afternoon as that was the only day on which she was available. Being in junior management, it was difficult for her to find the time to meet me during the week. The responses from the pilot were used as part of the findings as her experiences would be equally important in the study.

There were other valuable lessons to be applied when conducting the fieldwork. The interviews were audio-recorded and so it was important, if the meeting was held in a restaurant to choose a quiet spot and to request that the restaurant staff do not disturb you during the course of the meeting. It was also important to test the recording equipment before starting the interview.

It was during this interview that I decided to include ethnicity as part of the questions. The pilot participant was from KwaZulu-Natal but working in Gauteng and had experienced ethnic-related prejudices in the workplace. I therefore thought it might be an interesting category to include in the study. It is worth pointing out, however, that due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, the interview guideline itself can be

subject to ongoing modification as informed by both fieldwork experiences as well as concurrent and ongoing data analysis (Birks and Mills, 2015; Collis and Hussey, 2009; Kawulich, 2004; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers, 2002).

Once I had adjusted the interview schedule, I started setting up interviews with participants. I contacted them directly, via cell phone, email and LinkedIn. The interviews were set for a time and place that were most convenient for the participant. Where necessary, I introduced myself and my study and explained what I needed from them. Once the interest and willingness to participate was established, I then sent through the documents that were given by UNISA, confirming that I was student, as well as the consent form that the participant needed to complete (Shenton, 2004). I also sent more detailed information about the study.

The interviews took place in various venues, depending on what was convenient for the participants. The venues ranged from homes and restaurants to offices. It was important to work around the times that were convenient for the participants. The interviews ranged from just over 1 hour to 2.5 hours. The interviews with people that already I knew tended to be the lengthy ones, whereas those with strangers did not last for longer than 1 hour.

The interviews were recorded on a cell phone and a recorder. Notes were made notes of key issues on the interview schedules and backups of the interviews were made on a laptop and a USB. Conducting the interviews was a constant learning process. I forgot my recorder when I went for one of the interviews but that did not unsettle me as I had my cell phone. The phone was being used as the primary recorder anyway and it gave a very good quality recording. The interview was at the participant's home on a mid-week morning. During the interview, she excused herself as she needed to give instructions to her domestic worker. I put the recording on hold as I did not know how long she would be.

We then continued with the interview and I left. Later that day as I was transcribing, I realised that only the first 20 minutes had been recorded and I did not have a backup. Fortunately, she was someone I had worked with before and she graciously agreed to give me another interview on a Sunday afternoon. After that incident, I made sure that I did not touch the recording devices from the start to the end of the meeting (even if the participants needed to be excused for a few minutes). Transcribing silence was a better than interviewing a person twice and I know that no two interviews are the same, even if the participant and the questions remain unchanged.

Prior to starting the interview, the participants were asked to sign a participant consent form (Berg, 1998; Shenton, 2004). I realised the importance of having a set sequence in terms of the steps to be followed after the third interview. In that interview, the participant broke down when we were talking about her early life experiences. That situation had me totally flustered and I forgot to ask her to sign the form (I had to email her

the form post the interview). After the form was signed, permission was requested to audio-record the interviews and these were recorded on a cell phone. I explained that the use of a device would enable me to focus on the interview and “be present” instead of frantically trying to write down every word. It would also enable me to create an audit trail of the data collected for the study (Loh, 2013). Putting my cell phone in flight mode ensured that no calls came through during the interviews.

I also alerted the participants to the possibility of a follow-up interview should the need arise for additional information that I did not get during the interview. I informed the participants that they were free to end the interview at any time should they feel they no longer wanted to participate in the study (Stenton, 2004). I also informed the participants that they were to let me know of any questions that they were not comfortable answering and that they could withdraw from the study at any time (Stenton, 2004). All the participants agreed to be recorded and none of them withdrew from the study right up to its completion.

During the course of the data collection, I had to be extremely flexible in terms of meeting times and venues (Harvey, 2010). On more than two occasions, participants cancelled the appointments just before the scheduled time. Four of the participants asked me to interview them at their homes. One of the participants asked to meet at a child-friendly restaurant so that her 3-year-old daughter could play while I interviewed her. I worked with whatever was convenient for the participants and their families and kept the end goal in mind. One of the interviews was held after hours and started at about 6 pm. Two hours and seventeen minutes later, I was quite exhausted and realised the need for a cut-off time in terms of the duration of interviews. Fortunately, this was the only interview that ran late into the evening.

The participants were provided with a prepared interview script prior to the interview so that they could be adequately prepared for the meeting. While this might have contributed to over preparedness and taken away some of the spontaneity, being prepared could also enhance the amount of data collected during the limited interview time. The fact that the interview process allowed for probing beyond the questions in the interview schedule contained some of this risk. When I got to the interviews, none of the women had had the time to go through the scripts and so we were able to have a natural, unrehearsed interview.

It was important that I opened the interview so that the participant would know that we had started (Harvey, 2010). I started the interview by introducing myself and trying to establish a rapport with the participant (for those who I was meeting for the first time). The purpose of the study was explained and participants were assured of the confidentiality with which I would regard the answers to the interview questions and who at the university would have access to the interview scripts and recordings. The participants were also informed that pseudonyms would be used and that the organisations they worked or had worked for would not be mentioned in the report (Berg, 1998; Quinney et al, 2016).

Where the answers were vague, I exercised my judgement as to whether or not I should probe in order to get clarity regarding the answer. Where the question asked seemed sensitive and caused awkwardness, I treated the reaction as data and also exercised judgement as to whether to probe further or abandon the line of questioning. In the findings, I have shared my observations and reasons for following a particular course of action. I also shared and explored such moments of dilemma with my supervisor during supervisory meetings immediately following the interviews. My own subjective experiences of the interview, including my observations and those of the participants, were recorded in my research journal as soon after the interview as possible (Chan et al, 2013; Quinney et al, 2016). Some of the experiences shared in the interviews were quite intense and I needed a few days to “de-stress” and write my thoughts and feelings about the interview before transcribing.

At the end of each interview, it was equally important that I close the interview (Harvey, 2010). I did so by informing the participant that we had come to the end of the interview and thanked her for her time. I again reassured her of the confidentiality of our conversation and that the study would not make reference to her or her organisation or former organisation(s). I also gave the participants an opportunity to share their thoughts or comments outside of the questions that I had asked during the interview.

I kept a research journal throughout the research period which I used in order to debrief. This I found to be critical to do, especially after the interviews with my former colleagues (Coar and Sim, 2006; Donnelly, 2005; Roulston, 2014). As in any organisation, I had worked with them in an environment that was rife with gossip. Therefore, I needed to write down my preconceptions in order to be able to report on the findings as per the interview and to manage my biases (Coar and Sim, 2006; Donnelly, 2005; Roulston, 2014). Some of the interviews were emotionally draining for me, as I listened to the obstacles that some of the participants had overcome in their early family life experiences. Some of the interviews were like therapy sessions for the participants and I allowed them to talk as much as they wanted to. This was more the case with the women that I knew. I did not have to earn their trust and they were relaxed from the onset as they already knew me (Bryne et al, 2015; Coar and Sim, 2006). These were the interviews that ran for long periods of time. All the participants in Zimbabwe, except for one, were total strangers and I expected to have to go through the obstacles of earning their trust (Harvey, 2010; Kvale, 2012). Strangely enough, I did not experience the awkwardness of dealing with total strangers and having to earn their trust. They were all confident professionals who showed a very keen interest in my work and being part of the study.

**South Africa:** Interviews took place in various locations depending on what was convenient for the participants. Two of the interviews took place at restaurants on a Sunday afternoon and the participants brought their children to the meetings. So I had to find a balance between interviewing the women in their

roles as career women and watching them mother restless, bored children. I interviewed a total of twelve women including the pilot. There were five African, three Coloured, two Indian and two white women. All the women interviewed were either in my professional or social networks and I leveraged on these relationships to get time with them. The two white women had spent most of their working lives working for the same organisation although they had since moved on to different things. Both of them had at one time or another reported to a CEO. One of them was currently a direct report to a CEO but did not sit on the Exco. When I asked her about that, her facial expression changed and I guessed that this was not the norm and that she did not have a cordial relationship with her CEO. She later admitted that she was not in the right organisation. Two of the women (Coloured and Indian) had reported to a woman (white), who formed part of the sample. This was not intentional but it was interesting to hear how they experienced her as a leader. I will discuss this further in chapter 5.

For some of the participants, the part of the interviews where they talked about their early life experiences was hard and they actually broke down. The first interview in which the participant broke down was difficult to continue as it happened in the early part of the interview. I actually did not know what to do and debated whether to continue the interview. The other two were a bit easier as the women did not break down completely but acknowledged the fact that talking about her late mom for one participant and childhood sexual abuse resulting from neglect by her parents for the other was actually painful. Seeing the emotional side of those strong and high-flying women made me realise that even though these were highly accomplished women who were key decision-makers in their work environments, they were not superhuman and they felt pain, and they cried, regardless of how the corporate world saw and defined them.

**Zimbabwe:** In Zimbabwe I interviewed six women. All the participants were at executive management level. There were three African, one Coloured, one Indian and one white woman in the final sample. Two of the African women were the heads of their institutions. The third African woman worked for a parastatal (a state-owned organisation) and was able to bring insights into the culture and practices of an organisation that was owned by the government - the custodian of the Constitution that was described in chapter 1. I could not get women who worked below the level of Exco to avail themselves during the week.

Four of the meetings took place in offices, one was held in a restaurant and another was an after-hours meeting at the home of one of the participants. I met this last participant in Bulawayo although she works in Harare. This participant realised when I was already in Zimbabwe that she was going to be away from Harare on the day she had confirmed for the interview. Fortunately, she had a board meeting to attend in Bulawayo on what was to be my last day there and we were able to meet at her home after the meeting. Time constraints did not allow me to spend more than one weekend (travelling between the two cities) in the country.

At the end of each interview, I saved the recording with the name of the participant and the date of the interview. I transferred the recording onto my laptop and USB and ensured that it was backed up onto the cloud. I also filed my copies of the interview schedules onto which I made field notes during the interview.

#### 4.7 Data Analysis Methods

One of the most important steps in the research process is the analysis of data as it forms the outcomes of the research (Flick, 2013; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Data analysis is “a systematic search for meaning” from the data that has been gathered (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Data analysis can be done through quantification and non-quantification methods and the method that is used depends on the research paradigm for the particular study, as well as whether the data is quantitative or qualitative (Collis and Hussey, 2009). The selection of the method should be guided by the research questions, the theoretical foundation of the study and appropriateness of the technique in question to make sense of the data collected (Kawulich, 2004). Quantifying methods are used for quantitative data and non-quantifying methods are used for qualitative data. Analysis starts when the data has been collected and prepared for analysis. (Flick, 2013).

Regardless of the data analysis method used, Collis and Hussey (2009) advance three necessary steps in analysing data, namely reducing, restructuring and detextualising the data. Data reduction refers to finding a systematic way of selecting data, which is usually done through coding, restructuring data into major categories and themes and detextualising data by summarising it into network diagrams. Collis and Hussey (2009) suggest three key elements in data analysis:

- Comprehending is done even before the research commences and involves obtaining an understanding of the setting and culture of the study topic. There is an ongoing debate with regard to the amount of pre-knowledge that the researcher should have to enable research that is untainted by the preconceptions of ideas and theories from the researcher.
- Synthesising is drawing out different themes and patterns to get an explanation of what is going on.
- Theorising is the development of theory from data.

There are many different ways of analysing qualitative data (Kawulich, 2004; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007) but in the following sections, I will briefly discuss the most commonly used ones and then expand on the one that I have selected for this study:

4.7.1 **Constant Comparative Analysis:** This type of analysis is also known as coding and was created by the fathers of grounded theory (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). In constant comparative analysis, the researcher is required to read through the entire set or subset of data and to reduce it into “smaller meaningful parts” which are then given a descriptive title or code. Each new chunk of data is compared to an existing code before a new one is created. The codes are then grouped according to

similarity and themes are identified which are then documented ((Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Although constant comparative analysis was initially used to analyse data that had been collected in a series of rounds but can now be used to for data that has been collected in a single round ((Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). This method is important in research that wants to assume general or overarching questions of data (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

4.7.2 **Key Words in Context:** This method shows how participants use words in context by comparing the words that appear before and after key words (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). This method of analysis is appropriate for research where the actual words used by the participants are of interest to the researcher (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

4.7.3 **Word Count:** Where small amounts of qualitative data are being quantified, informal methods are used and these include counting frequency of occurrence of the phenomenon. The underlying assumption of this method is that people use words to which they attach importance or significance most frequently and so the number of times a word is used is counted (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

In the process of deciding whether to include or exclude data from findings, this method needs the researcher to exercise care so as not to compromise the richness and detail of the data and to provide the criteria, including explanations for excluding data (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This method is important to use in instances where the researcher deems frequency of words, categories or themes to be a good indicator of importance (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

4.7.4 **Classical Content Analysis:** This method is similar to constant comparative analysis but differs in that the researcher counts the number of times a code is utilised instead of creating themes. (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Content analysis is used to quantify large amounts of qualitative data. Content analysis involves the systematic conversion of qualitative data into numerical data (Collis and Hussey, 2009). In content analysis, the researcher determines the coding units that will be used to construct a coding frame. These units can be a particular pattern or theme. The data can then be further analysed using statistical software. It is useful for situations where many codes exist and the generation and frequency of use of codes is helpful.

4.7.5 **Domain Analysis:** Domains are units of cultural knowledge which are used to label chunks of data. The results are then used to create further questions for the participants (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The method is best used for research in which relationships among concepts are to be understood. This method may require that the researcher interviews the participants more than once (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

4.7.6 **Taxonomic Analysis:** This method is usually used in conjunction with domain analysis and forms the second step that helps researchers understand how participants use certain words and show the

relationships among all the items in a domain. It is useful to use where domain analysis has been completed and further analysis is required to organise terms used by participants. (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

**4.7.7 Componential Analysis:** Componential analysis can be undertaken after creation of domains. It is a “systematic search for components of meaning associated with cultural symbols (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). It is a useful method to use to identify areas that need further clarification.

If the study uses interpretivism as the research paradigm, the researcher will need to use non-quantification methods to analyse the qualitative data.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis using computer software**

Data analysis can be done manually or by using computer software (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Leech and Anwuegbuzie, 2007; Webb, 1999). Qualitative data analysis software can be used to import text, store and code data, search and retrieve text segments, stimulate interaction with data and build relationships within data (Collis and Hussey, 2009). It is important to note that software does not analyse and interpret data (Leech and Anwuegbuzie, 2007). It helps the researcher to structure and code the data and thereafter to analyse and interpret it. The use of software to analyse data has advantages as well as disadvantages (St. John and Johnson, 2000) and hence researchers have mixed feelings about it (Flick, 2013). The advantages that have been advanced for the use of software are that it is objective and systematic and thus enhances the elements of trustworthy, transparent and rigorous of the research (St. John and Johnson, 2000; Webb, 1999). The process of analysis is quicker when a computer is used than when the process is done manually and hence time is saved in this way (Leech and Anwuegbuzie, 2007; St. John and Johnson, 2000; Webb, 1999). The use of software also enables the researcher to deal with large amounts of data (Leech and Anwuegbuzie, 2007; St. John and Johnson, 2000). Among the criticisms of using data analysis software is the fact that it can alienate the researcher from the data and the context of the text may be lost in the process, thus creating “sterile and dehumanised data” (St. John and Johnson, 2000; Webb, 1999). It has been further criticised as “distraction from the real work of analysis (St. John and Johnson, 2000) which is “reading, understanding and contemplating texts” (Flick, 2013). The ability to deal with large amounts of data puts the researcher under pressure to focus on volume rather than depth and understanding (St. John and Johnson, 2000). The use of a computer program requires the researcher to invest money and time in acquiring and learning how to use it (St. John and Johnson, 2000). For novice researchers, the use of software limits the opportunity to fully understand the data analysis process. An understanding of the manual process enables a better understanding of the computerised process (Webb, 1999).

#### **4.9 Grounded theory and Social Constructivism**

I chose grounded theory to analyse the data that I collected in the study. Grounded theory is a popular qualitative philosophy that was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is the most popular method of analysing qualitative data (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2014). It advocates the case for data preceding theory and

that theory emerges from the data that has been systematically gathered and analysed through the research process (Birks and Mills, 2015; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory proponents came about during the “qualitative revolution” in defence of qualitative research against the view that quantitative research “provided the only form of systematic social enquiry” (Birks and Mills, 2015; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Grounded theory methods provide systematic guidelines for the collection and analysis of data which is then used to build theoretical frameworks to explain the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The method of data collection is not prescriptive and any data collection technique can be used to gather data for analysis (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Qualitative interviewing is however best suited for grounded theory analysis (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2014). One of the basic principles of grounded theory, as advocated by [www.mneducation.co.uk/openup/chapters](http://www.mneducation.co.uk/openup/chapters) is that there should be categories of meaning that are derived from data. These categories arise from the data analysis and are not pre-defined on the basis of theory. The categories are identified through a process known as “coding”. Initial or open coding is the first step in the data analysis and it enables the identification of important or key words from the raw data that are then categorised (Birks and Mills, 2015; Collis and Hussey, 2005). This is the first and basic level of coding. Axial coding connects categories and sub-categories at a more conceptual level than open coding and finally selective coding selects a core category and links it to other categories. The three levels of coding are done simultaneously (Collis and Hussey, 2009). The process of data analysis continues until the categories are saturated, that is, no new categories emerge and new data being analysed fits into existing categories.

A fundamental step in the grounded theory research design is concurrent data collection and analysis. This requires the researcher to use an initial purposive sample to generate data, which is then coded before further data is collected. During the analysis process, there is constant comparison of “incident to incident, incident to code, code to code, code to categories and categories to categories” (Birks and Mills, 2015:11). This step is what makes grounded theory, grounded theory (Birks and Mills, 2015). The researcher moves between data collection and analysis in an attempt “to ground the analysis in the data” ([www.mneducation.co.uk/openup/chapters](http://www.mneducation.co.uk/openup/chapters)).

Another step in the grounded theory design process is writing memos. The memos are a reflection of the researcher’s thoughts and feelings while undertaking a grounded theory study. The writing helps to build the grounded theory findings and is an important source in the process. In writing a memo, the researcher is able to think through the possible sources of information for the study. The concept of theoretical sensitivity acknowledges that researchers are affected by their level of understanding of themselves as well as their area of study. It also recognises that a researcher’s level of theoretical sensitivity is a reflection of what researchers have experienced and studied (Birks and Mills, 2015). In grounded theory, the level of theoretical sensitivity to analytical possibilities increases as the researcher becomes immersed in data.

In recent years, grounded theory has been remodelled and social constructivism has largely been responsible for this remodelling (Charmaz, 2003). The view of social constructionists is that knowledge is constructed rather than created and hence ontological issues are not considered. Social constructivism assumes multiple realities, recognises that a reality is created by both the viewer and the viewed and adopts an interpretive approach to meanings of what the subjects express (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). According to Charmaz (2003), a constructivist approach to grounded theory supports the study of people in their natural surroundings and encourages qualitative research to move away from positivism. The researcher supports this move by bringing about arguments that grounded theory strategies need not be rigid or prescriptive and focusing on meaning while using grounded theory furthers interpretative understanding. Grounded theory strategies can be adopted without leaning on the positivist views of earlier proponents of grounded theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and finally, grounded theory methods can be used with either quantitative or qualitative methods but tend to be favoured in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Furthermore, social constructivism in grounded theory acknowledges and accepts the constant interaction between the researcher and the researched. It also acknowledges the fact that the researcher is within the research situation and constructs data with the research participants. Social constructivism also acknowledges that any theory coming out of the research is an interpretation and depends on the researcher's view (Charmaz, 2007). For a study to qualify as a constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2007) advocates that certain conditions must be met. In the section below, I have explained how the study meets each of the requirements:

- Foundational assumptions
  - The study must assume multiple realities. The study acknowledged the existence of the multiple realities and that each participant's lived experience would differ from that of the others.
  - The study must assume mutual construction of data through interaction. The study created data from the information gathered from the participants through face-to-face interaction with them.
  - The study must assume that the researcher constructs categories. The researcher used the data to construct the categories that came out of the study. The process of creating the categories of analysis which I used is discussed further in the data analysis section.
  - The study must view representation of data as problematic, relativistic, situational and partial and the study should assume that the observer's values, priorities, positions and actions affect views.
- Objectives
  - The study must view generalisations as partial, conditional and situated in time, space, positions, actions and interactions. The data collected in this study was not generalised but limited to the participants' experiences at a point in time.
  - The study must aim for interpretive understanding of historically situated data.
  - The study must specify the range of variation.

- The study must aim to create theory that has credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. The theory that was created from the data in this study is credible, original, will resonate with readers and is useful. In the section that deals with rigour, I discuss how these elements were addressed.
- Implications for data analysis
  - The researcher must acknowledge subjectivities throughout data analysis.
  - The researcher must view co-constructed data as beginning the analytic direction. I interpreted the data and derived theories from it.
  - The researcher must engage in reflexivity throughout the research process. Throughout the research process, I kept a research diary and recorded my reflections in it. In the first chapter of the study, I positioned myself as a black, African female researcher and acknowledged my subjectivity in this study and continued to do so throughout.
  - The researcher must seek and (re)present the participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis. In analysing and reporting the data, I used the voices of the participants and, where necessary, quoted them verbatim to emphasise the issues raised which I thought to be pertinent.

From the above, it is clear that grounded theory was an appropriate methodology to be used for this study.

#### **4.10 The Data Transcribing, Analysis and Coding Processes**

After comparing the benefits of using software versus manual transcribing, I opted to transcribe the interviews manually from the cell phone recording. This enabled me to hear the interviews for a second time without distractions. It also provided me with the opportunity to become familiar with the data and to be able to immerse myself in it. Manual transcribing also abled me to analyse the data without getting lost as to where to find information from the participants. I didn't have the time to start learning how to use the software package. After discussion with my supervisor, and with her encouragement, I decided to take advantage of the opportunity to fully understand the data analysis process and to analyse the data manually (Webb, 1999).

I tried to transcribe the interviews as soon as possible after they were conducted. Sometimes this was not possible, especially with the interview that ended late in the evening as well as the ones in Zimbabwe, which were back to back. The process of transcribing took 7 minutes for every minute of recorded time. Some of the interviews took a week to transcribe as they lasted well over two hours and I could not complete the transcribing in one sitting. During the first round of transcribing, I would make comments on the recording sheet of any quotations and insights from the participants which I felt would be important to use as either verbatim quotes or themes. I also used the first transcribing process to cross-reference anything that was common or contradictory to what had been said by another participant as well as comments on the issues that were aligned or contrary to the findings from the literature review.

It took transcribing two interviews to get into a style that worked for me. The first attempt was with the pilot interview when I used earphones to listen to the recording and was typing directly onto the laptop. I thought

that was tedious and so tried handwriting the interviews as I listened to them. I write faster than I type and so I thought it would speed up the process. One day I noticed that the executive assistants at work used headphones to transcribe meetings and that they would listen, stop the recording, type and then continue in that sequence. I decided to try the headphones and found that they were not as uncomfortable, they were clearer and created a better experience, and I adopted the sequence that was used by the secretaries. Once the process of transcribing was completed, a coding framework was developed. The following steps were carried out to analyse and code the data:

- The transcripts were marked 1 to 12 for South Africa and 1 to 6 for Zimbabwe. A different colour ink was used for each transcript.
- The research questions and objectives were used to create a spreadsheet to organise the data and re-organised the interview questions to align with the research objectives. An Excel spreadsheet was used to record the major points from each participant and to be able to compare the information from the different participants at a glance.
- Once the spreadsheet was populated, I identified the first level of themes that emerged from the data and started the first level of the coding process.
- I coded the findings into categories from which I would identify the themes that emerged from the data.
- Once I had completed the first level of coding and categorising, I struggled to wrap my mind around the process which then would have enabled me to identify the related themes and sub-themes. I discussed the mental block with my supervisor, who then suggested that I identify the main story that came out of each research objective and the themes that emerged from it.
- I then started identifying the themes by studying each group of questions to see what “story” came out of it and what theme(s) I could give to each one. I used an Excel spreadsheet to identify the story being told by each of the consolidated answers.
- I created a separate Word document that used the research objectives and main research question as the headings and subheadings, respectively. I copied and pasted each of the participants’ responses under each objective.
- I was then able to identify themes from the stories and under each theme, I was able to identify the stories that “spoke” to it. The different ink colours enabled me to track who had said what. I identified the themes and sub-themes under each objective and used what I thought to be the most powerful statements to substantiate my overall conclusions about the results under each theme.
- After completing the analysis for the first research objective, I sent the spreadsheet together with the differently coloured transcripts and the draft write-up to my supervisor. She reviewed the interview transcripts and Excel spreadsheet and made a note of the themes that emerged. We then compared her findings to my write-up and made suggestions of any themes that I may have omitted or failed to recognise as they emerged. She also interrogated the quotes that I used to substantiate my findings and ensured that the quote used did indeed speak to the findings.

- We synthesised the data for each research objective in the same manner. This process of reviewing the transcriptions of each participant, identifying the main theme and the related sub-themes that emerged and then sharing them and discussing the findings with my supervisor continued until all the research questions had been covered.
- During this process, we also identified the questions which, although they appeared in the interview guide that I had adapted, the participants had not responded to in the context of the study and the data from those questions was dropped. Once the data analysis process for South Africa was completed, I repeated the same process for Zimbabwe.
- Once I had completed the process of categorising the interview questions under the research objectives and inserted each participant's colour-coded responses, I was able to identify any gaps, especially among the questions posed to the participants who were interviewed earlier in the process.
- I listened to the recorded interviews once again and, where necessary, contacted the participants with the follow up and any additional questions that I may have omitted with the earlier participants. I gave each participant a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality (Berg, 1998; Svensson, 2014; Quinney et al, 2016) and did not refer to the specific companies for which they had worked in the report.

Once the process of identifying themes under each research objective was completed, I started the process of documenting the findings that emerged from the data analysis. The literature review process was ongoing through the data analysis process. With each theme that emerged, I revisited the literature review and compared and contrasted my findings to previous research. The data that emerged also guided me to the gaps in my initial literature review and I went back to read up on the themes that emerged but had been previously omitted.

#### **4.11 Strategies to Ensure Rigour**

One of the criticisms of qualitative research relates to reliability and validity particularly among those of a positivist persuasion (Mays and Pope, 1995; Morse et al, 2002; Shenton, 2004). It has been argued that qualitative research is subject to the researcher's bias and lacks reproducibility in that a researcher doing the same research may have totally different research and the final criticism is the lack of generalisability (Mays and Pope, 1995).

The rigour of the research process is important to establish the trustworthiness of the results of a study and needs to be built into the research design, collection of data, interpretation and communication of results (Mays and Pope, 1995). Trustworthiness is to qualitative research what validity is to quantitative methods. An essential issue when discussing the trustworthiness of the findings of qualitative research is the presumption that a text has multiple meanings and some level of interpretation is required when approaching a text (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). The concepts of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability have been advanced as being necessary to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Loh, 2013; Morse et al, 2002; Shenton, 2004). These aspects of

trustworthiness are intertwined and it is important that they be built into the research process so that the outcome is trustworthy findings whose quality can be trusted generalisability (Mays and Pope, 1995).

#### **4.11.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the focus of the research and the extent to which the data and the analysis process address the required focus (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). This involves the decisions around selection of participants. The choice of participants with different backgrounds and experiences adds to the richness and depth of the data around the phenomenon being studied. Selecting the most appropriate data collection method and the right size of the sample are also important for establishing credibility of the findings (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Shenton, 2004).

Credibility of research findings requires that the most suitable meaning unit be selected. The meaning unit is the grouping of words or statements related to the same central meaning or theme (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). Credibility also refers to the extent that the themes and categories cover data and ensuring that relevant data is not omitted (deliberately or in error) and that irrelevant data is omitted. Credibility is enhanced by the use of direct quotes from the transcribed interviews, data triangulation, which is discussed in an earlier section, and the researcher's disclosure of personal and intellectual biases (Johnson and Waterfield, 2004; Shenton, 2004). The issue of reflexivity is discussed in a later section.

##### **4.11.1.1 Data Triangulation**

Data triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data (Berg, 1998; Collis and Hussey, 2009; Ghauri and Grøhaug, 2005), different research methods for the same study and more than one researcher to investigate the same phenomenon for a study. It helps to reduce bias and enhance reliability and validity if the different methods or researchers arrive at the same conclusions.

When I first conceptualised the study, my intention was to use multiple sources of data in order to triangulate the data. At the time, I deemed the use of different research methods as well as having more than one researcher to be impractical. During the course of transcribing and writing up the findings, I realised that most of my participants (especially those in South Africa) had not reached levels in their organisations that enabled them to be profiled or there to be media articles about them. For the participants who were at executive level, in addition to the face-to-face interviews, I used secondary data in the form of annual reports, official press releases from companies, biographical reports from company websites (where available) to corroborate the findings from the interviews. I also made use of company websites to confirm the organisations and positions with which the women leaders were associated.

In this study, I ensured credibility in the following ways: The participants came from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and this added to the required depth and richness of the data around the intersectionality of race, gender and class in corporations. Using participants who were in different countries and who had worked in different industries further contributed to the study's credibility. The data collection strategy of semi-structured interviews enabled me as the researcher and the researched to focus on getting answers to the

questions that were identified as being necessary to answer the research question but gave enough scope for further questioning outside of the script. The use of direct quotes to support the themes that emerged also ensured that the credibility of the study could withstand scrutiny.

#### **4.11.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to “the extent to which findings can be transferred to other settings or groups” (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). It is important to note that this is different from generalisation of quantitative research findings. The researcher uses his or her judgement to establish whether or not findings are transferable. Transferability depends on the extent to which “a clear and distinct description of culture and context, selection and characteristics of participants, data collection and process” can be established (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004:110). The use of direct quotes accompanied by rich and in-depth presentations enhances the transferability of findings.

##### **4.11.2.1 Thick Description**

“Thick description” is one of the most important concepts in qualitative research. It enables the researcher to provide contextual detail when observing and interpreting social meaning and goes beyond the surface appearances by providing as much detail as possible (Dawson, 2012 ; Svensson, 2014). It is in contrast to thin description, which is merely a superficial account that does not take into consideration underlying meanings of cultural contexts and groups (Ponterotto, 2006; Svensson, 2014). It involves understanding a current setting and behaviour and how the behaviour affects a future event. Thick description requires the qualitative researcher to provide interpretations of data that are “richly and thickly described” in order for the interpretations to have credibility (Ponterotto, 2006). Thick description provides details of context, sights, feelings and experiences (Dawson, 2012; Ponterotto, 2006). “In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (Ponterotto, 2006). The following are key components of thick description:

- It involves accurately describing and interpreting social actions within the appropriate context in which the social action took place (Dawson, 2012; Ponterotto, 2006).
- It captures the thoughts, emotions and web of social interaction among observed participants in their operating space (Dawson, 2012; Ponterotto (2006).
- A central feature to interpreting social actions entails assigning motivations and intentions for the said social actions (Ponterotto, 2006).
- The context for, and the specifics of, the social action are so well described that the reader experiences a sense of verisimilitude as they read the researcher’s account (Ponterotto, 2006).
- Thick description of social actions promotes thick interpretation of these actions which lead to thick meaning of the findings that resonate with readers (Ponterotto, 2006).

In my study I made use of thick description to enhance the credibility of the study and to ensure that the readers could “experience” the interviews with participants. In chapter 5, I provide detailed descriptions of the participants without compromising their anonymity and ensure that factors such as the type and locations of companies that they worked for, location and length of interviews as well as my and the participants’ reactions to interviews are described in full detail. In the results, I use thick description to express the voices of the participants as well as direct quotes to express relevant issues in their own words. Where I have quoted the participants in the study, I have indented the quotations and drawn attention to the fact that those are the exact words of the participant and I have identified the participant by the pseudonym given. Finally, in the discussion section, I use thick description to ensure that readers are able to make the link between the experiences of the women in the study and my interpretations of their experiences

#### **4.11.3 Dependability**

Dependability is another aspect of trustworthiness which “seeks means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced changes” (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). This takes into account the extent to which data changes over time and changes made in the researcher’s decisions during the data analysis process (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). The time taken to collect data can lead to data inconsistency and a balance needs to be maintained between questioning the same areas for all participants and the fact that the data collection process is an evolving one in which questions can change as researchers gain new insights into phenomena of study (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). The data was collected over a period of four months. Dependability is enhanced by triangulation, which was discussed in an earlier paragraph.

#### **4.11.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the final report (findings, interpretations and conclusions) are supported by the data that has been gathered (Loh, 2013). The process of synthesising the data and cross-referencing it with my supervisor ensured that the final report was extensively supported by the data that was collected.

Techniques to assist qualitative researchers in achieving trustworthiness are available and how I employed these techniques in the study is listed in [Table 13](#) on page 137.

#### **4.11.5 Reflexivity and Bracketing**

The process of data collection in a phenomenological study is a reflective one that is aimed at getting the insights of participants on their lived experiences (Quinney et al, 2016). One of the challenges in qualitative research is the issue of subjectivity in the data collection process. The continuous interaction of the researcher with the research subjects brings about the threat of projecting the researcher’s own biases, incorporating contemporary cultural prejudices and writing unintended autobiographies (Mruck and Breuer, 2003).

Table 13: Trustworthiness criteria and techniques to establish them. Adapted from Loh (2013)

Criteria	Techniques
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged engagement (Each interview lasted for at least an hour (although some went beyond two hours.) Where necessary, after the transcribing process, I followed up with the participants.</li> <li>• Persistent observation (of the researcher and the researched)</li> <li>• Triangulation (of searching alternative sources of data for information on the participant). The process of triangulation and its limitations are described earlier in the chapter.</li> <li>• Peer debriefing (I discussed the interviews with my supervisor as soon as possible after the interviews had taken place)</li> <li>• Negative case analysis</li> <li>• Referential adequacy (archiving of data)</li> <li>• Member checks</li> </ul>
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thick description (I provided as much detail of the interviews and findings as possible to enable the reader to imagine being part of the process. This included body language, expressions and any physical actions such as clapping or banging a fist that the participants may have done.)</li> </ul>
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triangulation (as discussed above)</li> <li>• Dependability audit - examining the process of the inquiry (The interviews were audio-recorded and the recordings will be kept until the final report has been examined.)</li> </ul>
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmability audit - examines the product to attest that the findings, interpretations and recommendations are supported by data. I reviewed the data that emerged to identify any possible contradictions and, where necessary, I contacted the participant to clarify or confirm the record of the interview.</li> </ul>
All 4 criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflexive journal – about self and method (I kept a research journal that recorded my journey throughout the study. I recorded my thoughts, feelings and experiences about the research process and was open about my biases in the research.)</li> </ul>

“Reflexivity is the thinking activity that helps us to identify the potential influence throughout the research process” (Chan et al, 2013:3). This implies that the researcher understands being part of the social world that they are investigating and there is a need for a continuous, internal dialogue with self that keeps asking how the researcher knows what the researcher knows (Berg, 1998; Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Johnson and Waterfield, 2004; McDermid et al, 2014).

Bracketing addresses, the issue of researcher bias. It is an acknowledged fact that in qualitative research, the researcher cannot be totally objective (Chan et al, 2013; Shenton, 2004). Bracketing enables the researcher to contain their own experiences so that the participants’ understanding of phenomenon is not unduly influenced (Chan et al, 2013; Finefter- Rosenbluh, 2017) and thus trustworthiness of data can be achieved. There are, however, no set methods of undertaking bracketing (Chan et al, 2013). Prior knowledge about a topic can hinder the process of researching thoroughly and hence it is important that bracketing strategies be employed throughout the research process (Chan et al, 2013). It involves an honest introspection of values and attitudes and identifying areas of potential bias that can affect the research process. A research diary is one of the bracketing strategies that can be used to contain the researcher’s biases in the research process and the researcher can use it to record their “thoughts, feelings and experiences” (Chan et al, 2013).

There are four strategies that are advocated by Chan et al (2013) for use in bracketing:

- Strategy for mental preparedness: This speaks to the researcher's mental readiness to use a research paradigm that requires putting aside their point of view throughout the research process and being curious about what the research results will yield.
- Strategy for deciding on the scope of the literature review: The strategy for doing the literature review relates to doing the groundwork literature review but ensures that it does not affect preconceptions about the study. The scope of the literature review must be such that it is sufficient to meet the requirements of the researcher's study institution but still leaves room for curiosity about the research findings.
- Strategy for planning data collection: The aim of the interviews in phenomenological research is get a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. The manner in which the research questions are posed by the researcher will affect how participants respond. The interview questions should not be leading, but rather focusing and enable the researcher to maintain their curiosity about what is being asked. The questions need to be developed around the research aims.
- Strategy for planning data analysis: The data collection process strategy concerns those processes which will enhance trustworthiness. It is important to acknowledge that data analysis can be influenced by the researcher's own interpretations and thus mar the trustworthiness of the data.

I kept a research diary from the onset of the research process. It enabled me to "vent" about the issues that I had been encountering through the literature review process. I processed some of the emotions about my previous experiences in the workplace, such as sexual harassment, in the diary in an effort not to project my experiences and emotions on the participants of this study. The diary was especially important during the data collection and analysis processes. The journal entries included my thoughts and feelings about the emerging data and themes. In order to manage potential subjectivity, the supervisory meetings during the data collection and analysis period included an interrogation of my emergent interpretations and potential bias around the same (Finefter- Rosenbluh, 2017; Shenton, 2004).

After collecting the data for the first interview and the subsequent transcription of the same, I had a meeting with my supervisor in which we discussed the entire process of collection, transcribing and analysing the data. The meeting also served as a venting and counselling session as I mentally processed the interview and the data that came out of it. The meeting also helped to prepare me mentally for the rest of the meetings and the possibility that they would be as emotionally and mentally draining as was the first.

#### **4.11.6 Ethical considerations**

The researcher has ethical obligations to the institution they represent, the research participants, society as a whole and themselves (Berg, 1998). As soon as the methodology for this study was approved by the colloquium, I sought clearance from the SBL Research Ethics Committee to proceed with fieldwork. The clearance certificate is in Appendix 1.

The other issues related to ethics that needed to be considered included privacy, confidentiality of data, physical safety and consent (Berg, 1998). I started by seeking the informed consent of the identified participants to take part in the study (Shenton, 2004). The participants were told upfront that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. The participants were requested to sign the informed consent form before the first interview commenced (Shenton, 2004). The names, organisations and positions of the participants were not disclosed at any stage of the research process. Each participant was identified by a pseudonym (Berg, 1998; Quinney et al, 2016). I ensured that the interviews were conducted in safe environments and that there was no risk of physical harm to the participants. Integrity in research is vital (Cooper and Schindler, 2003) and I have made every effort to report on the findings as accurately as possible. I also ensured that the highest possible standards of integrity and professionalism were maintained throughout the research process.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the research methodology that was used in the study. I began with a summary of the research process and discussed the research design and the research paradigm, comparing briefly the differences between qualitative and quantitative research. I described the two types of research methodologies and went into more detail on the different types of qualitative research methods, especially grounded theory which was the chosen methodology for the study. In this chapter, I discussed, inter alia, the issue of thick description and data triangulations, the population, sampling strategy and the sample size for the study. I went on to discuss the data collection method strategy and the methodological challenges associated with it. The data analysis process as well as strategies to ensure rigour in the study and how they were employed was covered. The chapter ends with the ethical considerations that I took into account when carrying out the fieldwork and reporting on the findings. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of the study, which are discussed by drawing on existing literature. The discussion will explore and expand on the major themes that emerged from the study and comparisons are made between South Africa and Zimbabwe. A holistic theoretical framework that is aimed at assisting women in navigating the career labyrinth is presented.

Initially the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do gender, race and class simultaneously impact the career experiences and career progress of women?
2. How do organisations authorise or fail to authorise women in leadership positions?
3. How do women self-authorise and authorise one another?
4. How do personal and internal factors influence the career journeys of women leaders?
5. How do systemic and/or organisational factors impact the career experiences of women leaders?

In the end, question 3 was consolidated into question 2 which dealt with authorisation issues and was expanded to include the dynamics of women in authorising and de-authorising each other. The findings for each research objective are discussed with the results for South Africa presented first, followed by those for Zimbabwe. A comparison of the data from the two countries is then made. First, however, and to put the findings in context, I present an overview of the participants' profiles (see [Table 14](#) for South Africa and [Table 15](#) for Zimbabwe). To protect the identities of the participants, pseudonyms are used.

### 5.2. Profile and overview of participants in South Africa

The profiles of the participants in South Africa are tabulated in [Table 14](#) below. In South Africa, a total of twelve women leaders were interviewed, with at least two from each race group. It was relatively easy to get appointments with the women in senior and executive management positions. Getting appointments with women in middle management was not so easy and this could be a reflection of the fact that they sit at a level of management where their time is monitored. Hence, while the study was initially intended to focus on women in middle management as well, their unavailability ended up limiting the participants to those in senior and executive positions.

Table 14: Profile of Participants in South Africa

Pseudo - Name	Race and Ethnicity	Age	Current Position	Current Industry	Highest Qual.	Additional information
'Zinzi'	African Zulu	33	Performance coach	Financial	Matric	Worked for the same organisation since leaving school. She grew up in Umlazi township in Durban, raised by her aunt and uncle, whom she refers to as her parents. Zinzi grew up in a Christian home. Her biological father died when she was young and she was the youngest of four girls. She categorised her childhood social class as poor and currently as middle class. She went to a predominantly Indian school in an Indian township and it was there that she was exposed to other possibilities in life. Her parents ran a construction business. At the time of the study, she had been in a junior management position for three years and currently studying towards her Bachelors' degree. There were no alternative sources of professional information about this participant.
'Nthabiseng'	African Tswana	33	CEO	Media and Brand	Bachelors	Worked for several different brand and media organisations. She grew up between Soweto and the northern parts of Johannesburg. She was raised by her mother, who was a social worker, after her father died. She went to a mixed-race private Catholic school and was raised in a Christian home. She was the eldest of two sisters. She categorised her childhood background as lower-middle class and saw herself currently as middle class. Nthabiseng had been CEO of her own business for four years. The company profile of this participant confirmed that she was the managing director.
'Thembi'	African	46	Head of communications	Steel manufacturing	bachelor's degree	Worked in the pharmaceutical, Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and steel industries. She was born in Swaziland to a Zulu mother and a Swazi father but considered herself Zulu. She was the youngest and only daughter in a family of four siblings. She was raised by her mother as her father had a second wife and was absent. She grew up in a strong Christian home and went to private schools. She categorised her childhood social class as "privileged" but now considered herself as working class (as she had worked for everything that she had). Her father was a High Court Judge and her mother was a matron at a girls' high school. She had been in leadership for 20 years. Her current employer's website and annual reports confirmed that she was the head of public affairs and communications.
'Thandeka'	African Shangaan	38	head of integrated marketing communications	professional service organisation	Master's degree	Worked in academia, media, and telecommunications and energy organisations. She grew up in a shack in Soweto but was private school educated in the northern parts of Johannesburg. She was raised by both parents and was the youngest of five girls. She categorised her childhood social class as having gone from rich to poor but now self-categorised as middle class. Her father was a famous actor/playwright and her mother sold <i>vetkoeks</i> (a fried doughy ball often filled with savoury fillings), cool drinks etc. She had been in leadership for 11 years. She was featured in an article on Women: Gender Diversity and Equality, in Who's Who SA and had been quoted in various media articles for the companies for which she worked.

Pseudo - Name	Race and Ethnicity	Age	Current Position	Current Industry	Highest Qual.	Additional information
'Lerato'	African Sotho	32	CEO	Financial Services	Chartered Accountant	Served articles and then worked for various financial institutions in investment banking. Grew up in Soweto and then moved to a suburb and attended former model C schools. She was the eldest of two children and her parents were divorced. She categorised her childhood social class as lower-middle class and now considered herself as middle class. Her mother was a psychologist and her father a lawyer. She had been running her own business for 3½ years. She had been nominated as a finalist in various professional awards and her company website confirmed that she was the CEO.
'Beryl'	Coloured English-Speaker	46	CEO	Consulting	Masters	Had academic, telecommunications and banking experience. She was Muslim and was raised by her father and stepmother (her biological mother died when she was 4) in a Coloured-only community. She had three sisters and went to a government Coloured-only school. She categorised her childhood social class as working class and considered herself as currently middle class. Her parents were blue collar workers. She was in management for 12 years before starting her own business. There were no alternative sources of professional information about this participant.
'Annelese'	Coloured English-speaker	44	Procurement executive	Financial Services	Bachelor's degree	Working experience was in energy, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications and the financial services sector. She was raised initially by her maternal grandparents in a strong Catholic home, and then by her mother and stepfather. She had a younger brother and stepsiblings. She went to a mixed-race private school as well as a school for Coloured children. She was raised in a Coloured-only community. She categorised her childhood social class as lower-middle class and currently as middle class. Her mother was a nurse turned teacher. Her stepfather was a music lecturer and then a subject advisor at a teachers' college. She had been in management for 20 years. The participant had been featured in various supply chain management articles and her current position was confirmed in these articles. She had been the recipient of various professional awards.
'Melody'	Coloured English – Speaker	40	Senior Human Resources Partner	Financial Services	Bachelor	Her experience was in insurance, FMCG, telecommunications and the financial services sector. She was raised by both parents and had two siblings. She lived in a Coloured-only community and went to a Coloured-only school. She categorised her childhood social class as poor of the poor and currently as middle class. Her father was a panel beater and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. She had been in management for ten years. There were no alternative sources of professional information about this participant.
'Noor'	Indian	40	CEO	Consulting	Chartered Accountant	Served articles and then worked for a telecommunications company before leaving to start her own business. She was Muslim and was raised by both parents in an Indian township in the south of Johannesburg. She had two sisters and a brother and was educated in an Indian government school. She was raised in a middle class home and considered herself to still be middle class. Her father ran his own business and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. She was in management for 12 years before starting her own business. There were no alternative sources of professional information about this participant.

Pseudo - Name	Race and Ethnicity	Age	Current Position	Current Industry	Highest Qual.	Additional information
'Zeenet'	Indian	39	Executive: Sales, Strategy and Risk	Information Technology	Project Management Intern. Certificate	She started working straight after matric and worked in the financial services, telecommunications and IT sectors. She was Muslim and was raised by both parents initially in rural KwaZulu-Natal and then in Johannesburg. She had four sisters and was educated in a model C school in an Indian community. She categorised her childhood as poor and now considered herself to be middle class. Her father was a blue-collar worker in a printing business and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. She had been in management for ten years. There were no alternative sources of professional information about this participant.
'Joanne'	White -Afrikaans	44	General Manager	Information Communication and Technology	Bachelors	Her experience was in steel manufacturing and telecommunications. She was raised by both parents and was the youngest of five children. Her early childhood years were in Mthatha, after which the family moved to Pretoria. She attended single-race Afrikaans-speaking schools. She categorised her early childhood as lower-middle class and her current social class as middle class. Her father was a missionary turned academic and her mother was a teacher. She had been in management for 15 years. There were no alternative sources of professional information about this participant.
'Deborah'	White - English	47	Head of Sales and Business Development	Information Communication Technology	Chartered Accountant/Chartered Marketer	She served articles of clerkship and had experience in telecommunications and ICT. She was raised by both parents and was the oldest of three girls. She attended whites-only model C schools. She categorised her early childhood as working class and her current social class as middle class. Her father was a miner and her mother was a teacher. She had been in management for 18 years. This participant had been featured in Who's Who SA and previous positions in the telecommunications company were confirmed.

**South African Participants:** The participants sat at different levels in the organisational hierarchies and came from a diverse range of industries. Zinzi was in junior management. Joanne and Melody reported to managers that sat on Exco (although Joanne had acted as an executive of sales reporting directly to the CEO of her organisation). The remaining nine women were either chief executive officers of their own businesses or were members of the Exco in their respective organisations.

The average age of the participants was 40. Four of the twelve participants ran their own businesses. They had, however, worked in corporate organisations before setting up their businesses and were thus able to share their experiences in those employer organisations. I had worked with seven of the women and found it interesting that they had all experienced the organisation we worked for differently. What was even more interesting was that Beryl and Zeenet had both reported to a white woman, who also participated in the research, and their experience of her as a leader was very different.

As can be seen from [Table 15](#) above, the participants came from different social class backgrounds ranging from “poorest of the poor” to privileged. The women leaders also came from different family structures and this too had an impact on their life trajectories and career experiences. Another factor that affected the women leaders’ experiences at work was the age at which they started mixing with other races. The impact of the childhood social class, family structure and dynamics and early interracial interaction on career progression is discussed later in the chapter.

**Overview of participants:** In Zimbabwe, I interviewed a total of six women leaders with at least one from each race group. Three of the participants were African women. The average age of the women was 50. All the women were at executive level in their organisations, with three of them holding the position of head of their respective institutions. As with South Africa, it was difficult to find women in lower levels of management that were available during working hours. It was extremely difficult to get white women in corporates and when I mentioned this to one of the CEOs that I met, she indicated that most of the white women worked in family businesses. This statement was confirmed by the fact that the two white women that I contacted held senior positions in family-owned businesses and I managed to get one of them to be a participant in this study.

### 5.3. Profile and Overview of Participants in Zimbabwe

The profiles of the participants in Zimbabwe are given in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Profile of participants in Zimbabwe

Pseudo - Name	Race and Ethnicity	Age	Current Position	Current Industry	Highest Qual.	Additional information
<b>“Sithabile”</b>	African Ndebele	44	Managing Director	Health Insurance	Completing Masters	She had been the head of the organisation for six years. She had been a teacher and had also worked in professional services, mining, IT and actuarial services. She was originally from Bulawayo but worked in Harare. She went to mission boarding schools. She was raised by both parents and was the fourth born in a family of six. She categorised her childhood social class as middle class and now self-categorised as upper-middle class. Her father was a teacher and her mother a nurse. She had more 15 years in leadership positions. Her current position was confirmed on the company’s website as well as in press statements.
<b>Rutendo</b>	African Shona	49	Marketing Director	Transportation	Masters in Bus. Admin.	She had worked for the same employer, state-owned entity all her working life. She was originally from Masvingo but worked in Bulawayo. She went to a Catholic boarding school and spent school holidays at the family farm. Her father died while she was young and she was raised by her mother, who was a farmer. She was the third born in a family of six. She categorised her childhood social class as lower-middle class and now considered herself as middle class. She had been leading people for more than ten years.
<b>Siphwe</b>	African Ndebele	52	Managing Director	Financial Services	Masters in Bus. Leadership	She had worked in hospitality, telecommunications and financial services. She had more than 20 years’ experience in leading and managing people. She was raised in Bulawayo and worked in Harare. She came from a family of six. She was raised in a middle class home and considered herself still to be middle class. Her father was a train driver and inspector and her mother worked at the City Council. Her current and previous positions were confirmed on the websites of the companies. She had been the recipient of various awards.
<b>Viola</b>	Coloured	54	Group Merchandise Director	Textile	Bachelors	She was born in South Africa to a white father and Coloured mother. Her father was a civil servant and her mother a housewife. She grew up in Bulawayo and went to a private girls’ school. She categorised her childhood social class as lower-middle class and currently as upper middle class. She had worked in the fashion industry, for the same employer, all her life. She had 25 years’ management experience. Her position was confirmed on the company’s website.
<b>Beena</b>	Indian	54	Managing Director	Distribution and Logistics	Professional Accounting Qualification	She had worked in the timber manufacturing, pharmaceutical, retail, FMCG and distribution and logistics industries. Her parents were teachers and she considered them middle class and herself above middle class. She was the youngest of four girls and grew up in a Hindu and Christian home. She had held leadership positions for 16 years. There were no alternative sources of professional information about this participant.
<b>Sandra</b>	White	45	Director-Sales and Marketing	Textile	Bachelors	She was raised by her father and stepmother. Her father was a teacher and her stepmother was the managing director of the business. Her highest level of education was a bachelor’s degree. Her family had money but was not flashy and spent on charitable causes. She categorised herself as middle class. Various media articles confirmed her position for the company for which she worked.

Although in my proposal I had indicated that I would only interview Harare-based participants who worked in corporates, I ended up interviewing women who were based in Bulawayo as well as a woman leader who worked in the public sector. It was, after all, more important to get information from a range of women leaders irrespective of their location. I expected ethnicity to play a big role in the findings and I was pleased that I could interview a Bulawayo based Shona-speaking woman and two Harare-based Ndebele women. In Zimbabwe, Ndebele speakers hail from Matabeleland and Bulawayo is the biggest city there, while the capital city of Harare is in Mashonaland with Shona-speaking people in the majority.

For an overall picture of the findings, the themes and subthemes for the two countries are presented in Table 16 below:

Table 16: Summary of main themes and sub-themes

Main theme: Women's career journeys are a racialized and classed hurdles race.	Main theme: The impact of race and class on the career journeys of women is less pronounced.
<b>Sub-themes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race still matters in corporate South Africa</li> <li>• Black women: The Cinderellas of Corporate South Africa</li> <li>• Class: A mediator for middle class African, Coloured and Indian women</li> <li>• Gender: a common denominator for all women</li> <li>• We're not sisters at work: the complicity of other women</li> <li>• Sexual harassment: a taboo in corporate South Africa</li> </ul>	<b>Sub-themes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race still matters in Zimbabwe (depending on where you are)</li> <li>• Gender is a common denominator for all women</li> <li>• We're not sisters at work, the complicity of other women</li> <li>• Sexual harassment: a taboo in corporate Zimbabwe</li> </ul>
<b>Authorisation subthemes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorisation by organisations</li> <li>• Self- authorisation : a function of childhood experiences</li> <li>• Authorisation and de-authorisation in the workplace: an intersection of gender, race and age</li> <li>• Self-confidence and authorisation: an emotional roller-coaster</li> </ul>	<b>Authorisation subthemes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorisation by organisations</li> <li>• Self- authorisation : a function of childhood experiences</li> <li>• Authorisation and de-authorisation in the workplace: an intersection of gender, race and age</li> <li>• Self-confidence and authorisation: an emotional roller-coaster</li> </ul>
<b>Internal influences subthemes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood experiences</li> <li>• Navigating the workplace</li> <li>• Relationships in the workplace</li> </ul>	<b>Internal influences subthemes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood experiences</li> <li>• Navigating the workplace</li> <li>• Relationships in the workplace</li> </ul>
<b>Systemic influences subthemes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The written stuff</li> <li>• Training and development</li> <li>• Alliances and cliques</li> <li>• Gender politics of male leaders and colleagues</li> </ul>	<b>Systemic influences subthemes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The written stuff</li> <li>• Training and development</li> <li>• Informal conversations</li> </ul>

In the next section, the results for South Africa and Zimbabwe are discussed under each objective.

#### 5.4. Research Objective 1

*“To investigate how the intersections of gender, race and class have contributed to the career experiences of women in leadership positions in corporates in South Africa and Zimbabwe”*

##### 5.4.1 Findings in South Africa

The main objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which the intersections of gender, race and class impact on the career experiences of women leaders in corporates. The study found that the three social categories do indeed have an impact on the career progression of women. Race closely followed by class emerged as key influences on both the career starting points and career journeys of women leaders. This result is consistent with Dlamini’s (2013) findings. Specifically, Dlamini (2013) found that race had the biggest impact, followed by gender, with class overlying both gender and race. As Dlamini (2013:54) puts it, “Lower class, black females had a longer and harder career journey”. The main theme from the current study is: Women leaders’ career journeys are a racialised and classed hurdles race. The following sub-themes emerged:

- Race still matters in corporate South Africa
- Black women: The Cinderella’s of corporate South Africa
- Class: A mediator for middle class African, Coloured and Indian women
- Gender: A common denominator for all women
- We’re not sisters at work: The complicity of other women
- Sexual harassment: a taboo in corporate South Africa.

##### **Main theme: Women leaders’ career journeys are a racialised and classed hurdles race**

Overall, in South Africa, the data shows that the impact of the intersections of gender, race and class was most pronounced amongst working class women from the African, Coloured and Indian groups. For middle class and upper class women from these racial groups, class mediated their career experiences. For them, the intersection of gender and race had the most influence. White women, regardless of class, only experienced the impact of gender in their career journeys and did not feel the effects of social class on their career choices and opportunities. This was consistent with Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike (2012) that white women have benefitted more from employment equity than African women despite the numbers of the former being lower in the economically active population.

Given the fact that white males hold the majority of senior and executive management positions in the private sector in South Africa, (CEE, 2017), it is plausible to consider that white men identify with white women and are thus more willing to create career opportunities for them. In the next section, the above result is unpacked and the themes that emerged from the data are discussed in detail. Figure 4 below depicts the career progression of women leaders in South Africa as running a hurdles race and renders vivid the different hurdles that women leaders of different races and classes have to jump in their career journeys.



Figure 4: Hurdles Race. © Ncube 2017

### Race still matters in corporate South Africa

In South Africa, race continues to be a serious issue and had the biggest impact on the career experiences of the women leaders. This is similar to Dlamini’s (2013) findings on South Africa still being “colonial in behaviour”. For the white participants, the starting point in their careers was ahead of those of other women

leaders, and the only hurdle they had to jump was the gender one. Their career journeys were quite similar in terms of workplace exposure and career progression despite their different childhood familial backgrounds.

Joanne grew up in a home where her parents were academics. She went to an Afrikaans-only school and later to university, knowing that she wanted to be an engineer. She was able to get a bursary from her second year of university. After university, she went to work for the company that had sponsored her studies and within a short space of time moved to a telecommunications company where she worked for close to 20 years. Deborah, on the other hand, grew up in a working class home and started working when she was in high school. Her mother was a teacher and her father a miner. She worked part time throughout university and realised from an early age that she would have to work hard to get what she wanted.

For the white participants, the childhood social class did not seem to be a hurdle in terms of career choices and options. Under the apartheid system, white people, regardless of social class, were afforded the exclusive privilege of attending schools that prepared them adequately to make informed career decisions (Green et al, 2009; Grubbs, 2008; Kendall, 2002; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Ratele and Laubscher, 2010). The schools offered aptitude tests and that enabled them to choose careers that were aligned with their abilities and interests (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012):

*“I did an aptitude test at Wits and I did extremely well in that. And they said well you need to be an Actuary and I said I’m not going to be an Actuary but I will be an Accountant ... and CA was it.”* Deborah

*“We did at school ... Aptitude tests. And out of there it said I could become an Engineer or I could become this or I could become that so I just read up on it. And I went on an engineering week, Tuks used to have this week where you could come and see what the engineers do”* Joanne

Once they got to university, they were also able to get bursaries as their parents were able to sign surety for them and they could access student loans and bursaries.

*“I had the ability to get a bank loan because my dad could sign surety whereas a lot of children coming through now can’t because their parents can’t stand surety because they are not in that earning category”* Deborah

*“I got bursaries so they [parents] didn’t pay for my studies at all. So from the day that I finished matric, I financially supported myself, completely independent”* Joanne

When Deborah and Joanne got into the workplace, the differences in their upbringing and family circumstances did not matter. The career race for the two white women leaders had relatively fewer

obstacles. They were both, by their own admission, given tremendous career exposure and opportunities to work on strategic organisation-wide projects.

*“I worked with quite the big visionaries at [name supplied], at that point in time [emphasised the words “at that point in time”]. They were on senior manager level, [names supplied] and they really knew where they wanted to take the organisation and how they wanted to get there. So I learnt a lot about understanding a business, how you define things, what is a system, how do you implement it ... I had very good exposure to working closely with people that had passion for the organisation and really growing”*

*Joanne*

*“I think the opportunities that I had at [name supplied] and I absolutely couldn’t question, I had amazing opportunities...”*

*Deborah*

The white participants echoed similar sentiments in terms of the opportunities that they got working for, incidentally, the same organisation. For one of the participants, this organisation was the second one she had worked for on completion of her university studies. For the other, it was the first one she had worked for after serving her articles of clerkship. They were not highly experienced when they joined the organisation but each spoke of having “good exposure” and “amazing opportunities” and each spent close to 20 years with that same organisation. The white participants attributed their success in the workplace to hard work. They did not see themselves as privileged and did not consider the workplace opportunities and exposure that they had as a manifestation of white privilege.

*“I think often as a white South Africa, you get seen as privileged and I didn’t come from a privileged background at all, in fact far from it. I worked hard, I paid my own way through varsity, I didn’t get scholarships, I didn’t go to fancy schools so for me, what I’ve done myself and I’ve worked hard for that so I think and that’s also shaped I think who I am because I do have empathy for people who have worked hard and I respect that hugely”*

*Deborah*

Deborah defined privilege according to what her family could and could not afford. It was lost on her that by being white, she was a beneficiary (whether she liked it or not) of a system that was designed to enable white people to access a good education and subsequent career and economic advantages that were denied to other races in South Africa (Green et al, 2009; Grubbs, 2008; Kendall, 2002; Ratele and Laubscher, 2010). The women leaders from African, Coloured and Indian backgrounds had different career experiences from those of their white counterparts and as a result, experienced the workplace and the journey to career success very differently. None of them spoke of being given career opportunities and exposure. If anything, all the African, Coloured and Indian women leaders had experienced issues related to their racial background in their career journeys. These issues included not being given the necessary exposure and experience in the

workplace (Noor and Lerato); having their competence and experience questioned when pitching for work as business owners (Nthabiseng); being asked to make tea (Thembi); sitting in meetings where people spoke in Afrikaans, a language she did not speak (Thembi), and for an executive-level Coloured female, being expected to make the professional relationship with a white male colleague work despite him being a bully (Annelese).

Race had a dominant influence on the dynamics that they faced. They did not get the same opportunities that were afforded their white colleagues, nor were they positioned to ensure that they were exposed to different facets of their chosen career paths (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012). They fought for, forced and used whatever means at their disposal to get the exposure and experience that they needed. They fought to be treated equally and found that the contribution and value that they brought to organisations were not welcome. As participants put it, in terms of getting exposure and experience:

*“there was obviously the white Afrikaner group and here was the white English-speaking ... So when the audit groups were created, you had dominance of either or, in each of the groups and when it came to new intake, they would obviously book their own on jobs and you would be left... I think for the first month of being there, I get nothing to do you know, then I was like I'm not, I'm still getting paid for this but it's not me to just sit here and do nothing. So I went to speak to them. They then seconded me into one of their service environments... So I went there and I got stuck for over a month again. I said clearly they had forgotten about me and they didn't care. You know, it's one of these two things then I said hey, I'm not getting any hours, I'm not getting any client experience. Eventually I said I can't do this and I said to them either you move me to another group or you give me some work. I think that's because they didn't expect me to say anything. I suppose they just expected me to go with the flow but eventually I got one small job to do and then I guess they liked what they saw and started booking me onto other jobs... But initially I suppose because of the colour of my skin or whatever it was”* Noor

And another:

*“I think it was always a challenge, you had to push to get the right clients and because the managers would staff the team according to people that they said that felt comfortable with which would never be a black trainee so you had to push, I mean I had to push right from moving... I was told no you can't be in the financial institutions services team because that would mess up with our demographic profile and whatever and I was like listen, that's not my problem and I really pushed, I took it to the chairperson of [name supplied] ... even getting clients, the kind of exposure that you wanted you had to really try and push”* Lerato

The women leaders in the study also experienced racial discrimination in the workplace. This was most apparent in the financial services sector and was both overt and subtle. Lerato and Melody did not know each other but had at one time or another worked for the same financial institution. Lerato worked there more than

five years previously and Melody started about two years before at the time of the research. Both of them experienced race and gender discrimination in the financial services sector.

*“I think was I quite resentful, especially at [name supplied], I’ve never been in an environment that is, when they look at me, all they can see is a black person. You know what I mean, they don’t see you as a professional, and they don’t see you as someone who can add value, with a future, with a hope, nothing unless you kind of dance to their tune”*

*Lerato*

*“And here, my colour and my sex, I’ve never felt so Coloured. At [former workplace, name supplied], I never felt colour”*

*Melody*

The African, Coloured and Indian participants had career-impacting experiences from a race perspective. The experiences of the white women leaders were quite different. While Joanne had overall had a good career journey, with support from white and Indian male colleagues, she mentioned that she was starting to feel her colour in the workplace. She had worked for the same organisation for 20 years and in recent years, the organisation became unionised. She shared an incident that took place in the work canteen where she felt racially attacked.

*“so I can’t say until the last year that I could really feel a racial difference. There was one incident in the canteen when the lady was pushing in front of me ... She made it a bit of aggressiveness you know, this white person, what is her story and I just left it. I remember I was a bit ‘whew this is weird’ cause I wasn’t used to it in my work environment but that was it”*

*Joanne*

While Joanne was starting to experience race in the workplace, it did not impact her career experiences or her career journey in any way. Similarly, Deborah’s experiences of race dynamics did not impact her career progression in the workplace. She shared how, as a white person, she had to be sensitive when it came to race:

*“You have and you know what I’ve experienced and some of this was at [name supplied] as well ... I definitely found among team members that there was a stronger sensitivity around race when you were speaking white-black, white-colour versus when you were speaking the other way round so I think white people are just, like, I’m certainly like whatever, it’s not a big issue for me, so people can say like you’re whitey, like, it’s ok. I can’t help it, it’s the way I was born, I can’t change that but there’s a lot more sensitivity if I said that the other way round”*

*Deborah*

However, Beryl, a Coloured woman who had worked at the same organisation as Joanne, talked about how the organisation was protective of white people and how they were given much more room to fail than people of other races.

*“I felt like if it was a white person in their position [two African men], they would have been given a lot more scope to fail than those guys had been given. However, the lack of support from the Chief at the time... was instrumental in their demise if you will. And then who was protected? And [white males] they were protected, they were like untouchable even when they were not performing, and then [name supplied] was just given the boot”*  
Beryl

Overall, the African, Coloured and Indian participants had either personally experienced the impact of race on their own careers or had seen its impact on other people who belonged to those race groups. In order to further explore the “perceived” or real role of race in determining success, I asked the participants if they thought race played a role in career success.

The participants had varying views as to whether or not race determined success. While the white participants and the middle class African, Coloured and Indian women leaders did not view race as a determinant of success, the African, Coloured and Indian participants who came from working class backgrounds were of the view that achieving success was pre-defined according to race. It would seem like the apartheid construct of ensuring that race determined success which was enjoyed by whites still exists.

The African, Coloured and Indian women leaders were of the opinion that, there was not enough support to help other races succeed regardless of how much they may have wanted to, whereas whites would achieve success because South Africa (former political and now economic landscape) is designed to enable them to achieve success. There was a further view that there was a racial hierarchy to achieving success that was defined by better schools and better opportunities and the pecking order was white, Indian, African and Coloured. Post-apartheid, it would seem the Africans and Coloureds have exchanged places in the racial pecking order.

*“In our generation, I think its leaning more toward white and Indian cause they’ve had better schooling, better opportunity etcetera. And I would definitely say white, Indian, Black [African], Coloured, in that order”*  
Beryl

The concerning suggestion from these findings is that, while apartheid is no longer constitutionalised in South Africa, it is still very much institutionalised and alive in corporate South Africa (Adhikari, 2006; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; Dlamini, 2013; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012). It manifests in the way people are treated, their contribution is viewed and the career exposure they are given. Race also determined the opportunities that were made available to the women in the study (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012). Experience on the CV is what determines career growth and if that is withheld, then growth is stunted. As indicated earlier at the start of this section, seven of the women that were interviewed worked

for the same organisation at the same time and 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 and Emirbayer 2009; Green et al, 2007).

The Indian middle class participant was promoted to a senior management position (as a direct report to the CFO) at the age of 28. Although she did not mention it in the interview, she got a great deal of career exposure from her boss who was an Indian male and was positioning her to take over from him. I was not able to interview an African woman who had worked for this organisation to find out how they experienced career opportunities and growth and to see if there was indeed a bias that favoured white women in the culture of the organisation. The finding on race in South African corporates is in line with Seekings (2008), who found that the legacy of apartheid has left South Africa “deeply unequal in terms of the distribution of income and opportunities”. The study confirmed that the distribution of career opportunities is definitely unequal and favours white women.

While the white participants waxed lyrical about the role played by the white and Indian men in facilitating their career opportunities, none of the African, Coloured and Indian participants mentioned the positive role of men, specifically black men, in their career journeys (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). The fact the employment equity reports reflect the representation of white women in senior leadership as not being representative of the population must mean that the role of white men is yielding results (CEE, 2017; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012). Why are black men not doing the same for black women? The answer to this question might be found in results of the study by Booyesen and Nkomo (2010), who found that black men are less likely to associate the characteristics of a successful manager with a woman. With such a finding, can black men be expected to be the mentors and career sponsors of the same women whom they perceive to lack the requisite qualities?

### **Black women: the Cinderella’s of Corporate South Africa**

Employment equity is opening up opportunities that were previously the domain of white men, and to some extent white women (Naidoo and Kongolo, 2004). Black women, especially Africans, seem to be getting preferential treatment, and this is often criticised as unfair discrimination (Naidoo and Kongolo, 2004). Their experiences, however, once inside the organisations, suggest a troublesome picture, one that needs serious attention if meaningful transformation of South African workplaces is to become a reality.

In thinking about the experiences of black women in the workplace, the fairy tale of Cinderella comes to mind. After spending most of her life relegated to the drudgery of the worst of chores in the home and being ill-treated by her stepmother, Cinderella is given the opportunity of a lifetime by her fairy godmother – to attend a royal ball dressed in finery with a horse-drawn carriage. She could enjoy herself at the ball as long as she left before the clock struck midnight, otherwise the magic would disappear and she would be exposed as her real self. The Employment Equity Act has been the “fairy godmother” of previously disadvantaged individuals, including black women. It has opened doors to careers and to workplaces that they could not have imagined three decades ago.

In later years, with the increased focus on employment equity in the workplace, the women leaders are experiencing the impact of the legislation in different ways. Zinzi, an African participant, was of the view that her race and her gender were working for her, at a time when the ropes of transformation were tightening and organisations were expected to focus on “redressing the imbalances of the past” (Coetzer,2009; Nkomo, 2011).

*“Right now the country is in a position where people of my race, of my gender, are being given a voice. They’re being given platforms, they have been given some support, so what has worked for me at the moment, at this present time, is my race and gender. There are certain positions that are specifically for my race and for my gender, that say we will not take any other candidate”*  
Zinzi

It should be emphasised here that Zinzi was in a relatively junior management level compared to the rest of the participants. She had, so to speak, just arrived at the ball and was yet to experience the dynamics inside the ballroom. Annelese also shared how employment equity had played a positive role in her career progression:

*“so I think even though we don’t want to admit it, employment equity and affirmative action certainly has played a role in that because I think there’s a lot of recognition by society and in industry that we have to right the wrongs of the past so in my career I almost feel like I was always at the right place at the right time and those two elements did contribute to my growth in career in my lifestyle and what I’ve achieved in my career and in personal life”*  
Annelese

Similarly, Nthabiseng found that as an employee in her industry (brand and media), race and gender (being an African woman) was definitely in her favour:

*“I think I was always a step further than most because of my career choice, being a black woman helped. It really did. That’s why I was, had the choice to choose which agency I wanted to intern at because they were looking for black females”*  
Nthabiseng

That dynamic changed once she started running her own business and she had to compete with white people for business. It was no longer an advantage to be an African female. She found that clients preferred to work with those with whom they were most comfortable rather than the most qualified or experienced to do the work.

*“And for him [white client], he wasn’t looking at what was being presented or strategies that were being presented, he was looking for comfort. He was comfortable working with this white agency rather than working with this black [African] young girl”*  
Nthabiseng

In contrast, while also an employment equity candidate, Noor, an Indian woman leader, had a different experience with employment equity. She shared the story of how she went for a chief financial officer position interview and was the best-performing candidate but the job was offered to an African male. The recruitment agent confidentially told her that it was her race that had worked against her.

*“I was their best candidate and I knew this... But be as it may, the outcome of the process was that I was not awarded the opportunity, to some degree because I was female and to some degree because I was not black [African]”*  
Noor

It could be a possibility that employment equity is starting to mean African first, bearing in mind that the Indian population was second in the pecking order during apartheid (Green et al, 2007). Given the findings of the gender and race analysis of women in decision-making positions by Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike (2012), the paucity of African women in leadership positions does require that a review be done of the definition of the beneficiaries of Employment Equity to create an environment that requires both race and gender to be a consideration in the making of appointments.

Despite the doors being opened by employment equity, once the African, Coloured and Indian participants get to the “ball”, that is the workplace, there is an unspoken rule: they may not dance with the prince. They are to be seen but not heard, to make up the numbers in silence. They are expected to be grateful for the opportunity of being in those organisations, in those positions. The African, Coloured and Indian women leaders found that their contribution was not valued and was constantly second-guessed.

*“I mean they hired me because I’m a black female and I have got some corporate finance, that’s it but didn’t really value my experience and didn’t really want me adding anything to any conversation. So I clashed a lot with colleagues at [name supplied] because of that, black and white colleagues, it didn’t matter, just people who thought I should be quiet and sit in my little corner and be an EE stat, you know what I mean, just be grateful that I have a job”*  
Lerato

*“I had a huge fight with management strangely enough cause what they had appointed me to do was window dress. They would make me do very low level tasks for lots of money that they were paying me and I found it was absolutely against the ethics and principles for what I was brought up to do”* Zeenet

And another participant:

*“I am a professional, I’m good at what I do and yet I feel like I’m a black token and the fact that I’m a black female is probably more to your benefit at this point in time, so you don’t recognize me for my professionalism and the contribution that I’m bringing to the organisation”* Annelese

The beneficiaries of employment equity are actually finding the workplace a frustrating place. Being senior, experienced and competent professionals, they are finding their contribution undervalued, leading to dissatisfaction and conflict. Lerato shared a very interesting piece of advice that she got from her older relatives who were professionals in their own right and had entered the workplace during the days of apartheid:

*“what they did tell me ... was ... it’s a hostile environment, you haven’t been invited, there’s been codes that have been made and companies are kind of forced, you’re not welcome there ... if we were welcome there, we wouldn’t need codes and we wouldn’t have to measure on equity. So it’s a hostile environment”* Lerato

Upon close examination beyond the façade of numbers, it seems that the racial dynamics that her older family members faced during apartheid were quite similar to what Lerato was facing today 20 plus years into democracy. So, in summary, even though the government is legislating what should create a conducive environment for black women, the reality is that the numbers may be changing in terms of who seemingly holds positions of authority in organisations but the kingmakers remain the same. South Africa continues to see white people in positions of economic privilege and maintaining the status quo (Adhikari, 2006; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike, 2012; Seekings, 2008). This is consistent with the findings of Nkomo (2011) on the obstacles with regard to employment equity, where the focus is on “numerical targets” as opposed to being on the intent of workplace transformation. The employment codes will not transform behaviours in the workplace; they will not determine how black people are treated. They will open doors but cannot monitor what goes on inside the organisations. The numbers will grow but not the depth and quality of experience of the people who make up those numbers. The argument of there not being enough experienced/skilled people will continue to be used.

As one white managing director in one of the organisations I once worked for put it, “the government cannot tell me how to run my organisation and which people to pay what salaries!” (In that organisation, race played a big role in the salary band at which employees were pegged). And I think that statement may be an

accurate reflection of what is really going on in corporate workplaces. Lip service is being paid to transformation and numbers are pointing to change but at the heart of the matter, government cannot tell threatened executives what salaries their people should be paid, nor force them to provide experience that will create professionals who are competent enough to take over their jobs.

**Class: A mediator for middle class African, Coloured and Indian women**

Class, to a certain extent, seemed to mediate the experiences of the African, Coloured and Indian women leaders from middle and upper class backgrounds. For these women, while race remained the common and highest hurdle, class seemed to influence the starting lines in their career journeys. As shown in figure 5.1, women from middle and privileged classes started the career race behind the starting line for white women but somewhat ahead of that for underprivileged women of their own races. They were able to go to tertiary institutions and get post matric qualifications of their choice. Through various influences, including parents, mixed-race and/or private school education, they were able to choose qualifications that were not necessarily defined by their race.

*“I remember when I was in matric, we went on a site visit to Wits University and they took us to the Engineering department ... and also because I thought that I could make a bigger difference by doing something scientific because at that stage there was a big demand for Engineers in the market here and I think that’s why also I opted for it”*

Annelese

Thandeka shared that the influences of her career choice were both school and home. She went on to explain the guidance received in terms of choosing a career:

*“The one thing I can definitely say is my father had a conversation and said to me, I know you’ve always wanted to act and I know that’s all you’ve ever seen yourself doing. However you’ve seen how acting has been difficult for me in terms of living, livelihood, paying the bills and everything else. So he said you’ve got to have a plan B”*

Thandeka

This was the experience of another participant:

*“So I had a calm conversation with mum, cause I had always liked Accounting and Math at school ... After that conversation, I managed to sway her mind, ... a week later, Wits had a place for B.Com”*

Noor

Class also gave the participants more career options. They were able to choose careers that were aligned with their passion as opposed to being limited to what the family had been exposed to or to what courses universities were prepared to finance.

*“I would say I’ve always been drawn to the arts and I was lucky to have a parent who let me do what I liked”*  
Nthabiseng

Some like Lerato came from privileged social backgrounds that, after finishing tertiary education, opened doors for them to enter the corporate workplace.

*“I wouldn’t have had the opportunities unless there was a transformation agenda when looking for a ideally black female CA, oh they’re so hard to find, oh no, my niece is black, she’s just qualified as a CA, that’s how I got the first job at [name supplied] Bank or even in articles, I guess it does influence why people open doors for me, it’s had a major impact and I suppose that family that I come from also has a major impact”* Lerato

Once inside, however, the African, Coloured and Indian participants, regardless of class, found the workplace hostile and unwelcoming. Class was no longer a mediator and the privileged women who were African, Coloured and Indian had to jump both race and gender hurdles along the way in their career journey.

From among each of the African, Coloured and Indian race groups, I was able to get participants who came from disadvantaged backgrounds and whose family circumstances either did not allow them to go to a tertiary institution, or limited the tertiary institution that they could attend as well as their degree choices. Poverty or affluence determined life after matric. Zinzi and Zeenet came from families that could not afford to send them to tertiary institutions and they had to find work as soon as they finished matric. They, by dint of the fact of not having a formal tertiary qualification, started the career race with more hurdles ahead of them than other participants, so class was definitely a factor in their career journeys. They had to make their way from the very bottom and, through sheer determination, work their way up to managerial positions.

*“for me it was never about a career choice, it was about working, it was never a career choice ... but you know after school, the circumstances at home did not allow for that and it didn’t matter then ... I started off with customer services, standing and serving people”*  
Zeenet

*“I wanted to do Information Technology but because of the magnitude of poverty back at home ... I had to consider working ... I was then taken to the organisation, which is a financial institution and started off at the bottom as a manual processing teller”*  
Zinzi

The experiences of Zeenet and Zinzi speak to the findings of (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989), in that they had to look for jobs and not careers as a start of their work journeys. Putting bread on the table was a more pressing need than identifying areas of work in which they could grow professionally.

The exception to the story of lower social class limiting career and/or university options was Melody. She had researched and found that if she studied through the Open University, she could get a bursary and that

was what she did. This enabled her to follow the career of her choice. The reasons for her career choice were linked to her experiences as a mis-diagnosed dyslexic who was treated as a “retarded person” and almost sent to a special school that catered for children with Downs’ Syndrome. With the guidance of a counsellor from school, she was able to identify the field that was of interest to her:

*“Initially it was social work because I wanted to help people like me [laughs] from the guidance counsellor... she talked to us about careers and what we could be ... and I just thought Psychologist and I could help people like me*  
Melody

The study also included women who came from lower class backgrounds who did go to tertiary institutions, but were in some cases limited in their career choices either because they were not exposed from a career perspective or they were discouraged by their parents from following their passion.

*“I went to high school ... and then went to Cape Town, UWC, that’s when I did my bachelors. I majored in Psychology and English but because of our financial situation, I couldn’t study what I wanted to study”*  
Beryl

The women leaders (Beryl and Melody) were in some cases expected to conform to those careers that were traditionally associated with their race groups. Beryl shared that in the Coloured community, working in a bank was at the time (and from my observation when I walked through the call centre of a financial institution, still is) the obvious career choice and that it is what was expected of her as the family did not have the means to send her to university. The choice to go to university meant that she was on her own and she had to find a way of making it work.

*“If mom and dad had their way, I probably would have gone to work at the bank like my sisters did, like every Coloured child that was remotely successful in high school. The banks came to recruit at the schools”*  
Beryl

*“and being a girl as well, so we were told, you can go work in Woolworths, if you’re lucky, you can become a receptionist”*  
Melody

The issue of having a predetermined occupation seemed to be unique to the working class Coloured participants in the study. The number of hurdles to be overcome in the career journey seems to have been influenced by race and class for African, Coloured and Indian participants. Those who came from working class and poor social backgrounds seemed to have more challenges than those who came from middle class backgrounds. This is consistent with previous findings (Dlamini, 2013; Hunter and Hachimi 2012) that class makes a difference when it comes to opportunities for black women, but that they need to be well educated to make it.

Social class determined the lives, career choices and ultimately career journeys of the African, Coloured and Indian women in the study. Social class opened and closed career doors and played a part in mapping the route of their career journeys. All the participants who came from either privileged or middle-class family backgrounds were exposed to different career paths either through family members, school aptitude tests or school university career days. This enabled them to identify the most suitable career paths and to make informed career choices which were encouraged by their families. These findings are in line with research that social class plays a big role on the “life-chances” and “life-choices” and indeed the life trajectory of a child (Gabrenya, 2003; Goldthorpe, 2016; Wright, 2003). Accordingly, the options available as well as the choices made by the participants were defined by their childhood social class.

### **Gender: A common denominator for all women**

The under-representation of women at senior management levels in South Africa was consistent with global research (Klatt et al, 2016; Ryan et al, 2011). All the women leaders in the study in South Africa, regardless of race and social class, experienced gender-based discrimination. Some of the findings related to gender confirmed previous research in that there is a boys’ club, pay parity, preference for men over women in certain roles, hostile work environments and work environments that are not conducive for working mothers.

*“Ja. It’s a very interesting structure, this company is a [name supplied] joint venture which is quite interesting and my feeling is that it’s a boys club ... I don’t know whether it’s just me but I battled with, and I’ve always felt that I’ve glass ceilings along the way especially in the tech industry and I don’t know if it’s just the tech industry but I’m feeling like there’s definitely a boys’ club”*  
Deborah

*“[name supplied] is very much also a boys club. They’re a boys club”*  
Beryl

Although pay parity was not one of the questions asked, it was briefly mentioned by one of the participants. The participant has only one female colleague at Exco and, through the published financial statements, they discovered that they were the lowest paid members of Exco.

*“I do the integrated report. I look at our financial statements, the two ladies at Exco, we’re the lowest paid compared to our male counterparts”*  
Thembi

Some of the participants shared experiences of working in environments that were not “family friendly” and that did not take into account that they were mothers as well as wives, in addition to being executives.

*“[name supplied] was very unfriendly to mothers ... I had to stand firm and personally I think being the person that I am I said no. But it created problems for me and I was not well liked at [name supplied] by Exco because I would say no. And when they would travel, I remember ana-flights (flights) would be at midnight and I said*

*no, I'm not leaving at that time of the night, so it's things like those"*

*Thembi*

Being a woman and running a department that was not seen as strategic meant that colleagues at Exco did not take Thandeka seriously and that the organisation as a whole did not take her seriously either. It needed her to be assertive and make her mark and maybe even be aggressive at times for her to be treated with respect on the work-front.

*"You know in my career, as a woman, marketing is a necessary evil ... So the point is, as a female, looking after areas that are seen as soft and fluffy, you always have to be on your toes and listening so that people are reminded that I exist and I am relevant. The challenge I find is that as a woman to be respected, from the get go when you join an organisation, if you do not show them that, I'm sorry I'm going to use language that is not appropriate for your research but if you do not show them that 'don't [f\*\*\*] with me attitude' very friendly, very polite but people need to see the assertiveness from the get go so that they know"*

*Thandeka*

Zinzi and Deborah shared experiences where gender worked against them and created a hostile environment and negative career experiences. Deborah shared her experiences and conversation with her male boss when she fell pregnant. She experienced a change in attitude from her boss:

*"To be honest with you, I think when I fell pregnant, it kind of, people's eyes or view of me changed. I don't know why I feel that way, but it's definitely a feeling of kind of, subtly expressed, I remember [boss, name supplied] saying to me at one stage, I was 7 months pregnant and he said Debs, you know, your commitment is just not the same and I had just come back from a retail conference. Now I was 6-7 months pregnant and retail conference is like a big party and at the end of the day I had gone to bed, finished and the last thing I felt like doing was sitting with a whole lot of drunk people and all I wanted to do was lie down. I laughed and I said, that's interesting one day when you're pregnant, come talk to me when you're 7 months cause let me tell you, you reach a stage in the day when you just want to sleep. It's not about commitment, it's just kind of like oh my word, I can't actually do this. And that I found interesting so I think, I think that's some of the negative and I don't know why I think that but it's definitely, it's a kind of feeling that I have. And I also see, one of the other GMs got pregnant just after me and she was desperate to stay on as long as possible to a point that got, I think she had her baby literally she went on leave"*

*Deborah*

The gender-related experiences of boys' clubs (Wirth, 2001, 2003), pay parity (Berger, 1971; Guy and Fenley, 2014; Seligmann, 2005), preference for men over women for certain roles (Brenner et al, 1989; Catalyst, 2007; Mattis, 2001; Schein, 1973, 1975) and hostile work environments (Daniel, 2004; Neck, 2015; Wilhoit, 2014) are consistent with the research that has been done over the years on the barriers that women face in the workplace.

### **We're not sisters at work: The complicity of other women**

The dynamics in the workplace within a group have been researched quite extensively (Hurst, et al, 2016; 2017). The research on the dynamics among women has resulted in the identification of the queen bee syndrome (Braun et al, 2017; Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin, 2006; 2008; Mavin and Johnson, 2006) which manifests itself predominantly in the older woman manager-younger woman worker dyad and is one the hurdles that women face in the workplace. Zinzi and Beryl shared experiences where they had to put up with being stereotyped by other women in the workplace, especially white females. Zinzi, as part of her career journey, worked as a systems analyst, in which position she was a subject matter expert. She tells the story in her own words:

*“OK. So in 2013 when I was a Systems Analyst, from 2010-2013, the one statement that really stood out for me ... and this lady made, the Business Head, that I was looking after made the statement, she said to me, ‘this job was designed for males, it was designed for men’ ... I had a business that was working against me based on the fact that I am a woman. And there was a man that was being introduced into this role, a process that could get me out started”*

*Zinzi*

The gender bias that Zinzi faced was from another woman who defined a role according to gender and actually worked her out to replace her with a man. Beryl's experience was also of a white woman manager who doubted her ability and so she had to work extra hard to prove herself not only to the men in the organisation, but to the women as well.

*“You know [name supplied], I think working with her and how she didn't really have confidence in my ability and I constantly had to prove myself, that for me was like a big challenge and as a black woman I felt I had to do it doubly and triply even with my other colleague even when my other colleagues knew less than I did, I never felt like respected by her”*

*Beryl*

The lack of solidarity among women is consistent with the research of Mavin (2006, 2008), who criticises the expectation of solidarity behaviour among women in management to support other women. The reality is that the women leaders did not find allies in other women and there is certainly no “sisterhood across race” (Dlamini, 2013). The women surveyed experienced scepticism and denigration from other women. The only exception among the participants in South Africa was Thembi, who shared how she and her only female colleague in Exco decided to work together and not against each other in what was a male-dominated organisation in a male-dominated industry.

*“The two ladies at Exco, so we're working closely together to say, no why shouldn't we be”*

*Thembi*

It was refreshing to hear Thembi share how she and a female colleague linked arms to work as a team in their organisation. This finding was however an exception as most of the other participants had negative experiences in working with women peers and supervisors.

### **Sexual harassment: A taboo in corporate South Africa**

A big gender related issue that affects the career experiences of women, but is hardly talked about, is sexual harassment. Even during a presentation at the research colloquium, some male members of the audience tried to discourage me from including sexual harassment in the study. This is despite research showing that sexual harassment, whether at school, work or in the community, is a global problem (Akhtar, 2013). I saw this resistance as valuable data and became even more convinced that I should specifically explore sexual harassment in the study. When asked if they had ever experienced sexual harassment at any point in their lives, seven out of the twelve participants indicated that they had and five of them had experienced it in the workplace. This is line with the research on sexual harassment that one in every two women will be harassed at some point in their school or work life (Akhtar, 2013; Fitzgerald, 1993; Schneider et al, 1997).

The reactions of some of the women leaders when asked if they had experienced sexual harassment were quite interesting. Lerato initially said she had not experienced it before and then changed her mind and said “*ok, let me not undermine it. It was an idiot of a person*”. The perpetrator was her senior and she handled it by refusing to work with him. It is interesting that most of the women laughed as they answered the question.

*“Yes [laughs]. Sexual harassment as it’s defined in the corporate workplace at the moment is very subtle, that you can easily let it go, easily overlook it. So if a person starts to comment about the size of your rear end and how it makes them feel ... It can easily be dismissed as just a compliment whereas it’s sexual harassment ... So I’ve experienced a couple of those which I think I, let go of, I did not address I think because it’s so hard to prove it. How do you prove a person said something about your breasts? You don’t have evidence of that. So you end up just getting over it and not viewing in the light of actually this is sexual harassment”* Zinzi

Melody also laughed as she shared her experience:

*“What’s his name ... a black guy, ... I used to work late so he used to always come and sit with me and everything and it turned into a ‘I look after Coloured women and I’ll look after you and let’s get together’ and I told him to [f\*\*\*] off”* Melody

Also laughing, Zeenet had this to say:

*“Ja, many a times. So you get a lot of people hitting on you, a lot people trying, not where harassment was actually physical but you would have people, especially now in the business world with me being a businesswoman, everybody thinks that if you go into business you’re going to lie on your back and you’re going*

On how she handled it, she had this to say:

*“It’s about professionalism, you learn body language, you taught from a young age how to keep a distance, how not to get close to people so, also your craft around how you engage with people, I’m the kind of person when I meet people whether male or female, I’ll hug them but I know who to hug, you learn,”* Zeenet

One participant said she had never experienced sexual harassment in the workplace but her face changed from being animated to being guarded and her body language changed. This left me wondering if what she was saying was true or whether she had indeed experienced it and preferred to push it to the back of her mind. I could have probed, but instinctively felt that perhaps the question may have touched a raw nerve and decided it was best to leave it there.

Another participant talked about her experiences after her husband died:

*“There was somebody harassing me at one point at [name supplied], stalking me, and that was very scary ... This guy, he had a number and he could send it from any number and it was never the same number that came to. Oh, you’re looking so pretty today, or why you sitting there ... I never knew who it was, ever so it was actually quite hectic for at least a month or two but it was more of talking but it was sexual in nature so I was always conscious of the fact that it wasn’t the same sex [a woman] and I could feel it. Once when I took off my wedding ring, after my first husband passed away, the day I decided to take off my wedding ring, was there was a culture in [name supplied] that I never knew existed. Meat, fresh meat”*  
Joanne

The manner in which the women leaders handled sexual harassment in the workplace differed from woman to woman but was consistent with the research on how women cope with sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Knapp et al, 1997). They dealt with it by confronting it, as in the cases of Lerato and Melody, either by asking the perpetrator to stop or by refusing to work with him on assignments, thus using assertive methods to deal with it (Fitzgerald et al, 1995). None of the participants from South Africa reported the incidents to management, but one of them (Melody) used social coping (Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Knapp et al, 1997) by telling her colleague (male) about the incidents and asking him to have a chat with the perpetrator. She later regretted having done so because the manner in which her colleague managed the situation was totally different from what she had expected. When I probed Zinzi, my first participant, on what she did about the sexual harassment, she said she had done nothing because it would be hard to prove. This was also consistent with findings in other research that women do not report sexual harassment for fear that no one will believe them (Akhtar, 2013; Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Schneider et al, 1997). Sexual harassment in the workplace cuts

across race and social class. The victims were at different levels in the organisations and handled it quite differently, but fortunately for them, it did not turn sinister and did not involve threatening behaviour with obvious psychological side effects.

I discussed sexual harassment with my partner on the morning that I was writing up this section. He asked me to define sexual harassment, which I did. His response really amazed me. He said that it was merely the mating game where men chase women and women play hard to get and then men chase harder and eventually the women say yes. When I said to him but sexual harassment is unwanted sexual advances, his retort was that women eventually say yes if you are persistent. His comments reminded me of a conversation that I had with a former colleague a few years ago. I asked him of the whereabouts of another colleague that I had not seen in a couple of weeks and he told me the guy had been fired for sexual harassment.

The fired guy had entered a lift, put his arm around a female colleague and said “*namuhla ongowami*” which is isiZulu for “tonight, you’re mine”. The woman in question had filed a complaint for sexual harassment and that was how he had lost his job. The man telling me the story ended the narrative by saying, “Sisi, he didn’t even touch her breast. At least if he had touched a breast, I would understand.” The comments by these two men who did not know each other but held sexual harassment in a similar light helped me realise why it is such a problem. Men and women do not see it in the same light but it does have an impact on the work experiences of women.

#### **5.4.2 Findings in Zimbabwe**

With the main objective of the study being to investigate the extent to which the intersectionality of race, gender and class impact the career experiences of the women, the findings in Zimbabwe were contradictory. Specifically, gender, race and class intersected for the Indian and one of the African participants, whereas gender was without a doubt the biggest challenge faced by all the women in the study. All the participants, except for one, came from middle class families although they were on different continuums of it. In essence, the middle class in Zimbabwe can be divided into three classes, namely the upper-middle class, the middle class and the lower-middle class (Tomida, n.d.). The data for Zimbabwe shows that there was an intersection of gender, race and class for some of the women leaders. However, the intersection was not consistent across race and social class. The main theme in Zimbabwe could be that the career journeys were characterised by race and class obstacles for one African, Coloured and Indian participant. The following sub-themes emerged:

- Gender: A common denominator for all women
- Race still matters in Zimbabwe (depending on where you are)

- We're not sisters at work: The complicity of other women
- Sexual harassment: A taboo in corporate Zimbabwe

For the sub-themes that were similar to those found in South Africa, I maintained the same titles of the sub-themes for ease of comparison between the two countries. I have, however, tried to arrange them in order of the significance of the role that they played in the career experiences of the women. Zimbabwe had fewer themes than South Africa. The themes that did not emerge from the Zimbabwean study were related to employment equity and class, as five of the six participants had middle class backgrounds.

**Main Theme: Impact of gender, race and class on career journeys of women leaders is less pronounced**

While in South Africa, there was a consistent story of race and class mediating the career experiences of the participants, this was not the case in Zimbabwe. I therefore found it difficult to have a pictorial representation that would tell the story in the same way that would be as consistent as with the hurdles race for South Africa. The experiences of race and class differed from participant to participant but the story of negative gender experiences was consistent among the participants in the study.

**Gender is a common denominator for all women**

In Zimbabwe, it would seem that the elephant in the room is gender. Zimbabwe is still a very patriarchal country and the African, Coloured and Indian participants experienced it in their careers. Women in Zimbabwe are also under-represented in positions of leadership as in the rest of the world (Klatt et al, 2016; Ryan et al, 2011) There are organisations that have been in Zimbabwe for more than 50 years and have very few females in senior positions. The workplace and the management structures are male dominated. Women have to endure workplace cultures and policies that undermine them and put them at a disadvantage. They experience gender discrimination in many different ways, including hostility in male-dominated industries and pay parity. Across race, the participants mentioned male domination and gender dynamics in the workplace as being a career challenge.

*“Gender has been difficult and it remains a big challenge in the manner that if you look at it from a senior management perspective, if they are going to be 5 levels within a company, you begin to see the dwindling of female person on the level 1 who is the most senior and 2. You begin to see that, it’s a male dominated environment...from a seriousness perspective, the issue of women drive is still far from being achieved”*

*Siphiwe*

*“being in a male-dominated industry ..., in the majority of cases your contribution is belittled, is looked down upon. There are others that do not think women can contribute anything significant so no matter how hard you try, they want to make you feel like you are not in your proper place ... I remember even when I had been in this office, at the slightest of opportunity when they hear that you are not in, Is she ill, what happened to her, she’s booked off, she will collapse, these jobs are for men ... So you can see the kind of mentality, it’s for men, this is for men, it’s not for a woman to come this high up ... This appointment into Director Marketing position, ... it’s the first time in the structures of the [name supplied] that they appointed woman. It’s a male dominated industry ... and I’m the first woman to be at the helm, the top 5 in the organisation”* Rutendo

The organisation to which she was referring has been in existence since colonial times and Zimbabwe has been an independent state since 1980, so the chauvinist baggage is quite huge in that organisation.

Other participants had the following experience:

*“Black women are not looked at in the same way as the black male colleagues. I had to really work like 10x, 20x [bangs on table] a hundred times more than the male colleagues ... I realised that there were a lot of things that came into play and if I did not stand for I believed was due to me, I would have missed out on a lot of things ... Friday, men are given allowances because they are going to entertain brokers and it’s only the men that are given. Who says I don’t want to go out on a Friday and entertain my clients, ... you realise that these men think lowly of you until you really ascertain yourself and you speak out”* Sithabile

*“you always felt like you were a little bit on the outside looking in and sometimes that the suggestions that you made weren’t always given the weight you felt they should have been given because they came from you whereas I felt like if it had come from a man, it might have gotten more weight ... I think one of the challenges has been a woman even though this environment, the fashion industry is more open to women and women succeeding, still there is a little bit of them and us with the male executives. And certainly when I started there was one female executive among six men”* Viola

Sandra’s also experienced gender challenges in the workplace:

*Being a woman, sometimes that can be a bit of a challenge, I know I fought I really hard when I first came here”*  
Sandra

Sandra had to fight gender battles in a business that was owned by her family and in which she was a senior executive. The gender challenges were coming from her subordinates, which shows the extent to which the gender challenges exist in Zimbabwe. Beena, the oldest participant in the study, shared her sentiments on the issue:

*“Certainly the early years and even now, it’s very much still a male-dominated business environment regardless of the different industries that you may go in. It is changing a lot now and I would say maybe in the last 5-10 years... If you went into a boardroom and I often remarked at it, you would go into a business results for a company and you look around you and 80% white men. It’s changing now, but it’s still” [laughs]* Beena

Different environments, different age groups, different races, all the women could tell a story about negative gender experiences in the workplace. In the year 2000, the government introduced the National Gender Policy to put redressing of gender imbalances on the national radar. However, this focus on gender has the potential to backfire once women are in senior positions in the workplace. It can create perceptions that the reason women have made it to the top is policy and not merit. This was the observation of one of the participants:

*“No I’m talking about deliberate effort to uplift the women in the organisation, then you are stereotyped to say kuti vakapinda (they came in) because they are women, you know how even in general you are branded to say ndeve gender (they are gender appointees) because of the pursuit to improve the status of women at national level. So you get such kind of branding which would tend to just water down your abilities”* Rutendo

Similar to South Africa, Zimbabwe women have experienced issues of pay parity (Berger, 1971; Guy and Fenley, 2014; Seligman, 2005) and role discrimination (Brenner et al, 1989; Catalyst, 2007; Mattis, 2001; Schien, 1973, 1975) as part of their career experiences.

**Race still matters in Zimbabwe (depending on where you are):** The influence of the intersections of gender, race and class was evident in the experiences of one African woman leader as well as the Indian and Coloured women leaders. The industries that the female leaders worked in also played a major a role in their race and class experiences. Sithabile grew up in a middle class home and wanted to serve articles of clerkship with what was one of the Big Four accounting firms in the 1990s.

*“Why I’m highlighting [name supplied] is because when I was being interviewed ... [name supplied] only asked me 3 questions, what does your father do, what does your mother do, where do you live and those 3 answers that I gave them, they made a decision using those and they did not employ me ... other people would say my father is a manager in this place, my mother works for this corporate and they got the opportunities but because of where I came from, the schools I went to, who my parents were, I didn’t come in at that stage”* Sithabile

The organisation referred to by Sithabile did employ women of all races but it was an open secret that in the accounting profession, African, Coloured and Indian trainees were considered only if they came from private schools. Sithabile came from a lower-middle class social background but her childhood home was located in a high-density African township and it was on that basis that a decision was made regarding her application to work at the organisation. The interesting thing is that she lived in an affluent part of the township, where wealthy Africans were found during the years of racial segregation, but the interviewer, who was presumably not knowledgeable about the dynamics in African townships, would not have been aware of the class segregation within the townships themselves. A few years later, she moved to another city and applied to the

same firm and this time she was successful and got the job. In a firm that had previously turned down her application on grounds of class discrimination, a race battle began.

*“I used to question a lot of things because you would be at the same level with one person but packages would be determined by race and I fought a lot within that institution. The three years of staying there were really three years of really realising myself, standing for my rights, speaking out”*  
Sithabile

Beena did not attend university due to the fact that her mother could not afford to send her for tertiary education. While she came from a middle class background, her mother was a teacher and the breadwinner and this situation demanded that Beena look for a job straight after high school.

*“I couldn’t go to university it was not a financial option for us, my mum was really, as I said, those early years my mum was a breadwinner so it wasn’t really an option for me at the time”*  
Beena

In both Sithabile and Beena’s cases, their home situation limited their opportunities but not their choices. They still went into the professions of their choice, despite the limitations in terms of university education and working for the firm of their choice. Beena also experienced racial discrimination in her career journey but did not fight in the same way that Sithabile did. She shared her journey as follows:

*“as I said in those early years, it was very much male dominated and it was very much white. So you kind of were going to be in a position for a little while before you had promotional opportunities as somebody with the same qualifications as yourself”*  
Sithabile

And when I asked if she fought the system:

*“No, I actually don’t recall. You could sense the tension but I don’t recall actually having to [fight]. I would say I didn’t when I should have but I didn’t and in terms of gender, yes. Because I felt, in fact it was both, I felt that I was better placed to become the FM (Finance Manager) than an individual who was chosen who happened to be white and male. He didn’t last long, he was gone within 6 months, he just couldn’t cope and then I took that position so yes it did happen and it was both [laughs]”*  
Beena

The women leaders were obviously sharing their experiences with race that had taken place more than 15 to 20 years before when the racial makeup of management structures was still predominantly white. Beena’s experience of a white male colleague being promoted ahead of her and then leaving within 6 months reminded me of an audit client that I had in Harare who did a similar thing in his organisation. A young white male was appointed finance manager ahead of a Coloured female who had more than 25 years’ experience as a bookkeeper in that organisation while the white male had no accounting experience. What I can still recall, 22 years after the fact, is that the finance manager had no clue of what was happening in the finance

department and, during the audit process, could not understand simple things that were a part of his job. Everything that related to the audit was referred to the bookkeeper but the white man had the title and earned the money. The intersection of gender and race had an influence on the work experiences of Sandra, the only white participant in the study. Sandra worked for the family business and had been working there for nine years. She experienced race and gender dynamics in the organisation:

*“There has been very few times where I have felt racial pressure. There’s been a couple of times where somebody has a point to press and I kind of just ignore it ... [laughs] ... So I don’t think that’s made a difference.*

*Sandra*

While Sandra had had racial experiences, her career journey was not negatively impacted by them. She went on to share her insights on being white in the marketplace:

*“As a salesperson, someone said to me don’t you find it hard being a white person in Zimbabwe, I said no ... I tell you that I want your money before I send you the goods, you just do it. Um, and when I go in as a salesperson and I have, I noticed this when I was travelling with some black ladies, when I walked into the door, immediately I got the attention, the black ladies with me didn’t and I just thought that was really strange and in fact it doesn’t make it harder being a white person doing sales in Zimbabwe, I think I get a bit of a, it’s been a bit of a privilege ... I will go to any place and often times I am the only white person in the area, sometimes people think that I’m lost”*

*Sandra*

One of the African participants was of the view that currently, in Zimbabwe, race in the workplace is no longer an issue.

*“I would still repeat that from a race perspective, in Zimbabwe particularly, it is a non-event. Anyone who has been at home would agree with you that we haven’t felt that at all”*

*Siphiwe*

The intersection of class and gender had an influence on the career choices of the Coloured participant. She came from a lower-middle class family. She shared how her dream had been to become a journalist but her family could not afford to send her to university in South Africa, which was where she could study journalism at degree level and she did not want a diploma. She studied languages at the University of Zimbabwe and even then could not become a journalist due to being a “white-looking” female in what was then a politically volatile country.

The findings on race in the workplace in Zimbabwe were quite contradictory. Three women had negative experiences of a racial nature with one being denied initially an employment opportunity and then being disadvantaged from a salary perspective. One woman experienced being overlooked for a promotion in favour of a less experienced white male who failed to cope with the job. The third participant experienced

racial tension in the workplace but was not negatively affected or impacted by it. One of the older African participants who had worked for a multiracial company in the early days of her career strongly felt that race was no longer an issue in Zimbabwe. The woman leader who had worked for professional accounting firms (whose partners were predominantly white males) experienced racial discrimination in terms of initially getting a job opportunity and then in terms of salary. The findings on women of other races being second to white men confirms the research that racism is institutionalised and results in white people being afforded economic privileges over members of other races (Grubbs, 2008; Kendall, 2002; Seekings, 2008) .

In order to get a sense of how white Zimbabweans were experiencing life in Zimbabwe, I explored racial interaction with Sandra a bit more. At independence in 1980, many white Zimbabweans left the country for South Africa, which still had white rule. The eviction of white farmers from the farms started in the late 1990s and the subsequent economic decline led to more white people leaving the country. Consequently, organisations are now predominantly black managed and race is no longer a major issue. There are subtle undertones of it in the workplace but it is not as obvious as it is in South Africa. Despite all that is said about white people in Zimbabwe from the political platforms, in Zimbabwean society, white privilege continues to exist and to be a norm in business and society (Green et al, 2007; Kendall, 2002). This was confirmed by the only white participant who spent most of her adult years in the US and returned to Zimbabwe about 11 years ago. I asked her how she found living and working in Zimbabwe

*“I do think that in Zimbabwe you are definitely privileged as a white person and I’ve noticed this even going through a roadblock. I’m given a lot more leeway or a lot more, how would I say, I see what the policemen do to the ET [Emergency Taxi] drivers and what they do to me, two different things. It’s almost embarrassing ... One of our designers Lindi, a black lady, she wanted me to go to the bank for her because I [Lindi] don’t have my ID and I said to her, I can’t go to the bank for you., no one is going to give me your money ... She said you’re white, they’ll give to you anyway ... so I went in there and you know what, they gave me the money. I said what the hell are you doing”*  
Sandra

When I asked Sandra the race and age of the teller who had served her when she went to withdraw money from her employee’s bank account, she indicated that it was an African female in her 30s. The age of the teller seemed to indicate that she was born in a racially free Zimbabwe and hence had no historical experiences that could have contributed to her treating a white customer differently from an African one. Incidentally, while in Zimbabwe I went into a bank to enquire about opening an account. It was interesting to find that the bank forms still segregate the population as African, Coloured, European and Indian, a legacy from the colonial days (Gordon, 1996; Novak, 2011; Seidman, 1984)).

Sandra was open about the fact that she was privileged as a result of her race. Her awareness of this could be due to the fact that she had spent many years in the US and was thus more conscious of the stark difference in how, as a white person, she was treated in the two countries. She mentioned that in the US, people have had to earn trust, others do not treat people in a certain way simply because they are white. She seemed uncomfortable about the preferential treatment and squirmed in her chair when she was talking about it, something she did not do during other aspects of the interview. So in Zimbabwe, there is definitely a different set of rules for white people which give them preferential treatment that is not accorded to other races. This may not be prevalent in corporates, but it is still evident in greater society. This notion of white superiority over Black people is still practised at all levels of Zimbabwean society even though racist segregation policies were disbanded more than thirty years ago. This further confirms previous research that although legislation and policies regarding racist practices may change, the privileges enjoyed by white people continue (Adhikari 2006; Green et al, 2007; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike , 2012).

### **We're not sisters at work: The complicity of other women**

The dynamics among women in the workplace brought about varied and interesting responses. The African managing director in the study shared how she and two other female managing directors in her networks had agreed that the onus of pulling women up in the workplace was on them and they could not expect men to be doing what they themselves were not. Consequently, for the positions that reported to them, they always tried to identify a competent woman who could do the job. She emphasised, though, that the appointments were based on merit.

*“One of the key drives that certain women in Zimbabwe who are at top leadership [names supplied] and myself have said, let’s lift women up. And you’ll find that from a third level leadership perspective, we are trying to get the best women, from a second level leadership perspective we are trying to get the best women and from the line leadership who report directly to us, where we can we want women and it is known that at [name supplied] women are driven to the top, it is known that at [name supplied] and at [name supplied], women are, so we know that, we consciously sat down and planned”*  
Siphiwe

Hearing Siphiwe share about the commitment of female CEOs in providing opportunities for other women was very exciting and very contrary to the queen bee syndrome of women not wanting to share the leadership space with other women (Johnson and Mathur-Helm 2011; Mavin, 2006, 2008). The women she was talking about were all African and I wondered if the cultural practices of African people of “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (“I am because you are”) were not coming into play and negating the self-centredness of Western cultures. It is important, however, to point out that Siphiwe was talking about the efforts that were being done at the time of the research. Moreover, she was a managing director and hence it was unlikely that

she would have had recent experiences of female rivalry in the workplace. However, most of the participants shared experiences suggesting that the queen bee syndrome is alive and well in corporates in Zimbabwe.

When asked about the role of women in her career experience, Beena shared that she had very little interaction with women in her working life as she had worked mostly in male-dominated environments. In line with research on the dynamics of women in the workplace, the conflict between women in the workplace emerged as either being experienced personally or witnessed by the participants (Mavin, 2006, 2008). Sithabile shared how the only other female executive in her organisation did not “play ball” when working with her but was known as a team player by the men, and she mentioned how this was one of the ways that enabled men to gain the upper hand in organisations.

*“but most women, I don’t know if it’s just Zimbabwe alone but women don’t stand up and support one another. And we create that gap and that’s why men take advantage of us, they know that they can easily divide us, we tend to have these petty jealousies”*

*Sithabile*

When asked to share her specific experience with this, she stated:

*“I experienced that a lot, from other women ... I’ve been working with a very difficult company secretary, very difficult ... For me to get anything out of her has always been so difficult and I don’t know how many times we went to the group CEO because I would have complained, I would have put a formal complaint to say you are not supporting me, all I’m asking you for is ABC and it’s all in your office. Its either you do this or I look for another company secretary ... I had to learn to work with this woman but to the extent that even my own managers ended up seeing that this woman is sabotaging me. And when I looked at the background, before I joined this group, she had been the only woman executive so my coming in to head a department meant that it’s now me and her. She had been more comfortable when she was the only one. We didn’t know each other but she just wouldn’t support me but she would support the other general managers of that other divisions. It went so sour, it went so bad and at times I brought in cases where she would talk to junior members of staff about me and I would report all those cases and we had so many sessions where we sat down and I said but there’s no way that I can talk about you to any member of staff, how did you do that. To the extent of even bringing in those people to witness that yes she actually did this, she actually said this about Thembi. This is another woman. So those things do happen. It was so bad that even the Board picked it up at some point, so there are some women like that Linda.”*

*Sithabile*

Viola witnessed undiluted queen bee behaviour with a superior who frustrated her female colleague into leaving the organisation.

*“I saw it with my immediate superior. She was the confident, acting tougher than the males and then she employed a woman to come and report to her and the whole time that poor woman was*

*there ..., she was treated like so badly, so badly until like she left after a few months ... we as women could all see it, we could all see it and used to say to each other, [name supplied] can't stand any competition as soon as she's got someone around her age or as attractive as she is, that's her level, she stomps on them and she does everything to them ...so you know so I do think that it happens in business, I noticed it"*

*Viola*

The executive woman that Viola was talking about was a white colleague and the colleague who was treated badly was an African woman. The findings on the dynamics between women were is similar to the findings in South Africa where lack of solidarity among women could be found both within and across race. Women experienced tense relationships especially where they attained a senior position in organisations where they were very few women. They found themselves unable to form support networks and structures among themselves (Braun et al, 2017; Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mavin and Johnson, 2006).

### **Sexual harassment: A taboo in Corporate Zimbabwe**

Sexual harassment was either experienced or witnessed by the women leaders in the study. Three women (across race) had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. One of the African women mentioned having only ever worked for men and never having experienced sexual harassment. There was a hint of suggestion that the behaviour of young women could encourage men to make advances towards them.

*"One of the things I've said when I talk to young people who I mentor is that sometimes it's about how we conduct ourselves around people who would potentially sexually harass us, I've always said why have I not been. I am a woman that you would see and say let me talk to this girl ..., I like that but not in any one of the situations I have been told that for you to get to this thing, if you do this, then we will give you this, no!"*

*Siphiwe*

Another participant (Beena) had never experienced sexual harassment herself but had witnessed it with one of her staff members. She, however, had been the recipient of remarks which she had not taken to be harassment but rather referred to as "these stupid snide remarks." Sithabile laughed when I asked her whether she had ever experienced sexual harassment:

*"YES, I have. When I started working, you know I was thinking about this years later, sexual harassment was never explained to us when we were young and it's in so many forms, the language that people speak in the office, especially the language ... I went through a lot of phases where your superiors would be interested in having a relationship with you ... I think it's so wrong because as a junior employee, you feel so compromised, you're under pressure and even those that end up in those relationships, it's not that that person has a choice, that's harassment to me"*

*Sithabile*

And when asked how she had managed these situations:

*“I talk to them and I tell them my beliefs... I tell them ... we are here and the common ground is work and we must just do our work”*  
Sithabile

I probed if she ever had a situation where it affected or impaired the working relationship.

*“Ja I think at one point, it sort of did but the man turned around after some time but there was a time when there was that tension between us”*  
Sithabile

I asked whether she had ever discussed these situations with her marital partner:

*“Not at all, not at all and you know, now that I’m more mature I just think that’s how we protect wrong behaviour. I don’t understand, ok I understand my reasoning at that time, I didn’t discuss it with my partner because you are scared this story can be turned around against you that for this man to have done abc, maybe you also had contributed so you end up thinking let me not even have raised this issue but by doing that I think we are just nursing problems in institutions”*  
Sithabile

This is in line with research on the subject in which women attribute the sexual harassment in some way to their own behaviour (Jensen and Gutek, 1982) or fear reporting it for various reasons (Akhtar, 2013). Viola’s experience was treated as an incident:

*“In [name supplied] not really, there was one silly incident from someone who, in a lift ... I went up in the lift and one of the casual I don’t think he was a permanent employee rode in the lift with me and he made a sexual remark about me”*  
Viola

Sandra’s experience with sexual harassment happened when she was working in the United States and so I did not include it in the discussion for Zimbabwe. The reactions of the women in Zimbabwe were similar to those in South Africa and consistent with research on the subject (Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Knapp et al, 1997). They dealt with it by both confronting the perpetrator and asking him to stop the behaviour (Fitzgerald et al, 1995) resulting in tensions in the work relationships (Fasting et al, 2007; McLaughlin et al, 2012); reporting it (Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Knapp et al, 1997), but not sharing the incidents with their partners at home (Akhtar, 2013; Jensen and Gutek, 1982). The findings on sexual harassment confirm the extent to which it is a problem in the workplace and affects women of all races, social class and workplace positions (Akhtar, 2013; Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Knapp et al, 1997).

#### **5.4.3 Comparison of findings between South Africa and Zimbabwe**

The findings of the study show that in both countries gender, race and class intersected and affected the career experiences and progression of the women leaders. Race continues to be a major issue in corporates in South Africa. This is consistent with the findings of Dlamini (2013). In Zimbabwe, the findings show that race is no longer as big an issue as it was 15-20 years ago. There are, however, still pockets of it being

experienced, and these pockets are highly influenced by the type of organisation and the position held in the organisation.

In both countries, social class affected the career journeys of the participants. In South Africa, being black (African, Coloured and Indian) means that women need to have middle class beginnings in order to have a good start on the career ladder. Working class women starting their career journey have to take on whatever jobs are available with very few options for studies and career choices. In Zimbabwe, social class played a role in the type of organisation that the African participant could work for and it affected the ability of the Indian participant to go to university, but both of them were able to follow their desired career paths.

In both countries, gender remains an area of concern (as it is globally). In South Africa, issues of gender are addressed as part of the employment equity efforts and thus black women face the very conundrum that black women in the United States faced when the term “intersectionality” was born. They are categorised together with black men and white women under an agenda that seemingly has empowerment of previously disadvantaged groups as the main focus. It is black men who are the main beneficiaries and they are not pulling black women up in the same way that white men are doing for white women. Corporates seemingly are defining white women as representing all women and they are the women who have been benefitting from employment equity in South Africa (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012).

The Zimbabwean women leaders in the study had varied gender experiences from working for organisations that have existed for more than a century without a female executive to not receiving benefits that were given to their male colleagues. They had also been subjected to comments about their positions not being jobs for women, among other things. On the positive side, the women leaders who were running organisations were intentionally doing something about the gender imbalances in the workplaces. In Zimbabwe, based on the findings presented, the days of white dominance in most organisations are gone. The focus now is on women (and this may well be a political tool for the 2018 presidential elections).

The Zimbabwean government, in the form of the National Gender Policy (2000) and the amended National Gender Policy (2013), is prioritising the creation of an environment that is conducive for women to have opportunities both inside and outside the workplace. South Africa, at legislative level (the Constitution and Employment Equity Act), is also focusing on redressing the imbalances faced by women in the past. It is still undoing the effects of a racist political past and at a practice level, has seemingly put gender on the backburner. Due to the difference in focus in practice, the results show that in South Africa, white men run organisations and the result is that white women are given opportunities and experience career growth.

In Zimbabwe, African men run organisations and the result is that African women are not given opportunities and they experience sex discrimination. The findings by Booysen and Nkomo (2010) on gender stereotypes in South Africa could provide a clue as to this situation. The results of that study were that black men were less likely to associate the characteristics of a successful manager with a woman. This then raises the question: can black men be expected to be career sponsors and mentors of the same women that they perceive to lack the requisite qualities to be a successful leader and manager? Sexual harassment was either experienced or witnessed by the women leaders and in both countries, they either laughed it off or seemed to downplay it. Their responses were all in line with research on how the victims of sexual harassment respond to incidents. The commonality among all the women who had experienced sexual harassment at work was that they did not inform their intimate partners about the incidents for fear that their partners would cause a scene at the workplace (Fitzgerald et al, 1995; Knapp et al, 1997).

The women leaders in both countries identified with the fact that in the workplace, there were boys' networks or clubs. This finding is consistent with literature that men form networks that support them in their career strategies (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Wirth, 2003). The women also experienced pay parity and gender role stereotyping. There were typical cases of "think manager, think male" (Brenner et al, 1989; Booysen and Nkomo, 2010; Schein, 1973, 1975), with jobs in certain industries being viewed as not being suitable for women (Hartmann, 1976) as well as a lack of intra-gender support among the women themselves. In both countries, some of the women leaders found that their contribution was not valued in the workplace. In Zimbabwe, these sentiments were expressed by the Coloured participant as well as two of the African participants. This was attributed to the gender dynamics in the workplace. In South Africa, race once again played a role in terms of the extent to which women felt that their contribution was valued. The white participants did not experience this dynamic but the African, Coloured and Indian participants did.

In the workplace and outside too, white privilege still exists (Green et al, 2007; Ratele and Laubscher, 2010). In line with the literature on whiteness and white privilege, the white participants in South Africa were oblivious to their privileged positions and attributed their career success to hard work. The South African participants of other races were conscious of and had been disadvantaged by the focus on white colleagues in the workplace (Ratele and Laubscher, 2010). None of the white participants experienced being discriminated against when it came to workplace exposure and experience, which had been the experience of African, Coloured and Indian women in their career journey. White privilege manifested itself in employment positions and by extension economic power (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012, Ratele and Laubscher, 2010). The working class white participant from South Africa shared a view that although she was white, this

did not translate to being wealthy and she had to work for everything she had; therefore, according to her, she did not have white privilege. While economic prosperity may not have been the privilege she enjoyed, she still unknowingly was a recipient of white privilege in the form of good schools, access to a university bursary and workplace opportunities (Ratele and Laubscher, 2010).

This is in contrast to the white participant in Zimbabwe, who recognised and acknowledged that as a white person, she enjoyed privileges in the business place and in society as a whole and experienced preferential treatment over her African colleagues with customers, banks and the police on the road. I found this to be another interesting finding, especially for Zimbabwe which has been a democratic country for more than 36 years and whose entry-level workforce is the born-free generation.

White privilege is not necessarily commensurate with political power, although it is the result of those in power building a system that is aimed at benefitting white people (Kendall, 2002). Decades after political power passed into the hands of the black majority in both countries, white people still enjoy privileges (Green et al, 2007; Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012; Ratele and Laubscher, 2010). The white participants in the study all seemingly had smooth career journeys. It is worth repeating that the white Zimbabwean participant worked in her family business and perhaps a white executive in a non-family business may have yielded different results.

## **5.5 Research Objective 2**

*To explore how the authorisation processes and dynamics have impacted the career journeys of women in the study*

The second research objective sought to understand the role of authority in the career experiences of the women leaders. Authority and the ability to exercise it play a role in the success or failure story of a senior or executive leader (Coleman, 1997; Gould, 1993; Schieman et al, 2013). In this part of the study, the participants were asked questions about the highs and lows of their leadership journey and their experiences in taking up and exercising authority. The section also determined the leader's confidence levels to execute their roles and how their confidence developed over time. The extent to which the ability to exercise authority and be effective in the role is influenced by the intersections of race, gender and class was explored.

### **5.5.1 Findings in South Africa**

Overall, the women leaders in South Africa had differing experiences when it came to exercising authority. The race and ages of the people they managed played a significant part in how their authority was viewed. Gender, race and class intersected for the working class African and Indian women leaders and across class for the Coloured participants in terms of their ability to exercise authority in the workplace. The Coloured

participants found that their authority was undermined by men of all races and ages and by older women. The issues related to authority brought in a dynamic that is not covered in this study, namely intergenerational dynamics.

The ability to exercise authority was also seemingly influenced by the age at which the women leaders started to mix with other races and the positions of leadership held in the earlier years. Those who went to mixed-race schools found it easier to exercise authority and to challenge the system but those who did not were daunted by having to manage previously advantaged groups.

The following four sub-themes emerged around authority in the workplace:

- Authorisation by organisations
- Self-authorisation: A function of childhood leadership experiences
- Authorisation and de-authorisation in the workplace: An intersection of gender, race and age
- Self-confidence and authorisation: An emotional roller coaster

### **Authorisation by organisations**

I asked the participants about their experiences with authority given to them by the organisations they had or currently worked for, as well as their ability to exercise it. In some organisations, the levels of authority were clearly defined and the expectations that came with the role were built into the system and there was clarity on what was expected of them.

*“I did articles at [name supplied] in Johannesburg ..., you get given a lot of responsibility, so like in third year, you're expected to run with an audit, manage a team ... asking questions and it's expected that you're going to ask questions, it's expected that you're going not just accept things cause that's how they did the prior year working paper”*  
Lerato

In other instances, the role of exercising authority, and clarity and boundaries were not always in black and white. The different work situations and circumstances dictated that the women take charge of the situation and make things happen even if they were not necessarily given the authority to do what was needed. They took the initiative and did what was required.

*“I took the initiative to do a lot of things”*  
Beryl

*“I remember the first two weeks there, there was a crisis and for the first time I couldn't call the UK or I couldn't call the US, everyone looked at me, it was a crisis that I had to handle and as much as I was not an executive, I was a senior manager that reported into the CEO so I had to make those decisions so it was a rude awakening for me, and it came all like a flood”*  
Thembi

The findings on authority were aligned to the research on power and authority in that authority could be clearly defined with written delegations that are signed off according to the governance structures of the organisations and are given according to the position occupied in the organisation (French and Raven, 1959; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). Situations that required expert decisions were made without reference to another person in the organisation and as participants gained experience in the workplace, they were able to function independently (French and Raven, 1959).

### **Self-authorisation: A function of childhood leadership experiences**

Some of the participants, from all races and classes, indicated that exercising authority had never been an issue for them. When probed as to why they thought this was the case, they all attributed it to the fact that they had held positions of leadership, such as being a deputy head girl, school prefect, and so on, at an early age. One of the participants, Thandeka, shared how even as a young girl at play, she always ended up in charge of the game. Four of the five participants who had no problems with exercising authority in the early days of their career had gone to either private or model C schools. The two African participants who had lived in Soweto and gone to private schools were among those who had no problems with exercising authority. They shared, as part of the interview, how they had done a lot of extramural activities which included drama, public speaking and so on, and that early life exposure could have played a role in building up their confidence levels.

*“You know, you’ve heard that question, are leaders born or are they made? For me, I believe that I was born a leader because when I think about it when I was young and also when you think that I have been in a leadership position since primary school, since senior school, throughout my university life”* Thandeka

The exercising of authority was also not an issue for Zinzi (a junior manager) who went to a township school. She was the head girl of her primary school, and that early leadership role gave her the confidence to be able to self-authorise and challenge policies in the organisation.

*“Honestly, I just rewrote the rules ... If something was not working, for what I needed to get done, I would speak to the people that have the power to make that thing happen ... So this rule here is not working for me ..., If you can’t give me an answer to this thing, I’m going ahead with it.”* Zinzi

The white participants shared experiences of where they took decisions within their environments and executed without necessarily seeking permission to do so.

Joanne shared the experience of moving into a new role within the same organisation where she had worked for the last 20 years and in which she had continued to work for the same person. She later moved into the new space, assessed it and decided what needed to be done and how she would go about it. She reported into an Indian male and executed as she saw fit.

*“So when I joined, one of the key things that we needed to change was how people engage from that area with other areas, integrating them into the bigger organisation and succession because everyone that worked there believed that they were the best and no one could ever take their job or anything ... so, uh, so I drew up a plan to get them onto coaching and mentoring, it was like a 2-year cycle and we had proper support for that.” Joanne*

Deborah worked for the same organisation as Joanne for 19 years and she too could make decisions that were accepted by her manager, who was an African male.

*“I became a chartered marketer five years ago, and I actually initiated that at [name supplied] and now the majority of the team, the old team at [name supplied] became chartered marketers, I drove that with [African male boss] to try and get everyone to be a chartered marketer” Deborah*

The ability to exercise authority did not seem to be a challenge for the participants. They were able to work according to company policy guidelines and, where necessary, work outside of them, using expert knowledge guide them. They were able to initiate changes in their respective environments and to ensure that the policies and processes were changed if required.

#### **Authorisation and de-authorisation in the workplace: An intersection of race, gender and age**

I have defined de-authorisation as the non-recognition of authority as well as the withdrawal and/or undermining of the authority of a person who holds legitimate authority. The de-authorisation process in the workplace is not one that is as clearly defined and clear-cut as the process of conferring authority on individuals. The findings show that various factors can lead to leaders being de-authorised in the workplace. Relationships with subordinates can lead to de-authorisation, especially where there are race, gender or intergenerational dynamics to contend with. In the study, de-authorisation was not limited to a race or social class, nor was it always driven by gender. Race and intergenerational dynamics played a role in the experiences of the women leaders who experienced de-authorisation in their positions as leaders in the workplace.

*“having a team member who was a white male aged 50s and then there was another one also, a white female who was also advanced in age, those people it’s a bit too late for them to change their minds about how they view the world. So I, still in their eyes, form part of the world that was inferior and so their attitudes and behaviours towards me is not that of this is my leader ... It’s still that of this is a girl who’s supposed to be working in my kitchen” Zinzi*

*“But the COEs [Centres of Excellence] here, my gender and my race plays a big part because the bulk of the COEs are white” Melody*

The Coloured participant who experienced de-authorisation in the workplace on the other hand had to contend with race, intragroup and gender dynamics in her role as a leader. Race and age were factors that worked against the African woman leader. These findings demonstrate that race, gender and age do intersect in the authority roles of women leaders of different races. Intergenerational dynamics can lead to the de-authorisation of any leader and some of the women leaders in the study experienced it. The challenges of managing older subordinates were experienced by the working class African, Coloured and Indian participants. The Coloured participants of all classes experienced intergenerational dynamics with Coloured staff members. The white participants as well as the African, Coloured and Indian participants from privileged backgrounds had no similar experiences. The African female encountered resistance to her authority from her older white male subordinates. When I asked her why she thought this dynamic was specific to white males, she attributed it to the mind-sets of the past where the white male was the most privileged person in South African society.

*“In all honesty, you still get a lot of people doubting your abilities ... that see you in the light of your past, in the light of where you come from, in the light of your clan or your background. There are people who have not let go of the stereotypes and that becomes a bit challenging when you want to push forward”*  
Zinzi

A Coloured participant shared the challenge with a male of a different race:

*“My gender at first I struggled a bit cause [name supplied, African male] is a man”*  
Melody

The Indian working class participant did not specify the race of the subordinates referred to, but she also experienced challenges with older team members.

*“I had people that were twice my age that were reporting into my areas and had people who were like, who are you? you only an Indian girl and there wasn't really respect”*  
Zeenet

Two of the Coloured women talked about how being Coloured and in a position of leadership was a challenge for Coloured people, male and female. This was worse if the subordinate was an older Coloured person.

*“with [name supplied, Coloured male], my age was an issue, I'm a Coloured child, that was a big issue for [name supplied]. With the women, the [name supplied Coloured female], it did have an effect cause I'm a Coloured child coming in and I'm managing a 54 year old who's been there for years”*  
Melody

*“right these two guys in my team and they're both Coloured guys and I almost feel like because I'm Coloured as well, they have disregard for me as a professional and they feel like they can disrespect me by not delivering the*

Among the Coloured women leaders, the issues with authority were inter-race, intra-race and intergenerational and entailed undermining of their authority as woman leaders. These findings are consistent with the older worker, younger supervisor dyad (Collins et al, 2009; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989), and manifested itself as older workers being reluctant to take instructions from younger supervisors. The intergenerational challenges had little to do with the women's ability to exercise authority and more to do with the people who were resisting being managed by them. The interpersonal influences led to the women leaders being de-authorised by their followers. These influences were based on the followers' perceptions of the leader despite the fact that the leader had positional power (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). The issue of trust between a leader and her superior also played a role in the extent to which the former would be given the authority to execute in her role. Deborah shared her experiences with her new manager (a white male) in her current role:

*"I mean I'm in a situation now, where I've got a CEO trying to tell me how to do my job and I'm not doing it the way he wants to see me doing it and I'm not responding to things the way, and I'm going 'dude [thumps on table], does it matter?'"*

*Deborah*

As a leader, I could identify with the experiences of Deborah as I once went through a similar experience. When I first started working with a certain leader, he was like a helicopter, hovering over my shoulder and wanting to be involved in decisions that I was authorised to make per his delegation to me. To this day, I remember him sitting in an interview for a person that would report to me. As time went on and I gained equity for delivery, he started to let go and give me the space to lead.

Joanne shared her experiences of how her manager (an Indian male she had recently started working for) made a commitment to the group CEO without a prior discussion with her as the person expected to implement the decision. She basically had to do as she was told. This was a new experience for her, as she had previously been running things as she saw fit. This situation left her feeling unable to provide clear direction to her team as she was not given the necessary authority or guidance to get the necessary resources to deliver on the new commitment. On further probing about the situation at Joanne's workplace, it emerged that the situation had nothing to do with her personally and everything to do with where the business found itself at that particular point in time. The organisation was behind on its business targets for the year and decisions were being made at a strategic level that could not reasonably be implemented operationally. Joanne was the person responsible for the implementation of the decisions and she found the entire process

disempowering. Her opinion on the decisions being taken did not count in this case and for the first time, she experienced being told what to do without her concern about the decision being acknowledged.

*“the 20 years of telecommunications experience that we have, every time we told them this is not the wisest decision that you can make, this is how it’s going to pan out, we were told, don’t think, do what I tell you and it always panned out the way we predicted that it would”*  
Joanne

De-authorisation can be overt or subtle, deliberate or unintentional as can be seen from the experiences of the women leaders in South Africa (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). Organisations can unknowingly de-authorise leaders by not empowering them with the information that enables them to provide guidance and direction to their staff. Organisations also de-authorise people by not adequately preparing them for leadership roles and capacitating them to ensure that they are able to provide proper leadership in their new roles (Pearce, 1982; Wilson, 1970). Annelese shared her experience in her first managerial role as a young professional:

*“All of a sudden there’s all this additional responsibility and pressure of a team of people which I had never had until that stage so I think that for me was the worst time of my career”*  
Annelese

And on probing as to how she dealt with the situation:

*“I think I left the company”*  
Annelese

The de-authorisation for the white women in the study was really due to either their personal dynamics with the leader at the time or to the circumstances of the organisation at that time. In talking about the authority that they had in their career journeys, there was a feeling that they self-authorised too much due to the support that they had from their leaders. This could be the reason why Deborah struggled when she moved to a new organisation and new boss and why Joanne struggled when decisions were made without her involvement.

Sabotage is was part of conversation that I explored around the issues of de-authorisation. The women leaders in the study had either experienced or witnessed sabotage among colleagues:

*“I’ve had men sabotage me, I have men support me, I’ve had some women not supportive, lots of women be supportive”*  
Lerato

Sabotage is the one of the realities of the work life experience and is a dynamic that is related to de-authorisation by others. It is not gender specific and can be done and experienced by both men and women and at all levels of the organisation. It is usually done in a covert manner and the victim or intended victim is usually unaware of what is happening.

### **Self-confidence and authorisation: An emotional roller coaster**

The participants reported that, in their current positions, they were confident and comfortable enough to exercise authority.

*“At this point in time, am I confident? I would say yes, in most environments, I think I am happy to assert myself because it’s not about me being a female, it’s about competence. I’m comfortable in my skin. If I believe I have the skills and competence, then I feel confident to be able to assert myself in any environment.”* Noor

For some of them this was not always the case and learning to be comfortable and confident enough to exercise authority was part of the journey that they had travelled as leaders. One of them shared how she faked looking and sounding confident:

*“I had an acquired confidence”* Beryl

The confidence was learnt over time. When asked about what had led to the change from being unable to exercise authority to being confident and authoritative leaders, the majority of the participants attributed it to an ever-increasing level of experience and knowledge of themselves and their strengths and focusing on what they were good at. Being empowered and supported by a senior powerful person in the organisation (even if it was not necessarily the line manager) also led to an increased level of confidence (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

*“No I think it came with a lot of training and it does come with its own challenges. So I had to learn a lot about being confident, about being able to discipline somebody, about being able to issue instructions to somebody, it’s not something that came naturally, it was definitely something that I had to learn and actually to be confident enough to give an instruction...but I wouldn’t say that it’s something that came naturally.”* Beryl

The lack of confidence to exercise authority was not linked to a specific race or social class but was experienced by African, Coloured and Indian participants. A middle class Coloured and Indian as well as a working class Coloured and Indian admitted to having struggled to exercise authority in the early days of their leadership journey. All of the women leaders who initially struggled attributed the inability to exercise authority to their introverted natures and a preference to work alone and be responsible for their own delivery and not have to manage teams. It was interesting to note that the white participants did not struggle in terms of having the confidence to exercise authority, even though one of them talked about being an introvert.

In the preceding paragraphs, I indicated that a growth in experience and capabilities was one of the building blocks to building confidence for some of the women leaders. I then asked the participants if they had ever experienced doubt in their abilities as a leader. Nine of the twelve participants admitted to having experienced

self-doubt at some stage in their journey as a leader. The Indian and African women shared instances of self-doubt that came about because a manager or a colleague questioned a decision that they had made and the impact of such a situation on them:

*“I mean there’s a lot of instances when your confidence is brought into question but you tend to recover quickly. But when a person you’ve respected and done so much for does that to you, I think it takes a lot longer and it’s a lot deeper to come back from and I found that very hard to recover from, very hard. But I did. I did”*

Noor

*“The minute that happens, your confidence is down the drain, your self-belief is down the drain, you just start floating in the organisation, you just there to be there, you do the bare minimum and because you do not believe in yourself anymore.”*

Thandeka

The two white women leaders’ self-doubt had been experienced in recent months and was directly linked to having moved to a company whose CEO had a directive leadership style for Deborah and to recent changes in the organisational dynamics at the place where she had worked for 20 years for Joanne. The self-doubt arose as a result of different situations such as staff not buying into a leader’s visions, negative feedback about a decision taken, abilities being questioned by the team or a line manager, sabotage by colleagues and so on. Some of the situations that caused self-doubt were painful and debilitating, more so when they involved people that the woman leaders trusted and whom they thought supported them. All the participants who had experienced self-doubt suffered a loss in confidence as a result of the circumstances that had led to self-doubt. The moments of self-doubt were across race and social class.

Some of the participants shared the lessons that came out of the self-doubt experiences.

*“it made me stronger cause now I felt like I can’t fail, I was doubted and I was questioned and it was almost like predetermined that you’re going to fail at this therefore I had to succeed but not so explicitly. I just put in a lot of effort and a lot of hard work to do the best that I should do and if my best wasn’t good enough, so be and I guess that was my operating style at that point but it made me succeed I guess, so everything I did, it questioned whether I could actually do this.”*

Noor

Very closely linked to self-doubt is the impostor phenomenon which is the fear that high achievers have of “being found out” (Clance and Imes, 1978; Kets de Vries, 1990). Some of the participants shared experiences of doubting themselves all the time even within their areas of expertise. They talked about not having the courage to speak out loud in public for fear of being thought stupid and being found out. The impostor syndrome was prevalent in the African and Coloured participants, regardless of their social class.

Women leaders who had shared their journeys of hard work and achievement shared moments where they felt like frauds:

*“[laughs] because I always, think what is it that got me here. It can't be, is it solely experience and contribution that I've made to the company or is there other things that I've done in my career that also brought me here so you know like”*  
Annelese

*“Yes, absolutely all the time. So for me, it's a constant battle, it's a constant thing that I have to work on and they say fake it till you make it.”*  
Beryl

*“Yes. But you know what, I think, all the time, all the time. It's only recently that I've surprised that I'm not doubting, that's always my initial, always ... I don't know anything, that's been like my whole dialogue in my head, people are going to find out but people are like no you're doing a good thing, we trust you”*  
Lerato

Lerato was a finalist in a national award competition that was run by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in 2016. I asked her about this nomination and why she had not mentioned it in her list of career highlights. Her response both amazed and saddened me:

*“They're going to find out. Like my biggest fear is they're going to go oh no, how did we even think of her to be in this list”*  
Lerato

Self-doubt is a part of the leadership experience. Healthy self-doubt can give rise to an improved leadership experience that births thoroughness, empathy and an opportunity to take stock of oneself as a leader. An unhealthy level of self-doubt can lead to feelings of being an impostor and actually paralyse and prevent a person from being able to fulfil their mission as a leader and enjoy the journey of being a leader. The self-concept of the women leaders was consistent with the research on the impostor phenomenon (Clance and Imes, 1978; Kets de Vries, 1990). The participants were high achievers and very successful in senior leadership roles or even running their own businesses. However, when the impostor syndrome struck, they attributed their successes to factors other than the fruit of their own hard work.

A related dynamic which could be both a symptom and a product of the impostor syndrome is self-sabotage. Self-sabotage was described by the participants as having different forms, from political incorrectness in the organisation, organisational naivety, self-sacrifice in terms of putting others first (as nurturers) and just making the best personal decision even if it came at the cost of career. Self-sabotage comes when women are distracted and focus on the rats and mice instead of the elephant in terms of what is going on in the organisation. Across race and social class, there was consensus among the participants that self-sabotage did happen but it was not intentional as no one would consciously set themselves up to fail. The self-sabotage

could happen in terms of relationships within the organisation or as a result of decisions taken from a family life perspective. The participants had the following views as to whether women self-sabotage and how they do it:

*“You know what, I think we fight small fights, small battles, we don’t pick our battles very well ... That’s one thing I’ve learnt as well, when I say I’m focused on what the prize is, I know you don’t like black people but you’re going to give me what I want. And if I have to sit here and listen to you speak about the way you think black people are running our country to the dogs ..., I just sit and listen and get what I want”*

*Lerato*

*“Yes, I think it’s very possible due maybe to the nature of who we are or be, I think most women this is generalising, because we’re parents we’re mostly mothers ... when you’re a mother, you tend to put other people above yourself so you don’t think of yourself above others. I’m not saying everybody is that way but my experience of it is like that”*

*Joanne*

The opinion of another participant:

*“I suppose it could be true depending on your professional maturity. So if you’re not politically astute and you don’t understand the environment I suppose you could sabotage your career because of your naivety ... I also think that if a woman is too confident or too ambitious, you’re seen as a threat and that could also sabotage your career although you are effective and you’re delivering and you’re making the difference”*

*Annelese*

*“I don’t think sabotage is necessarily, maybe it is the right word but there could be positive and negative sabotage. Sometimes it may be that you may need to leave the corporate environment because of whatever reason like to have kids or to focus on something else in your life or whatever the case may be and your career does take, as if you sabotaged it. But then again you need to understand the reasons, so sometimes we do but in a lot of cases I don’t think that you would do it yourself. I don’t think you’re out to get yourself. I think in some way, if you’re naïve enough you could but you always have choices”*

*Noor*

Sabotage of women by women is a major issue in corporates. All the women in the study had either experienced sabotage or had been told that they were being sabotaged without being aware of it. The sabotage was predominantly across race and ran upwards, downwards and sideways. I really struggled when hearing the stories of sabotage from the women that I had worked with as some of the perceptions or realities of being sabotaged had been perpetrated by women that I had worked with and admired greatly. There were also instances of cross-firing when two women each said that they were being sabotaged by the other. In South Africa, the study showed that the sabotage was predominantly being done by white women against women of other races. There was an isolated case of intra-race sabotage among African colleagues.

*“Absolutely. I have experienced sabotage, from women in the workplace but I have particularly experienced sabotage from white women in the workplace and it was more a race thing ... Typical case of sabotage, I asked the organisation to investigate, they realized that it was pure lies and there was no substance to the case”*  
Lerato

*“Case in point, when I first started in the corporate and investment banking space ... two weeks there two, [African] ladies that had decided that they were going to hate me for absolutely no reason. It was when I started talking and mingling and socialising with the people in the department, that 3 months down the line, one of the ladies came to me and said you know what [name supplied], when I saw you for the first time, the way that you were, I just decided to hate you. I just thought you’re here to take my job and you’re here to get the attention of the bosses. You are here to be the lapdog of the boss and I just hated you ... So it’s a very common mistake that I have noticed women make”*  
Zinzi

*“I actually have. There was an instance in my corporate career now that I recollect with [name supplied] where I believe that she tried to sabotage me”*  
Noor

On being probed for the details and how she handled it:

*“It’s such a faint and distant memory and I think as much as it affected me at that moment, now that I’ve grown up, I’ve chosen to take it as a life experience”*  
Noor

Beryl also shared her experience of sabotage with her white female manager:

*“I did. As I said with [name supplied], I felt a lot ..., she’s not very nurturing, she pretends to be nurturing but she’s actually quite a backstabber and conniving, manipulative woman”*  
Beryl

On being probed if she was sabotaged by the same person:

*“I think so. It felt that way, I can’t prove it but I know for sure that was happening in the background”*  
Beryl

Sabotage is not necessarily directed at one person or limited to people who work there full time. Outsiders can be caught in the crossfire as was experienced by Deborah when she was a consultant:

*“ja, ja ... I experienced interesting female to female work energy when I was at [name supplied]. Very interesting. So the two, so I went in as a consultant and the girl I was direct report to, she and her boss didn’t get on, two women and I actually was employed by their boss. So he brought me in, white male, black female, Coloured female. And her and I, the middle person, I actually got along with her, we got on very well but she sabotaged, big time. The girl I was reporting to, she felt threatened”*  
Deborah

It is worth noting that Deborah, as a white woman, was not the target of the reported sabotage. Across race and social class, women are sabotaging and being sabotaged. They are doing it to themselves and to others. Sabotage comes at great cost to the organisation in the sense that it creates and promotes competitiveness

instead of team work and the focus moves from organisational objectives to self-aggrandisement. It also costs individuals and causes pain, resentment and ultimately dysfunctional teams. It should be addressed and confronted when it is discovered. The biggest challenge, as discussed earlier and also seen from some of the quotes, is that it is hard to prove.

### **5.5.2 Findings in Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, overall, the women leaders were comfortable and confident to exercise authority. As was previously stated, the participants were all at executive level in their respective organisations. However, they were able to share experiences related to how they got to a point of being comfortable with authority. The findings show that there was an intersection of gender, race and class on exercising authority by the Coloured participant. She shared that her background (lower-middle class and Coloured) had an effect on the way she approached and exercised authority.

*“I think the fact that I’m a woman who has come from a disadvantaged background kind of makes me more aware of what’s behind the scenes, so I look at the bigger picture rather than just the black and white. I look at the sort of grey areas and I try to understand why people work the way they do so I’m trying to understand from that point of view”* Viola

Although the women leaders in the study in Zimbabwe were all at executive level, they had struggled through their career journeys with exercising authority and self-doubt at some stage. Similar themes emerged to those in South Africa even though the participants in Zimbabwe were older and all at executive management level. The following themes emerged from the study in Zimbabwe:

- Authorisation by organisations
- Self-authorisation: A function of childhood leadership experiences
- Authorisation and de-authorisation in the workplace: An intersection of race and age
- Self-confidence and authorisation: An emotional roller coaster

#### **Authorisation by organisations**

As with the findings in South Africa, the women leaders experienced authorisation quite differently. In the early days, some of them felt overwhelmed and monitored, but with time, they were able address those situations.

*“I think as years go by and you remain in top leadership you raise and raise these issues guys you are over managing us, you are over monitoring us, you are overdoing this ... and they look at it from a growth perspective, from their point of view as well ... so as you go through the years and as they become as critical as they can, you grow and those things get more and more eliminated.”* Siphwe

The participants in Zimbabwe, as has already been mentioned, were all senior executives with some of them being the heads of their respective organisations. They now operated at a level where the deliverables were agreed upon at board or executive level and thereafter, they were given the leeway to execute as they saw fit. They were all operating within the five types of power namely positional, legitimate, expert, referent and coercive power (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

### **Self-authorisation: A function of childhood leadership experiences**

The early days and newness in a role usually resulted in a struggle to self-authorise, but once the women leaders gained experience and spent time in organisations, they found it easier to lead. The Indian and Coloured participants attributed their ability to exercise authority to their childhood experiences at home and at school.

*“I think it’s my personality. You know grade school, I think we were shaped by is that we had teachers who encouraged us to question, who encouraged us to seek answers, to healthily debate so I would to some extent but that was tempered by who you were and you were a minority so that’s the reality so I kind of had the influences of both of that coming in”*  
Beena

*“ I don’t know if anyone else feels, I think there are people who are born with leadership, I don’t know if that’s something in you or if it’s the way you were brought up but I was the eldest in my family and my parents expected me to be the leader amongst my siblings and I had such a hard lesson early in life about that so it really stuck with me”*  
Viola

The participants in the study were additionally authorised by their organisations providing the training that groomed them into positions of leadership. With training and being able to go to the workplace and implement what they had been trained, they became better leaders.

*“But the very good thing about [name supplied] at the time was that their training aspects and the way they groomed junior managers into senior leadership was excellent so we spent most of our time learning and going back to the work situation ... and you could see your progression and how you are going, how they position you and, it was just a good environment for leadership excellence and grooming”*  
Siphive

*“I’m confident now but it took a long time ... I was more lenient but I realised that as I progressed in my career, I needed to handle disciplinary issues very well ..., it has taken long but I picked up a few courses with some HR consultants on those issues so that you really are balanced but ja, it’s been a long road. Now I can handle anything”*  
Sithabile

The women leaders in Zimbabwe were authorised by their organisations through clearly delegated authorisation (French and Ragins, 1959; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). The organisations also

capacitated by preparing them for leadership roles in the early days of their careers when they were still rookie managers (Pearce, 1982; Wilson, 1970).

### **Authorisation and de-authorisation in the workplace: An intersection of race, gender and age**

The women leaders in Zimbabwe also experienced gender and intergenerational dynamics when it came to exercising their authority. This was more pronounced in the earlier days of the career journey:

*“I struggled because that industry is an elderly person kind of related industry from a back office perspective. You manage chefs that have been there for 20 years, you manage people that have been there for 20 years ... and you are new, coming out of outside”*  
Siphiwe

But one of the participants was still experiencing it in an organisation where she was an executive director:

*“And somehow again, the transition that all of us are going through is generations. I think a lot of men are now saying to themselves, this could be my own daughter”*  
Rutendo

The intergenerational dynamics were consistent with the older worker - younger-supervisor dyad that in which older workers are reluctant to be managed by people young enough to be their children and who have no or little work experience (Collins et al, 2009). One of the leaders indicated that she was still experiencing these challenges as an executive and this was a challenge from her peers.

All the women leaders in the study admitted to having seen sabotage in the workplace. Some of them had seen it across gender but it seemed to be prevalent among women. A preference for male bosses among women was cited as one of the ways in which women sabotaged each other in the workplace.

*“Ooh. [laughs] That’s an interesting issue, I have seen cattiness and I have seen bitchiness particularly in women. I’ve quite frankly also seen it in men so I wouldn’t say that it’s particular to women, I’ve seen it across all colours, men and women”*  
Beena

*“Yes I see that a lot, there’s this background that we have, most of us women our age and older that it’s easy for me to have a male boss so they’ll tend to support a male colleague more than support another woman”*  
Sithabile

The findings of women being catty and bitchy towards each other was consistent with the findings of previous research on the dynamics of how women relate to each other in the workplace (Abramson, 1975; Staines et al, 1973; Mavin, 2006).

### **Self-confidence and authorisation: An emotional roller coaster**

The African and white participants initially struggled to exercise authority but as they gained experience and grew in their respective environments, they were able to do so.

*“I was not so much comfortable, I had to learn to get into this position”*

*Rutendo*

And on being asked what she did to gain confidence:

*“I think it was just through exposure”*

*Rutendo*

Siphiwe and Sithabile shared their experiences as follows:

*“The most difficult thing was when you want to exercise authority on people who will tell you that you know what I’ve been here for 40 years, you are a young child coming out of school, surely you can’t tell us try this because we tried it already. So those kind of experiences tend to get you back to curiosity to say let me learn more, let me investigate more, let me see how other people are doing this thing, let me get this idea to be bought in ... that is how I’ve managed to go through these hurdles”*

*Simphiwe*

*“I think when I was younger I had a really hard time with that”*

*Sandra*

And when asked how she overcame the initial struggle:

*“I had a boss who said to me [name supplied] you are not their friend. She said if you want to this accomplish this ... you couldn’t be buddies anymore. It was kind of, almost lonely and the thing is there is almost a kind of difference between men and women. When you lay down the laws as women [taps on the table], they think you’re a bitch. If you lay down the laws as a man, they think you are just being stern, being strict [changes to a stern voice] being a leader but with women it’s different”*

*Sandra*

The ability of the participants to use power grew in accordance with the levels of career transition being entry into the labour market and appointment into a powerful position (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). By the time they reached executive levels, they were comfortable to exercise their authority in the workplace.

The participants in Zimbabwe also shared about having experienced moments of doubt at one stage or another in their career journey, and sometimes even now as senior executives in their respective organisations. These incidents tended to be brought about by things such as managing an area in which they were not strong, or a new position or taking the organisation into previously uncharted ground, but the self-doubt did not have adverse effects on their ability to progress or deliver.

*“Sometimes, sometimes, particularly more the discomfort when it comes to areas that I’m not very, that I know this is not my favourite area, for example finance ... Maybe that is the doubt because I consult ... but I have said look I can’t know everything, I have my own areas where I excel.”*

*Siphiwe*

*“Ja, I think initially when I just landed the position, I wasn’t full of confidence as it were because as you break new ground into this area where you are mentally perhaps prepared to know that it’s a male dominated industry, you go into it with a bit of scare, that maybe I’ll fail, maybe you know, but as you experience the office and you begin to work day to day, it all comes in neat and tidy and you say to yourself, after all there was nothing to be scared of.”*

*Rutendo*

And yet another leader:

*“Always, always. You always hope you’re doing things in the right way. With [name supplied] sometimes I hit the right note and sometimes I don’t and of course a lot rides on me making the right decision.”*

*Sandra*

One of the leaders shared that she did not self-doubt but there were instances where she would second-guess herself and consult another person.

*“[hesitant] I can second-guess myself, I can over-evaluate but once I’ve evaluated, I then do consult ... I go up, I say I’ve got this issue, what do you think? [to the Board or to a colleague that is in a similar position] but not to doubt, I actually have confidence in my ability and I think that comes from experience more than anything else”*

*Beena*

And with a competent and experienced Coloured executive came the impostor syndrome:

*“I think in a way I also am fighting inner demons and that I also constantly questions am I good enough, am I doing a good enough job, even though they said its ok, is it really ok or are they just patronising me ... sometimes I don’t really allow myself to believe that I am really worth what I am and that I am all that, I keep thinking that somehow they’re going to see that I’m a fraud”*

*Viola*

Twice during the interview, Viola talked about feeling like she was a fraud in her roles:

*“I think in a sense , I’m always my worst critic and sometimes I don’t really allow myself to believe that I am really worth what I am and that I am all that, I keep thinking that somehow they’re going to see that I’m a fraud”*

She was the only participant in Zimbabwe who specifically shared about feeling like a fraud and being found out (Clance and Imes, 1978; Clance and O’Toole; 1987; Kets de Vries, 1990). She attributed that to her childhood experiences of being questioned and then not believed about her racial background. Those experiences are discussed under research objective 3.

When asked whether they thought women sabotaged themselves in the workplace, five of the six women leaders that participated in the study were of the view that women did indeed self-sabotage. When asked how they thought this was done, the leaders' answers varied from women wanting to be treated with kid gloves and not pulling their weight in the workplace to women allowing their personal circumstances to interfere with their work and make decisions based on their personal circumstances. The fifth woman, Beena, had a slightly different view of what the others saw as self-sabotage for family circumstances and in her words she expressed it as follows:

*“do they sabotage it or do they sacrifice themselves for a partner or for a family. I don't know whether they sabotage or they sacrifice, I think often women sacrifice; I prefer to use that word. They give up a lot. If there's going to be a move, you relocate because my husband is moving, not the wife you know. If you're going to make a sacrifice on something that's going to happen on a social calendar, it's normally the woman who's going to do it not the man. I would say I would agree with that but I would rather term that they do sacrifice”*  
Beena

This sentiment was similar to the one expressed by Noor in the South Africa study, who also was of the view that women sometimes sacrificed their careers for personal reasons such as the family. The findings in Zimbabwe show that authority and the ability to exercise it is a learnt skill that comes with training and is enhanced by experience.

### **5.5.3 Comparison of findings between South Africa and Zimbabwe**

The findings in both countries show that the authorisation processes and dynamics were affected by gender, race and class for some of the participants. In both countries, the ability of the women to self-authorise was greatly influenced by childhood experiences either at home or at school. The journey to being able to exercise authority was one that started prior to entering the labour market (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

Findings in South Africa show that some of the women leaders had experienced being de-authorised either by subordinates of different races or their managers. None of the leaders in Zimbabwe had experienced that (or shared about having experienced those dynamics). This difference could be attributed to the fact that the participants in Zimbabwe were at executive level whereas those in South Africa were at both senior and executive levels. The confidence to exercise authority was in most instances, for the participants of both countries, learnt as the journey progressed and the women leaders started to gain experience in their different fields. Competence bred confidence. This growth of confidence is line with Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), who found that the accumulation of education and training (and in this case experience) as well as promotion into a powerful position were part of the journey to being able to influence power in an organisation.

Moments of doubt and the impostor syndrome were experienced by most of the participants (Clance and Imes, 1978; Clance and O#Toole, 1987; Kets de Vries, 1990). In South Africa, the white participants shared about moments of doubt but not the impostor syndrome. For them, these moments of doubt were related to the dynamics of what was going on in their organisations rather than doubt in themselves. All the South African Coloured participants experienced the impostor syndrome and questioned themselves as to how they had made it to the top of their respective professions. In Zimbabwe, it was only the Coloured participant who experienced feelings of being a fraud and being found out, but most of the other participants did have experiences of self-doubt. It was interesting that the impostor syndrome was consistent across all the Coloured participants in both countries.

In both countries, sabotage was either experienced within or across gender. While in South Africa it was predominantly experienced from white women against women of other races, in Zimbabwe, it was within the same race. The issue of self-sabotage was also acknowledged by the women leaders in both countries. The issue of the authority of the women being undermined is in line with the literature on power and authority (French and Raven, 1959; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). The sabotage for these participants took place where perceptions and stereotypes related to the woman leader (Brenner et al, 1989; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Schein 1973; 1975). Intergenerational dynamics played a role in the women being or feeling undermined (Hart, 2006; Johnson and Lopes, 2008). In South Africa, intergenerational issues were experienced with members of the opposite sex and different races, except for the experiences of the Coloured participants which were intra-race and intra-gender. With the latter, it was a typical case of the older worker, younger supervisor dyad (Collins et al, 2009). In Zimbabwe, intergenerational dynamics were experienced by an African participant in the early days of her career in a male-dominated industry, also in an older worker, younger supervisor setting (Collins et al, 2009). They continue to be experienced by another African leader who was an executive in a male-dominated industry and the only female on an Exco that had older, patriarchal males of the same race.

### **5.6 Research Objective 3**

*“To understand the internal influences (meaning the woman herself, her confidence, self-esteem, interpersonal skills etc) and their impact on the career journeys of women”*

The third research objective was to understand the impact of the personal and internal factors on the career journeys of women leaders. In order to understand the factors that shaped the women leaders in the study, it was important to understand their formative childhood experiences. I asked questions related to the

community in which the family lived as well as the family dynamics and parental roles. The age at which the participants started to mix with people of other races was also determined.

### **5.6.1 Findings in South Africa**

In South Africa, the overall picture is that participants, either in choosing their career fields or during the career journey itself, were influenced or impacted by personal and internal factors. The findings in South Africa are that the women were shaped by their childhood experiences (both good and bad). All the participants had one thing in common, regardless of race and childhood social class: they are STRONG! Without a shadow of doubt, these are strong women and their strength has been shaped by various people and circumstances along the way. Three main themes emerged from studying the personal and internal factors that influenced the career journeys of the women leaders in South Africa: (i) Childhood experiences, (ii) Navigating the workplace and (iii) Relationships in the workplace.

**Childhood Experiences:** The participants grew up in vastly different communities, and most of them spent their early childhood in single-race environments as they were born during the time of apartheid. Joanne and Deborah grew up in white suburbs and were totally oblivious to the political reality of what was happening in South Africa during their childhood years. She shared how she realised only when she was at university that what was reported by the media and the reality on the ground were not always aligned. According to Deborah, being a white South African did not automatically mean financial well-being even though it guaranteed a privileged place in society. Deborah grew up in a working class home and started working over weekends when she was still in high school. During her first year at university, she held two jobs. She worked hard to put herself in a position where she could afford whatever she wanted.

*“I worked hard, I paid my own way through varsity, I didn’t get scholarships, I didn’t go to fancy schools so for me, what I’ve done myself and I’ve worked hard for that so I think and that’s also shaped I think who I am because I do have empathy for people who have worked hard and I respect that hugely”* Deborah

Deborah’s drive to succeed was fuelled by the fact that she saw a successful career as being necessary for the lifestyle that she wanted to live. She shared that she had to pay her own way through university because her younger sister’s fees to attend a secretarial college were higher than her university fees and the family had to sacrifice, something she did not want to have to do in her adult life.

Nthabiseng and Thandeka attended private schools but lived in Soweto and had to navigate between the two extreme worlds. Poverty and financial lack was not a feature of Nthabiseng’s life; her mother was a social worker and at some point, the family lived in England. Although she followed her passion from a career perspective, she had to rely on a bursary to complete her tertiary studies.

Thandeka's family went from very being well off, enough to send their children to a private school, to living in a shack and her parents making an arrangement with the school that enabled them to continue learning there while making minimal school fee payments. Thandeka spoke of winters where she left home when it was still dark and returned home when it was dark. She shared a story of days when school events went late into the evening and she would spend the night at the home of a schoolmate as there was no way of getting home at night after the public transport had gone.

*"I think being exposed to all of the hardship, some of it, not always unpleasant but having been exposed to that drives you to say when I grow up [thumps on desk] I will make sure that my life I can take care of myself, I will have the ability to drive myself and my kids around, I will not sleep at people's houses unless I absolutely have to, I will be able to provide for myself and I will change and reverse the circumstances that I went through when I was young"*

Thandeka

The commonality that Nthabiseng and Thandeka had in going to private schools was that, due to English not being their mother tongue, their teachers encouraged them to take part in extramural activities such as drama where they could practise speaking skills. As a result, their confidence levels and their speech were greatly developed and this served them well when they entered the workplace and were required articulate issues and to make presentations.

The dynamics within the home served as a driver for success. Across race and class, the mothers of the women leaders (knowingly or unknowingly) had a strong influence on the career decisions of their daughters as well as their resilience in the workplace. Deborah saw her mother as weak and subservient to her father and she did not want to be like that. She wanted to be strong and was very focused on what she wanted to do. Being self-sufficient was very important to her (she clicked her fingers when she said this):

*"And it really came to head during my varsity days ..., I never wanted to be like my mum so I saw my mum as being weaker and I always wanted to be strong. I always said I would be self-sufficient in my life"*

Deborah

And on being asked to define what weaker looked like:

*"Weaker looked like subservient"*

Deborah

Deborah's internal narrative about her mother reminded me of my own self-narrative, which was planted and reinforced by my father from the time I was about 7 years old. He constantly said to me, "you must be able to stand on your own two feet and not be dependent on someone else". So in my own career journey, when the workplace became unbearable and I thought of giving up, those words carried me through the difficult phases.

Thandeka spoke of her mother's strength in supporting the family throughout the adversity they faced after losing their wealth and having to live in a shack in Soweto.

*“So that's why I say I don't regret that and I am very grateful for the lessons there but most important my sisters and I had an amazing mother. My mum is late [starts crying],...My mother was very strong, very strong Linda, very strong. We are strong because of my mother”* Thandeka

This was Annelese's story about her mother:

*“I think as I grew up I started seeing what was seeing what was happening in the household and I really wanted to break out of that although for me, I admired my mother a lot because I thought she was strong and she was persevering and she stayed in this abusive relationship for the sake of her children ... And also what I admired about my mother was that she changed professions. So she changed from nursing to teaching, a complete switch so she was very good at both of these professions and I think for me what I admired was the strength and the perseverance and the ability and the adaptability to change like that”* Annelese

The strength and indeed weak natures of the mothers played a role in moulding the characters of the women leaders. It helped them define what they wanted and how they wanted to be.

The driver for success differed according to social class. Zinzi, Beryl, Melody and Zeenet, who came from working class backgrounds, had an internal narrative that they needed to get out of the poverty into which they had been born. This poverty, for some time, forced them to suspend their dreams and do what was necessary to earn an income and contribute to the family finances. The social class to which their families belonged defined their choices after high school (Goldthorpe, 2016; Wright, 2003). Despite these limitations, they worked hard and made their way out of their childhood communities and social class to different environments.

*“A lot of it was driven like I said by the need to escape poverty “* Beryl

*“In Umlazi, you do not get spoon-fed anything. From a very early age, you are taught that life is not fair, that you have to fight for your dreams. You are taught to not just keep your head above water but to actually learn how to swim yourself out of a deep end for the survival ... you have two choices in Umlazi, either you choose to be alive and do well or you choose to conform and die at a very early age. So how it shaped the woman that I am is that 1) the principles of hard work is not negotiable; either you work hard or you get swallowed by the circumstances and the environment of your surroundings 2) it teaches you resilience. To have to sleep without food for 2 days is a very difficult thing ... and then the last thing that it taught me is that you have to be emotionally strong to survive anything. ... I lost 3 sisters to HIV/AIDS and it's simply for this reason ... So they gave themselves to a circumstance, a once-off trade-in rather than looking at things from a future perspective. So I learned from those errors ..., from those mistakes, from those funerals that I have to choose better, I*

*need to think how to survive, not just today or tomorrow, but I need to think about how to survive years from now. What do I do now in order for me to survive to that time”* Zinzi

The women from the working class families came from homes that for the majority consisted of women. It was therefore hard to determine the extent to which they would have been discriminated against in their homes to further their education. Another finding with regard to the women from working class backgrounds was they did not fear success once they started being successful. In fact, they craved more and more of it as it was the ticket out of poverty and a life of struggle. This is in contrast to the success neurosis experienced by the patients in the study by Holmes (2006) who found that people from poor backgrounds ended up wrecking their success in order to remain accepted by family and friends whose class did not change circumstances from childhood to adulthood.

Annelese was raised in a Coloured community but her mother was a nurse who later went into teaching. Poverty was not a feature of her life and so her narrative does not speak of needing to get out of her environment and survive. What did come out strongly was that the physical abuse she witnessed her mother go through made her want to succeed and leave her environment. The childhood environments, both positive and negative, played a role in shaping the women that formed part of the study. Most of them were driven to succeed in order to better their circumstances and in some cases to move out of those environments.

The ages at which the women leaders started interacting with other racial groups had an impact on their career experiences and their responses to race-related incidents in the workplace. The participants started mixing with other races at different points in their lives. Most of them spent their formative years living in single-race environments and interracial contact would have started at school. Joanne was the exception, in that she was mixing with people of all races for as long as she could remember and even as an adult, the example she gave of a friend was of an African woman.

*“And we, we were brought up never to see colour in my life. So I never really knew that people discriminated formally until I was a lot older and I realized, well, because we had people staying at our house from a young age and theology students for my dad that came from the Transkei to come and do some studies here at UNISA and they would come and stay with us and it was not strange to me.”* Joanne

The participants who were exposed to other races at an early age seemed to be better able to navigate the diverse environment of the workplace. This was true of the African and Coloured women whose early life included mixing with white people. They were able to engage and interact with other races but especially white people without feeling fearful or intimidated. They were able to take them on if need be. However, for

the participants who had no interaction with white people in their early years, the racial aspect of the workplace was quite daunting.

*“When it came to me actually having to integrate, it was with the other races and being exposed to that, it only started in my working career. And in your working career you’re also a bit scared cause you don’t know... you don’t really understand what you’re relating to”* Zeenet

*“It’s one of those things that we were not taught how to do when the transition happened in the country ... The people of my generation to some extent, still suffer from that kind of mentality that says you stay there and I stay here. You’re black, I’m white, I’m better, you’re not. So nobody has taught us how to bridge that gap as yet in the corporate”* Zinzi

**Navigating the workplace:** The women leaders who were exposed to the workplace at an early age (working over weekends, school holidays) had varying experiences when they entered corporate life. The white working class participant did not experience any issues with orientation and conduct in the workplace as she had been working in professional environments throughout university. The middle class Indian participant did not seem to indicate any challenges in this regard either, even though her parents were self-employed and she had not been exposed to a professional work environment prior to her first job (she had worked in a shop that sold music in her teen years). This was also the case with participants from other races whose parents were professionals. The Coloured and Indian working class participants struggled with orientation and conduct and even dress code in their first jobs. They had no one to show them the ropes at home and at work.

*“I got that job as a Girl Friday but the thing is I dressed inappropriately. I remember that very clearly cause it was so embarrassing for me so I would go in little shorts, cork shoes, high cork shoes, sleeveless”* Melody

*“Strangely enough when I went into the working environment like [name supplied], I used to dress up like a street little girl that didn’t know that corporate dress code is ... so [name supplied] had a certain dress code, you had to learn all of these things”* Zeenet

The ability to settle in the workplace seems to have been more a function of class than it was of race, except for the white working class participant. This anomaly could be attributed to the fact that she started doing part-time work in professional environments and was therefore exposed to the conduct that is expected in a formal work environment.

Women in top positions are often portrayed as hard and unemotional. The reverse is closer to the truth. They are human, they feel pain and they pay the price of being at the top with physical and emotional health. Across race and class, they have to find ways of coping with the pressures of the workplace. The women

leaders in the study talked of burnout, emotional breakdowns and having to leave organisations because of the psychological trauma that comes with organisational politics. One of the women that I interviewed left the organisation because she questioned executives. She did not talk about the details of that experience but she spoke of the pain of being forced out of an organisation. It was difficult not to ask about that part of her career story because I know about it but it was something that she chose not to dwell on in this interview. There is an opportunity to carry out a study of women who have been successful in their careers but have been forced out of organisations due to politics and refusing to conform and how they move on from those experiences. The participants used different methods to handle the work place pressures.

*“I used to like have lots of dinners with a friend of mine who’s very senior at [name supplied] and we often used to, it was like our [makes collapsing sound] look after each other club, our commiseration club, it helps”*  
Deborah

*“A lot, a lot. As I say being given a task, I remember when I first moved into marketing, it was the very first time that I went to a psychologist, because I couldn’t fit into the department, I was like sidelined ... there, I would feel like such an outcast and I just found a way, secretly went to a psychologist without anyone knowing”*  
Thembi

*“So during these 3 years and especially the past 2 years with the strike, the ridiculous target that we had to meet, I think that I burned out my body, emotionally because of the drain that we had ... It was as if the last 6 months of being at [name supplied], I continuously had the feeling of not being on purpose anymore ... the emotional strain ... always feeling that somebody if they could axe you, they will and the pressure of having to help the organisation to achieve the targets with very slim operational support meant I didn’t sleep at night, I worked excessive hours and in the end, my body packed up ... I started getting sick and I felt as if I had the flu or something and so I went to the doctor and I explained the symptoms and he told me you have burn out”*  
Joanne

In some instances, the career success came at a personal cost, which is not often talked about. The women who talked about the coping mechanisms (Deborah and Thembi) also mentioned that they sought support outside of the workplace. Thembi mentioned “secretly” seeing a psychologist while Deborah had a friend from outside the workplace as her “commiseration club”. Evidently the participants did not feel that they could be open about what they were going through in the organisation. This could have been a response to the pressure that career women have, of looking and acting like they have it all together all the time and not being able to admit that sometimes, they need help.

I asked the women leaders to share the highlights and lowlights which they had faced in their career journeys. The participants acknowledged that the journey included both successes and failures. The career highlights varied from individual to individual but by far, the one that was cited the most was career exposure and

experience and the related promotions that the women gained over the years. The participants were not oblivious to the fact that some of the exposure they had was directly related to their gender and their race. However, they were able to see themselves grow as professionals and to acknowledge and embrace this growth. Success of projects and ideas that were conceptualised by the participants came a close second to career exposure as a career highlight.

The challenges also differed from individual to individual but the most common ones were having to deal with team and organisational politics, getting work exposure and actually fighting to ensure that they got the right training to build their competencies (for the African, Coloured and Indian participants). Another common challenge was getting respect as a leader (from the team and colleagues) and also respect for the function that they ran. Thandeka gave an example of how, as head of marketing, she had to fight for sufficient time to be allowed on Exco because marketing is seen as a “soft and fluffy” function.

Managing people during a time of uncertainty and when the organisation could not clearly articulate its mandate led to the burnout of one of the participants in the study and she was actually in the middle of separation discussions with her employer when I went to interview her. The participants all tried to learn lessons from their workplace experiences and used them to build on their career journeys. The two key lessons from the negative experiences were that firstly, they were character building blocks which enabled them to know what mattered to them from a values perspective. Secondly, they needed to focus on priorities and not on the perceptions that people had of them as an African professional without actually having worked with them and knowing what they were capable of.

*“You know what, I learnt that the most important thing that holds me now in business is that, because I still do business with people who just see a black girl, I have to be partnered with, I was partnered by a client with a white company they had given the work to but they demanded that they work with [name supplied] so he had to work with me. Before he even met me, he was like she probably doesn’t even have the qualification, he knew nothing about me, so I still deal with that but I get less emotional about it now whereas when I was still working for corporate so the biggest lesson I would say is to focus on the prize, focus on the prize. I’m less distracted by people’s bias, racist outlook, I can’t help how he sees me, I just focus on my priorities”* Lerato

**Relationships in the workplace:** As mentioned previously, once in the workplace, the childhood social class of the white participants did not seem to matter in terms of interactions. What seemed to have a greater impact were the race dynamics for African and Coloured women with white colleagues. No deep and meaningful relationships across race, with either gender, were formed. The participants reported being able to form professional relationships that were based on what was needed for delivery in the workplace, but

indicated that these were not close relationships where the participants felt safe and protected, and they did not extend beyond the workplace.

*“It has not been easy at all for me personally. As I speak right now, I don’t have friends of other races. I don’t have people that I can say are close to me, that I have formed bonds and relationships with. I have acquaintances, I have colleagues with whom we have respect for one another in terms of professional levels”*

Zinzi

The African women, regardless of their early interracial contact, did not have close and meaningful relations across race in the workplace. The relationships were purely cordial and sometimes, tense professional relationships.

*“Forming relationships is very easy, the question is the authenticity of those relationships”*

Thandeka

*“It has not been easy. Not at all ... “Both across race and gender. Let’s say across race, gender fine, gender fine but race not so easy. It just, because we clash ... What we clashed on was work input, actually I probably think I clashed the most with Indian women in terms of input, in terms of work, in terms of who does what. We just clash because I found that people always wanted to put me down and it just, I’m not that kind of person and similarly with white men, putting me down, so creating relationships, but among black colleagues fine. Generally fine”*

Lerato

Another participant shared how she conveyed how she expected to be treated in the workplace:

*“Any company that I’ve worked in they do know that the one thing I’m very intolerant of is inequality so the minute you make me feel inferior, I get very upset, I don’t tolerate it. I remember when I was a secretary ... I can’t remember what he asked me to do and I just lost it. And I remember saying to him, screaming at him in the passage, saying don’t talk to me like that, I’m not your maid. So I’ve always been very sensitive to being treated inferior cause it’s not something and I always say that openly to my white colleagues to say, that’s where I come from and I don’t understand why people need to treat others”*

Thembi

*“Not close. I would say, where I can trust somebody and know that they have my back and so on, not really”*

Beryl

*“I think the simple answer is fairly easily as long as both parties are open to having that sort of relationship. It could prove to be a bit more difficult if the other party is more closed off and that could be for various reasons. They could be closed off because it’s their nature, they’re introverted, it could be because of where you’ve come from or it could simply be that they’re too damn arrogant and they simply don’t want to. Again you have to deal with each one on the home front. Again the difficult one for me would be if they are arrogant and they think they are better than the rest”*

Noor

The white women in the study did not seem to have a problem forming relationships, but again these seemed to be professional and not close relationships that could spill outside the workplace.

*“I personally never found it difficult to build relations across race, class, gender or anything but in the last year or so, I realized, because I mean, when I sat on the Exco we used to be three women. One lady for business risk [name supplied], and the Foundation lady, I can’t remember her name and then it was me.”* Joanne

It was interesting that Joanne could not remember the name of the other woman from Foundation. When I checked on the company website that that woman was, I found it was an African. So the reference to ease of forming relationships across race could be a perception. Having said that, when talking about success definition for different races, Joanne made mention of her friend who was an African as the comparison as to why success cannot be defined through race. Deborah, too, answered very blithely as to the ease with which she was able to form relationships across race, but further probing revealed that, again, these were at a superficial level and she saw herself as an island where other women at the same level were concerned:

*“Easy ... I found, as I’ve progressed and moved through the ranks, I’ve found it more difficult cause I think being in a senior role, it’s hard, it’s really hard. You can’t, especially as a woman, you generally don’t have a lot of peers working at the same level as you”* Deborah

I found this to be quite an interesting remark on her part because at some point she and I worked for the same organisation, at the same level, and there were at least eight women who were at that level, so there certainly was not a lack of women with whom she could interact and form close relationships if she had wanted to. The findings of the study in terms of relationships across race and gender would suggest that there were racial and gender silos where the women were concerned. Sisterhood across race was not their experience. This is consistent with the findings of Dlamini (2013) that in the South African workplace, there is no sisterhood across race. It also further confirms research that the notion of solidarity across gender being harder to achieve for women than would seem at face value (Mavin, 2006; 2008; Jogulu and Vijayasighnam, 2015).

The workplace relationships did impact the career experiences and sometimes the career progression in both positive and negative ways. The experiences of the women leaders differed from individual to individual. The white women benefitted from the relationships in the workplace and had career sponsors (males) who positioned them well. Social class did not matter.

*“If I am trying not to be naïve about it ... I do think that I had a lot of depth of experience and exposure because I was connected to the right people. I would be silly if I did not think that was not the case, I would really be ignorant if I think that is not the case”* Joanne

Speaking of her recent promotion, though, she had this to say:

*“So I don’t think the GM move was because I knew someone. Whether he allowed me to do things my way or to do things, but that was just his style, it would be wrong to think, I think because they knew who I was and*

*what I could do, they allowed, he allowed, he would have allowed me more freedom in the role than if it was somebody he wasn't as close to from a how many years we've worked together type of scenario"* Joanne

Two Coloured women also spoke of positive experiences from their relationship within the organisations for which they had worked. The positive impact on the career depended on who was aligned with whom in the organisation. Melody shared how her workplace relationships with senior people in the workplace worked to her advantage and how she leveraged on relationships to get people to act:

*"At [name supplied], I was very selective about which relationships I work on because I knew there's already this stigma around me, so, [name supplied] ... was my coach ... And she can sell you and she can influence [name supplied, her boss] ... with the rest, I didn't bother. I think it's because as well, I knew that I had [name supplied] backing, so I don't freaking need you... And if you want to mess with me, I'll tell [name supplied] and [name supplied] will send you an email cause [the senior people] all did. I would go and tell them, [name supplied] wants to do this and you're saying no. ok [name supplied], they say no and then they'll do it"*  
Melody

The workplace relationships with kingmakers resulted in work exposure and visibility within the organisation. The alignment with powerful or influential people was important in getting decisions made and things done. The relationships were not always positive and also led to negative career experiences where trust and respect from colleagues were an issue. Some of the negative relationships were career limiting. Melody, quoted above, had a very good relationship with a kingmaker who gave her a great deal of support but he was not her boss. Her career sponsor and her boss did not have a good relationship, neither did she have a good relationship with her boss and she ultimately left the organisation because of that – a decision she continued to regret even four years after leaving the organisation. The impact of negative relations was reported by the African, Coloured and Indian women leaders.

*"It varies according to who it is. Generally when I think about the people I still speak to, they aren't that many to be honest from previous places of employment, ja it was very difficult for me to leave those places on a positive note so it's been difficult to maintain kind of relationships with people that I don't have the same values with, I don't share the same values with but there have been some that we connected when we worked together and we keep in touch so it's kind of mixed."*  
Lerato

*"Sometimes positively, sometimes negatively like white women I really don't trust and that has impacted me a lot because I tend to be a little more guarded around them and I don't trust them very easily. I find males are easier to trust, even white males, cause they'll give to you like you get but I think you should take that on a case by case basis, I don't think you can generalise but if you have to generalise I think white women in general I find less trustworthy"*  
Beryl

*“So at [name supplied] bank currently I think my progression is being hampered because I don’t have a very good relationship with my colleague right now. He’s a bully and the environment is tolerant of his behaviour and so when you highlight those issues it’s almost like you are whingeing. In fact, I found myself over the past two years being threatened about promotions that wouldn’t transpire because I don’t have a working relationship with this individual and so I think maybe if that relationship was different and there was some professional relationship between the two of us that progression probably could be a bit smoother and a bit quicker as well.” Annelese (with hopelessness and despair in her voice)*

The findings of the study in South Africa show that workplace relationships and networks really do matter and play a role in the career journey (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). Relationships with peers and decision-makers seemed to be the more important ones as they helped to get things done or to be visible during times of career progression conversations (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989) I am inclined to conclude that, after a certain level in the organisation, relationships play as much of a role as competence in navigating the workplace.

### **5.6.2. Findings in Zimbabwe**

Similar to the participants in South Africa, the women leaders in Zimbabwe were shaped by their formative experiences as well as what they observed and were told. These factors affected decisions around career and staying in the workplace no matter what. Three themes emerged from the study of the influence of personal and internal factors on the career journeys of women in Zimbabwe. The women in the Zimbabwe study came from middle class backgrounds and therefore did not experience the kind of adversity that comes with poverty. Consequently, they did not have to work from an early age and their options after high school were not negated by the economic status of the family. None of the women leaders in Zimbabwe spoke of work experiences that required them to find means of coping with work-related stress outside of the work environment. The themes that emerged were: (i) Childhood experiences, (ii) Navigating the workplace, and (iii) Relationships in the workplace.

**Childhood Experiences:** As was the case with South Africa, the participants came from different communities. They were all raised in urban settings except one who initially lived in an urban and then a rural setting. They came mostly from single-race communities as they grew up during the period of racial segregation in Zimbabwe. Sandra initially went to a mixed-race government school as she started her school life at the time of independence and her parents did not believe in the racist policies of the government of the time. Her parents moved her to a private school when the sizes of the classes in government schools became very big and her father, who was a teacher, was of the view that this was not conducive to learning. Viola also went to a private Catholic-run school as it was the only school that would accept African, Coloured and

Indian children. Her siblings were white-looking and could get into the government Group A schools, which were for whites only and were similar to the Model C schools in South Africa.

Beena lived in an Indian/Coloured community and went to schools that were for those race groups. The African participants also lived in single-race communities and went to single-race schools. The participants were aware of what was happening politically in the country and the implications for them. Where they came from was not a strong driver in the decisions that they made about their futures due to the economic statuses of their families, which in Zimbabwe had a strong internal influence. The direct and indirect roles and encouragement of the mothers in shaping the career choices of their daughters were also factors for the women leaders in Zimbabwe. The role of the mother differed for each participant. Viola's mother was totally dependent on her father for everything and Viola felt this had an impact on the financial status of the family and that it put tremendous strain on her father as the sole breadwinner. As a result, she made a decision that she would be a working mother and assist her husband financially.

*“We weren't very wealthy, he was a basically a civil servant ... My mother was a stay-at-home mum so it was just his income alone through rough times, good times whatever”* Viola

Rutendo shared how her father died when she was young and that her mother placed on her the burden of excelling so that she could assist the family financially.

*“With my mother, I think it was more of the conversations after my dad had passed on that I remember, that she would say to me you know I am looking up to you to help me raise this family to take us forward ... she would say to me that you are headed for a good future if you remain like focused and the family will depend on you so it's like, she would say as a family we are really banking on you to take us forward”* Rutendo

Beena's mother was much younger than her father and became the breadwinner after her father suffered a stroke. As a result, Beena started working as soon as she finished school and her parents encouraged her to follow whatever career path she chose. Watching their mothers and hearing what they had to say had an impact on the decisions of the participants both from the perspectives of choosing and remaining focused on the career journeys. The mothers of the women leaders in the study were not prescriptive in what their daughters should do, but they had an influence on the decisions they made in terms of being financially independent. Viola and Sandra started mixing with people of other races from a young age and had parents who mixed with people of different races. Each of them shared stories of friends whom they had met early in life who were of different races and were still a part of their lives. Viola also shared the experiences she had

as a “white-looking” Coloured girl in social gatherings with children from her school and how she was racially classified as follows:

*“In Neverland to be honest. People that came to our house took us as we were and they were fine with it but I would find going to school, I would go to a birthday party and I would be in an awkward position from the parents in the lounge. I would be called into the lounge by the parents to say, what are you, and when you ask a child at primary school what are you, at first you’re thinking you don’t know what they’re asking you and after a while, I just caught on that they wanted to know about race and it was so humiliating I have to say to be asked that and have to say in front of all these quizzy mums and have to say what am I and finding an answer that I felt was truthful because I kind of had the sense that if I say I’m white, they’d think well really, that’s stretching it and if I say I’m Coloured, not acceptable either so it was always me being this person that was in this grey area, I didn’t quite belong”*

*Viola*

The lack of interaction with other racial groups during childhood years did not seem to have impacted on the ability of the women leaders to navigate the workspace. In a previous section, I shared how Sithabile challenged the race-based pay practices of her previous employers quite early in her career. She also shared how, prior to joining the organisation in question, she had worked in a racially diverse environment and was therefore quite comfortable around people of other races by the time the incidents related to unequal pay among the different races occurred. Beena, as previously shared, also experienced racism in her career but did not fight it. As I was reflecting on the different reactions of these two women to racist practices in the workplace, I concluded that they must be related to their personalities. Beena was very quiet but authoritative in her manner whereas Sithabile’s voice and presence could not be missed. Rutendo did not interact with other races at all at school and in her work, as she was in environments that were predominantly single race. Her extent of interaction with white people was limited to consultants from Canada when she first started working for her current employer shortly after completing her bachelor’s degree. Sipiwe did her tertiary studies at the University of Cape Town in South Africa and that was when she started interacting with white people. She repeatedly stated that in her workplace interactions, she did not find race to be an issue.

**Navigating the workplace:** The highlights and challenges of these women leaders were as varied as their career journeys. For the majority of the women, the biggest career highlights were the transformations they were able to bring to their organisations, turning them from struggling businesses into profitable organisations. The appointment of a woman leader into the position of managing director for a company that was struggling was in line with glass cliff appointment which saw women being appointed to lead organisations that were in crisis (Haslam and Ryan, 2008; Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Ryan, Haslan and

Hersby, 2011). Career growth in terms of promotions also ranked high among the career highlights. The biggest challenge by far cited by four of the women leaders was working in male-dominated industries and making their mark as professionals. Another challenge cited was matching experts in an area that was not their strength. From the positives and the challenges faced in the career journey, the women leaders learnt some important lessons. The main lessons were that hard work pays and having a “hard worker” brand would always speak for them even in their absence. Staying on top of their game and being an expert in their area was another lesson learnt by one of the participants. One of the participants talked about facing the challenges and looking for the opportunity in them and from three of the women leaders the lesson was: don’t give up!

**Relationships in the workplace:** Four women leaders (two of them African marketers), the white and the Indian participant found it easy to form relationships across race and gender but the third African leader did not find it easy to do so.

*“I would still repeat that from a race perspective, in Zimbabwe particularly, it is a non-event ... From a gender, as I have mentioned still remains a challenge. But once you are within and have been accepted, I have found that it’s easy to move across and be accepted easily ... So I’ve found not as challenging”*  
Siphiwe

*“I think the career that I chose makes it easy for me because I think one of my successes in life is building relationships and this is what marketing is all about these days. So it then makes it easy for me to relate to colleagues to create those social relationships in the work set up”*  
Rutendo

*“We were a strong team in one of the businesses that I worked for and we actually did form some very strong bonds which we still have today. We’re not working together anymore but we still have strong bonds ... You’re not going to make friends with everybody that’s in your organisation, some people are just not going to fit your taste profile in terms of your social commonalities, you know, interests, whatever it is”*  
Beena

The exception:

*“Not easy. You need to be open-minded that some will accept, some won’t take too much offence ... For me it wasn’t easy but I didn’t take it too badly”*  
Sithabile

The Coloured participant got on well with her colleagues but preferred to separate work and social contact except for things like weddings and funerals.

*“I’ve separated; I’ve definitely got a distinction. In the workplace, I think I get on well with people and I haven’t really had too much trouble but I don’t take those friendships home.”* Viola

The interesting finding for me in this section was that, of the Zimbabwean participants, Sithabile was the youngest and had worked in the most racially diverse environments. I wondered whether it was the racial experiences or the environments in which she had worked that made cross-race relationships a challenge. The relationships at work did and continue to affect the career experiences and progression of the women leaders, both positively and negatively (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). The negative experiences were predominantly related to gender in male-dominated environments, race and intergenerational dynamics for the participants who entered the workplace in the early 1980s.

*“I’ve, like I keep relating to this male-dominated set up. In a way I think it kills your zeal to a certain point until you grow out of it and say no, I shouldn’t allow this to happen to me, I can’t be constrained because of this”* Rutendo

*“Remember growing up in a Coloured/Asian community, I didn’t have much exposure to both white or black and I found that initially going into a business environment, the older black gentlemen, this is a bit of reverse racism going on here, is where they think twice about a female leader.”* Beena

The experiences of some of the women leaders in Zimbabwe seemed to also be related to the gender stereotypes and the “think manager – think male phenomenon (Braun et al, 2017; Catalyst, 2007; Schein 1973; 1975). They were aligned to the research in that women faced bias in the workplace and struggled to be accepted as leaders in their respective organisations.

The positive experiences came from having managers who were mentors with very good people skills and in some instances father figures. The participants were able to leverage on those relationships for references and future business.

*“I would say my MD has probably mentored me, they do, they shape you. I remember one with such a high level of integrity and a sense of right you know and that’s always influenced me that particular, it had affinity with my upbringing as well so I respected him for that ... I had another leader who’s exceptionally entrepreneurial, really sees business opportunities everywhere, may not be the best human motivator and you learn that from him, so you learn different things from different people.”* Beena

*“I think for the most part its being quite positive I reported to [name supplied] for many years before he became CEO and after he became CEO I got to report to him again. He was just lovely ... and he just took such a fatherly interest in me ... but he was so fatherly and genuinely concerned about me so after that I called him dad and he was granddad to my son.”* Viola

None of the participants in Zimbabwe mentioned having career sponsors or establishing workplace relationships that led to workplace opportunities and career exposure. They did, however, talk about being mentored and supported, but not about those relationships opening career doors. The fact that the women leaders were being mentored and supported by their managers, who in some instances were managing directors meant that they had access to senior employees who could mentor them as well as aid in advancing their careers (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Elsesser and Peplau, 2006).

**5.6.3 Comparison of findings between South Africa and Zimbabwe:** Three themes emerged from the study in South Africa, with nine sub-themes. There were also three themes from the study in Zimbabwe, with six sub-themes. The three themes that did not emerge in the Zimbabwe study were as follows:

- Poverty as a childhood experience that drove an internal desire to succeed did not form part of the findings in Zimbabwe. Strength from adversity was peculiar to the working class participants from South Africa. Poverty was an influence of post-school options and served as a driver to succeed and break free from the cycle. The participants from Zimbabwe came from middle class backgrounds and though finances played a role in the decisions they made and options they had, family circumstances did not limit them to the extent of tertiary education not being an option and the need to work to help support the family.
- The early working experiences, which were also related to social class and the need to earn money from a school-going age, were not present in the study results from Zimbabwe. In South Africa, the exception to the link between childhood working class and working after school was Noor who, although she came from a middle class background, was sent to work during the school holidays as a means of preventing her from spending too much time with boys from her neighbourhood once she reached her teenage years.
- Coping mechanisms did not play a role in the career experiences of the Zimbabwean women leaders in the study. This could be due to the pace of life in Zimbabwe where it is slower than in South Africa and there is time to try and find a work-life balance. It could also be that the women leaders in Zimbabwe chose to leave it out of their stories.

In both countries, the early childhood years were spent in single-race environments and for some, racial integration started at primary school and for others in the workplace. In both countries, there was a white participant who integrated racially from a very young age and that influenced their ability to form friendships across race. These early racial experiences were linked to having parents who mixed with other races even when the government policies of the respective countries forbade such association.

In both countries, the participants shared the influence of family dynamics on the decisions that they made as adults and how those memories and experiences were drivers to succeed and influencers not to give up. I found it very interesting that in both countries, there was hardly any mention of the fathers playing a role or a significant role in guiding the choices and decisions made by the women leaders. I wonder whether the fathers were talking to the boys and leaving the mothers to talk to the girls or whether the fathers did not see the need. This really made me realise and appreciate the fact that my father was in a class of his own when it came to encouraging his girls to become professional women.

### 5.7 Research Objective 4

*“To explore the systemic factors and their impact on or contribution to the career journeys of women”*

The fourth objective of the study was to explore the systemic influences and their impact on and/or contribution to the career journeys of the women leaders. Initially this chapter would have focused only on the formal systemic influences. However, the data suggested that women were affected by the formal system influences as well as the underlying cultural nuances in the workplace, those things that were not formal policy and that no one spoke about in public but they were there and they mattered. All the women experienced these influences regardless of race and social class and I therefore decided to include them in the study.

#### 5.7.1 Findings in South Africa

Overall, the study showed that in South Africa, the informal factors had a greater influence than the formal systemic ones on the career journeys of the women. Four sub-themes emerged:

- The “written stuff”
- Training and development
- Alliances and cliques
- Gender politics of male leaders and colleagues

**The “written stuff”:** Most of the organisations where the women worked had policies on equal opportunity and putting their people first, but they did very little to create workplaces that supported the written policies and values that they seemed to be advocating. Flexi-time or the lack thereof impacted the career journeys of women, especially once they started having children. There was an overwhelming agreement among the women that flexi-time was extremely valuable in helping them to balance being career women together with being wives and mothers. None of the organisations for which the participants had worked offered flexi-time or telecommuting options, even though technology has enabled the creation of virtual offices and work

teams. Flexi-time was usually an informal arrangement with the manager and dependent to a great extent on the manager-employee relationship (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

**Training and development:** The extent to which organisations invested in training and developing their staff members helped with the professional growth of the women leaders in the study.

*“At [name supplied] we were fortunate through the years to always have life coaching but from a senior manager onwards, I’ve always had the privilege of having good training courses put together by external organisations about who you are, how can you grow yourself, what’s your strengths, what’s your blind spot, how do you work on it”*  
Joanne

The training and development helped the women leaders to understand themselves and their strengths and to work on improving their areas of weakness. The training also helped them understand their teams and be able to lead people according to their strengths and to get the most out of their staff.

### **Alliances and cliques**

There were far more informal influences that the women leaders felt impacted their careers than there were formal ones. The behaviours of men in the workplace created cultures that impacted on the career journeys of the women. There were the powerbases and internal networks that created opportunities for those (men and women) who aligned themselves accordingly. Stereotypical statements and comments about women in the workplace further served to reinforce the traditional gender roles.

*“And then the other thing, I think it’s all of those subtle under tones that males , like you make the coffee, those subtle, you take the minutes and that kind of thing”*  
Beryl

Beryl expanded on her views as to how the organisational dynamics affect and impact the career experiences of women:

*“I don’t know it’s not the formal constructs, maybe I don’t know if that’s the right word, processes and such in an organisation that attributes to either your success or failure it’s all of the sub-cultures, the underlying networks, all of the underlying undercurrents that’s not so tangible that hinders your progression.”*  
Beryl

Another participant shared her insights on the issue of alliances and cliques:

*“It’s important to understand who has history with who and how that is intertwined in relationships and support as far as that boys club is concerned and I suppose it is also important to understand how that plays out in terms of loyalty to that organisation ... In [name supplied] case, it was probably very important because a lot of those gentlemen were founding members of that organisation so they had a high level of loyalty for that organisation and would protect it at all costs because of that ... So who are the strong players in the organisation, how are*

*they aligned to one another, what does that mean in terms of their historical relationship and how they have assisted one another to get to where they are today cause obviously that all boils down to loyalty and a track record and you're going to protect that at all costs because of that affiliation that has been built up."*

*Annelese*

Beryl and Annelese were talking about their experiences with cliques and alliances at the same organisation and this confirmed that, at least for that organisation, they were real. The alliances and cliques in the workplace are not formalised but they do exist and are an important part of how the system works (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). Emotional intelligence is required to identify and align with the important cliques in the workplace. Ignoring the networks is at a person's own peril and can lead to career suicide as these alliances and cliques play a major role in career advancement. The women found that power politics between cliques in the organisation created a working environment that had staff members being treated in one way or another depending on which clique they were perceived to be a part of. Melody shared her experience of not being part of her boss's inner circle:

*"So there, [name supplied] was my block. [He] could have treated me the same he treated the [name supplied], the Brat pack, he made it very clear that I am not one of his, not at all. I was a total, I was out of it, I was a total outcast."*

*Melody*

Another unspoken rule in the workplace is the need to have an influential sponsor in the organisation (who is aligned with the right clique), without which one's effectiveness in the organisation is minimal (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Elsesser and Peplau, 2006). I asked the participants what their thoughts were with regard to race being an important part of being effective in an organisation, and whether it was part of the "unspoken." Most of the participants were of the view that race affected their effectiveness as a leader to a great extent and that being white worked in a person's favour (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012) even though it did not necessarily translate to being effective. Race provided a head start and opportunities but effectiveness required competence and confidence. Leadership effectiveness required support, a sponsor at a senior level, and this generally impacted the effectiveness of black people as leaders.

*"It's huge because you can't be effective if you don't have support, you know what I mean, if you don't have, I have an aunt who likes to call it a sponsor at a senior level. Black people we don't have sponsors, very few of us have sponsors. So it's very difficult."*

*Lerato*

The organisations that the participants had worked for did not have formal mentoring programmes and unless an employee had been exposed in some way to the need for mentors and career sponsors, the women had to work out how to manoeuvre without a sponsor.

One of the white participants was of the view that this perception of race being a determinant of effectiveness as a leader was a result of tainted eyes and not recognising the ability of a person.

*“I don’t think it affects it, other than where you have racism, underlying racism, I think that can impact. However, I look at, I have huge respect for the likes of [African man, name supplied], I don’t care, he’s amazing and I see him and I always see them as the dream team, him and [white man, name supplied] was just incredible as well, like I see them both as exactly the same, hugely successful men, it doesn’t matter what race they are, I see them as the same ... but if you are tainted, if you look at the work world through tainted eyes or negative eyes, you are going to see it differently and then you are going to say he only got into that role because he’s black. And he most certainly didn’t and he drove the company for many years and very successfully, not because he was black, because he was a good leader. Till this day, I still rate him as one of the best leaders, amazing man.”*

*Joanne*

When asked about the role played by gender in the effectiveness of women as leaders, the majority of the participants were of the view that gender plays a role (to a great extent) in the effectiveness of women as leaders in corporates. Some of the reasons given are the need for a sponsor, competence and confidence and the lens that people use when looking at a woman leader. Gender stereotypes (one of the unspoken) were cited as one of the reasons that impacted leadership effectiveness and blocked women in the workplace.

*“A male, it will look like a male is always delivering, they don’t always get questioned, and they know how to delegate without feeling guilty. They will gladly, this is my perception; they will gladly take the credit for something they haven’t done. I had a female executive in [name supplied] that I supported and she struggled at every turn, she would be blocked with a male Indian guy [bangs on desk] and she was a high flyer. She would be blocked.”*

*Melody*

The reality of the experiences of the participants was that preference was given to men and black, mainly African women remained marginalised, even with transformation on the national agenda (Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike 2012). They were hardly ever given strategic roles and race came before competence. For black women, race and gender affected their effectiveness as leaders.

*“That kind of question, for me personally, I cannot look at it silo-ed, from the perspective of an organisation but I have to look at it from a country perspective. We’re functioning in a country that is still recovering from a lot of scars, from the past. It will take time because this whole system that we are operating in is a system that oppresses certain people because of certain traits that they have is still there. So in as much as they are programmes that have now been designed and introduced to organisations to help people of my race and my gender and my social class to progress, at a much faster pace, it’s still not effective because those kind of interventions have not been institutionalised as yet. So that is the challenge at the moment, that as a black young woman, whose potential is not yet fully been explored, and exploited because of my background where I was*

*forbidden to be educated because my family was poor, I had to get into the working environment. There is nothing in the system as yet and if I'm talking system, I am talking about the organisations which then lead to the government which then lead to the entire country as a whole, the governance of the entire country, the system does not yet accommodate that kind of situation."*

*Zinzi*

It was hardly surprising that gender stereotypes came out of the data. Previous research has repeatedly shown that gender stereotypes are a big challenge faced by women in the workplace globally (Braun et al, 2017; Catalyst, 2007; Schein, 1973; 1975).

### **Gender politics of male leaders and colleagues**

The quality of the male leadership, at any point in time, as well as their own internal narratives about women impacted the career journeys of the women leaders. One of the participants shared the experience of having a managing director who came from the Middle East. She shared how it was almost as if he did not know what to do with the women in his leadership team during meetings. The women in his team felt totally unvalued and frustrated with being treated as if they did not exist

*"I think [female, name supplied] has got a lot of positive value to add, and if [name supplied] talks, the input she gives is always worth listening to. I think they humoured her. My experience of sitting at Exco was like you, know we didn't really want to hear what you wanted to say, make it go away and Foundation is such a nice thing role that they undermined it, it's such a nice portfolio to take care of, not it is the face of [organisation, name supplied] and has such an important role of how people perceive us in the industry and the person playing that role should really be a face for [name supplied]. No, it's a nice portfolio for women to take care of. It was the first time that I started noticing some of the, I wouldn't call it discrimination even, I would just call it ignorance of the people in the key role and I don't know if the culture where he came also played a very big role which was my experience at that point in time. Culturally, a woman in his culture didn't have a key role and he could never blatantly discriminate against any of us but he didn't really have to have any conversation if he didn't want to. So I experienced there and the fact that I ended up being the only woman but I didn't experience it among my peers actually at all or on the executive level that managed it but the cultural change because the egocentric had a much bigger impact on how people were treated than anything else."*

*Joanne*

A leader with a bias against women will more often than not create an organisational culture that is not supportive of women in the workplace (Bass and Avlio, 1993; George, et al, 1999; Warrick, 2017). The failure of organisations to take transformation seriously and to take the contributions of black women to strategic decisions in their areas of expertise was demoralising and left them frustrated. This was exacerbated

by the fact that in some organisations, the opinions of men mattered, regardless of their expertise or lack thereof in an area where decisions needed to be made. Annelese shared her experience in this regard:

*“So I have a peer that looks after South Africa, he’s an English white male, he has no procurement experience ... yet he’s seen to have very strong procurement experience but whenever there’s an expert opinion required on procurement, his opinion is sought, whether it’s informed or not, whether it’s correct or not, whether it will make the difference to the organisation or not so it’s almost like you’re always the second class citizen and if they don’t get his view of something then your view really doesn’t matter ... I’m just a number here to fill your EE requirements, your employment equity requirements and once that is taken care of, my opinion doesn’t matter. And it hurts me because I’ve worked so hard for 20 years and I don’t want to feel like that at this point in time in my career. And I think I’ve also made such a big difference in every organisation that I’ve worked in this far and I don’t think that’s recognized and that for me is almost like a slap in my face to be honest with you ... Is it a political thing, is it the fact that I’m reporting to a white male, what is it? So that’s the type of things that plays on my mind, and gives me the impression that no, you just a token.”*

*Annelese*

Deborah, a high-flying executive who spent 20 years with the same organisation and, in her own words, built a brand for herself, shared about a change in the organisation when she fell pregnant and how four days into her maternity leave, she got a call from the Human Resources Department telling her that her job had become redundant. At no point prior to that had she even been aware that restructuring was taking place and that her job would not be in the structure in the future.

*“You know what, I can’t, other than what happened in the end, I still to this day would love to know what the deeper, what really went on around that. To be honest with you, I think when I fell pregnant, it kind of, people’s eyes or view of me changed ... it’s definitely a feeling of kind of, subtly expressed, I remember [name supplied] saying to me at one stage, I was 7 months pregnant and he said Debs, you know, your commitment is just not the same”*

*Deborah*

The South African women leaders in the study hardly talked about the contribution of the formal processes. It seemed that the informal constructs were the ones that had a greater impact on the career experiences of the participants. The experiences of the women across race and social class support the view that it is the unwritten that makes the greater difference to the career journey. This then requires corporates to have an emotional intelligence quotient that is very high so as to be able to identify and then deal with informal cultures in the workplace.

### 5.7.2 Findings in Zimbabwe

The journey of the women leaders in Zimbabwe was similar to that of the South African women and once again, the issue of formal and informal systemic influences had an impact on the career journeys of the women leaders. The themes that emerged in Zimbabwe were:

- The “written stuff”
- Training and development
- Informal conversations

**The “written stuff”:** Working for a male-dominated organisation in a male-dominated industry in a patriarchal country would naturally lead to a maintaining of the status quo (Desson and Cloutuier, 2010). The women felt that organisational policies that required appointments to be done via interviews worked in favour of the female employees as they provided an opportunity for them to be interviewed for positions that became vacant. This was, according to Rutendo, one of the ways in which her organisation supported the career progression of the women leaders.

*“Supported, well to the extent that the organisation allows appointments to be on merit, I think it has opened the doors for me to excel ..., if it wasn't that the organisation fills positions by way of interviews for every post and if they were allowed to handpick, I can assure you that men would always have that opportunity but within that system that allows you to be heard through an open interview type of set up, I think it makes it so difficult for one who has the orientation towards men”*

*Rutendo*

**Training and development:** The training that the organisations provided to the women leaders in the early days of their careers had a positive impact on their career experiences. One of the participants talked about the gap that she felt in her career journey when the economic environment changed to such an extent that the organisation no longer invested in training. Under research objective 2, some of the women shared how the training programmes in their respective organisations were crucial in their growth as managers and leaders.

**Informal conversations:** The extent to which leaders provide support is an unwritten and unmeasured code, and yet this is an important element of supporting women in their career progression. Being appointed on merit and then having a supportive leadership were some of the ways in which the women leaders felt they had received support from their organisations.

*“I believe that I've been fortunate in that the managing directors that I did work for were very supportive and in actual fact if I go back maybe 15 years ago, being in a senior position as a female person of colour, I would say I was one of the few in that position and that happened because of the support I got from my leaders back then”*

*Beena*

The additional support that some of the participants felt was needed was in the form of equal pay for equal work regardless of race or gender. When asked whether or not race impacted the effectiveness of a leader, the participants had mixed views but the general view was that it depended on the industry and the organisation. One of the participants shared how she had observed that certain races were dominant and excelled at running different industries:

*“I think there is some influence there, I’m still finding in different businesses, you find different races being at the top of the game particularly in particular industries. They have a strength in particular industries. I’ll give you the oil industry, who is resuscitating the oil industry in Zimbabwe, it’s the Indians and that’s the background from where they’re coming from and from a South African perspective as well, that’s what they do and they’re strong at it and that’s where they’re coming in. I think if you look at different industries in Zimbabwe, it’s interesting, like the Jews, you find them in materials ... why doesn’t different races go in there and I think it’s something to do with their history”* Beena

Another participant emphasised that certain organisations had a white top management structure and success and effectiveness would be linked to race:

*“It depends on environments, you just have to be the right race ..., maybe I would not imagine myself being the top person say at [name supplied] and not struggle to maintain the supportive layer of management. Yes I can succeed but it could take a shaking”* Sithabile

When asked if they thought gender impacted the effectiveness of a leader, the majority of the participants were of the view that it did. They acknowledged that gender was and continued to be a problem in organisations and in certain industries. Organisations in Zimbabwe are still predominantly run by men (Booyesen, 2007). The different ways in which men and women view issues was also mentioned as affecting the effectiveness of leaders, although there was a participant who was of the view that the effectiveness of a leader had nothing to do with gender. In Zimbabwe, it was the formal systemic influences that played a major role in the career progression of the women leaders. Most of them talked about training and development initiatives that their respective organisations offered and the role played by these in their growth as leaders. The alliances and cliques and underlying sub-cultures certainly were not mentioned much and seemingly were not a major factor in their journeys. Again this could be due to the fact that the participants were at executive levels of leadership and could potentially be oblivious to the sub-cultures that played out in their organisations.

### **5.7.3 Comparison of findings between South Africa and Zimbabwe**

The findings of the study were that, both in South Africa and Zimbabwe, there were formal and informal systemic factors that had an impact on the career experiences of the women in the study. The formal

influences included policies on recruitment, being equal opportunity employers and training and development policies. The women leaders in both countries cited having benefitted from training programmes that the companies provided to groom their management and leadership teams. There were no formal mentoring programmes in either country that would teach and guide the women on how to navigate the organisational landscapes and “swim with the sharks” (Nkomo, 2006). The cultural background and the resultant gender politics of the leadership also played a part in how women were perceived and treated in the workplace. Leaders who came from patriarchal backgrounds did not view women as strategic contributors to the business. They, in fact, saw and treated them as a necessary evil that they had to tolerate (Bass and Avolio, 1993; George, 1993; Lok and Crawford, 1999).

## 5.8 Other findings

The study revealed other findings which are important to share even though they may not necessarily form part of the research objectives of the study.

### 5.8.1 South Africa

**Guides and cheerleaders:** In describing the findings of the research objective one concerning South Africa, I used the analogy of a race. Every race has coaches, cheerleaders, supporters and fans who cheer the runners to the finish. The career journey also has these role players and for the women leaders, these ranged from parents to school teachers, managers and any other person that was a positive encourager in the journey. Thembi, Thandeka and Noor spoke about the roles played by their mothers in the early part of the journey. Thembi’s mother had a primary school education and was in a dysfunctional marriage to a judge. Thembi felt that her mother had played both a positive and negative role in her academic and career journey. Her mother pushed her to excel at school and went as far as sending her to school outside of her country of birth so that she would not suffer the “humiliation” of hearing the gossip about her family in the city in which she grew up. This enabled Thembi to focus on her schoolwork. However, her mother was not able to guide her in choosing the right high school and deciding on career options. The only career that Thembi was exposed to was law due to her father being in the legal profession but her mother would not allow her to study law and so she chose communications and in her own words “made it work”.

*“...but I got a lot of wisdom from my mum, she was a stay-at-home mum. I remember her telling me one time how important it was to get an education and the day she got a job, I saw how much that liberated her. I saw the difference ... I realised that the independence, the financial independence, how important is it for a girl child or a female and education and your individual thinking, not having to depend on someone to make decisions for you.*

*Thembi*

Thandeka wanted to go into the arts like her father but he discouraged her from that line of career even though she was very talented and was encouraged by her teachers to pursue drama.

*“The one thing I can definitely say is my father had a conversation and said to me, I know you’ve always wanted to act and I know that’s all you’ve ever seen yourself doing. However, you’ve seen how acting has been difficult for me in terms of living, livelihood, paying the bills and everything else. So he said you’ve got to have a plan B ... my father wanted me to study drama and something else should things not improve in South Africa cause the arts are not big in South Africa, alright.”* Thandeka

During the interview, Noor shared that right up to her matric year; her mother had been of the view that she did not need a tertiary education as she would get married and work in her husband’s business like most Muslim women. It was right at the end of the year that her great uncle told her mother to “come out of the dark ages” and allow her daughter to be a professional if that was what she wanted. Her mother changed her mind and told Noor that she needed to apply to a university to study medicine!

*“and it just shows how strong my mum is cause she was like you will do BSc cause I want you to go to sort out the medical and so I registered for BSc. even though in here [points to heart] I knew that’s not what I wanted to do.”* Noor

Zinzi, by her own admission, came from a home where education was not valued (by her biological mother) and she was expected to sell her body in return for money and food. Her cheerleaders were not in her home. She went to a school in the Indian community where the teachers saw her intelligence and her desire to succeed and affirmed her in that way.

*“I grew up in a home where a lot of people were not very enthusiastic about education but I was viewed as an intelligent child. So in school I got the attention of the teachers. They encouraged me in pushing myself... Up until this day, even to this day let me say, I still get fuel from those statements. I still believe that I am an exception to the norm, I still believe that it doesn’t matter where I come from, that I am brilliant, that I can do and achieve anything that I want to achieve.”* Zinzi

**Intragroup dynamics:** The experiences of Coloured people among themselves and within the greater community of South Africa could be a study on its own and it forms one of the areas that I have recommended for future research. Both Beryl and Melody talked about the role played by hair and language in how they were perceived and treated.

*“So English speakers are considered to be in the more upper class and English speakers were traditionally considered more affluent than Afrikaans speakers. They are considered I think, so schools would have one English class and the rest would be Afrikaans and so it was very Afrikaans and also English-speaking parents were generally more successful than Afrikaans speaking parents. There was*

*also, the, I always refer to it as the politics of hair. Hair played a strong role politically and in a class sense. So if you had hair like mine, you generally spoke Afrikaans and were considered a lower class than English. My sisters had very straight hair, from my mom's side, my step-sisters, so they were generally treated better, spoken to better, so hair played a very big part and because I was in a family where my sisters were always considered better. I also think now that I talk about it, was more driven to be successful because I don't know, maybe I made the connection that I couldn't allow just my features alone to be a determining factor for my success I guess. That in Coloured communities is so prevalent even today [claps]! And if you then look at the differences, now this is just Jo'burg in the Coloured community. If you go then a bit wider, and you look at women from Cape Town with their accent and hair and the way they behave, you'll see its very different from the way someone from Durban for example cause their accent is different, so the nuances, the different nuances that make up Coloured is very political, is very strong and it is quite a strong determining factor for your success."*

*Beryl*

Beryl's comments about hair reflect the effects of apartheid in post-democracy South Africa. She referred to the role played by hair in being racially classified as Coloured. Straighter hair qualified a person to be categorised as Coloured and the Coloured people were treated better than Africans even though they were still marginalised (Erasmus and Ellison, 2008; Erasmus, n.d.). Post-apartheid, the fortunes of the Coloured people of South Africa do not seem to have changed much:

*"Coloured people are stuck in this cycle of hopelessness, that I see even today, it's sad actually, it's sad but it's the reality. We are the forgotten people of South Africa. Sadly. There are, there were even many more opportunities for black kids than for Coloured kids when I was graduating, when I was in high school, university"*

*Beryl*

**Ethnicity:** The study revealed other hurdles that women must jump over as part of their career experiences.

Closely related to racial experiences are those of an ethnic nature. This speaks to an intragroup dynamic amongst women of the same race. Zinzi was from KwaZulu-Natal and worked in Gauteng. She experienced differences between the way she was treated and the way that African people from Gauteng were treated in the workplace.

*"oh my goodness. That there, there is a general stereotype about my people, the Zulus, that we are thick-headed people. So when I came to Johannesburg for the first time, to work in Johannesburg, that is the kind of mentality that I encountered from the people in Johannesburg, to say that so you are a Zulu, so you are thick, you must be dumb, you must be this! And so it was a culture shock when I started getting promoted and left people who had been there for years and left them behind and even now they are still sitting there and I have progressed like decades. So being a Zulu, in an environment where it is predominantly, in my race I am working with Sotho people, I am working with Tswana people, with Jo'burg Zulus, there is still that stereotype type of mentality that goes on to say that you are inferior, inferior to us. We can't trust you with major decision-making because your people are from the bush and they are uncultured and uncouth ... These are the kinds of barriers that you are introduced to, that I was introduced to and they became a face brick in front of me and breaking through those*

*was very difficult. It meant that I had to work twice as hard than a Sotho woman in Johannesburg, it meant that I had to give twice as much as any other person that was coming from here”* Zinzi

Zinzi was the only participant who was not born and raised in Gauteng and therefore her experience with ethnicity was unique in this study. It would have been interesting to interview women from other provinces who were working in Gauteng and hear their experiences of ethnicity and the workplace. I have recommended under future studies a study that examines ethnicity in the workplace.

**Childhood social class – reluctance to admit social standing:** All except for one participant in the study, namely Joanne, were able to clearly articulate their childhood social class. I had to explain to Joanne the relevance of her childhood class to my study before she answered the question. All of the women had moved upward from their categorisation of the childhood social class. Across race, most of the women leaders who came from middle class backgrounds struggled to articulate their current social class. It was as if they were uncomfortable acknowledging the fact that they had done really well for themselves. They downplayed their upward movement on the social class categorisation. It was quite interesting, though, that none of them would describe themselves as upper class even though, according to the definition of classes in South Africa, they were, except for Zinzi. Thembi went so far as to describe herself as working class as she and her husband had worked for everything that they had. This was despite that fact that she lived in a private estate in Fourways (an upmarket area) and her children went to a private school.

*“I don’t like this middle class classification honestly. But definitely I look at it as a working class because we’ve always worked”* Thembi

*“so I really don’t like this term the middle class but technically ... I believe I am part of what South Africa refers to as the growing middle class ... if we look at the reality of South Africa, we are part of the 1,2% of people who really have wealth ... but in the reality of me understanding the circumstances, the demographics and the social realities of South Africa, I’m fairly privileged”* Thandeka

*“My social class, I still keep the people in terms of working class with me, I’ve never let go of that.”* Zeenet

And on being probed if she believed she was working class when she had a Ferrari in her garage:

*“Yes I do, a 100%, a 100%. You know I’ve never ever, even though you have a lot in your bank balance and, those are all things that the world wants to see strangely enough.”* Zeenet

Zeenet was the only one who insisted on being called working class, but during the interview, she constantly referred to humility and I am of the view that she saw classification as working class as a sign of being humble.

Melody found that her career success had led to her being labelled a snob by her family. I asked her if she ever felt guilty for being successful as has been suggested by Holmes (2006) could be the case when people who come from impoverished backgrounds become successful. She replied in the negative and was in fact one of the few who was able to articulate the fact that she had gone up the social ladder. Beryl also was able to admit that she had gone up the social ladder.

*“Now I don’t think I’m working class. I think I’ve sort of escaped that and escaped is not even a strong word cause it was something I said I would elevate myself out of, maybe middle class.”*  
Beryl

### 5.8.2 Zimbabwe

**Guides and Cheerleaders:** As in South Africa, the participants in Zimbabwe talked about how they had cheerleaders and guides along the journey. Sithabile shared the role her father played in encouraging her to follow her dreams:

*“My parents’ involvement in my studies also helped a lot, my dad always spoke about how good I was at maths and how I should pursue it because I’m already so good in it so already it influenced my thinking. They praised me a lot on anything that I was excelling in so it really influenced my career choice”*  
Sithabile

Viola was similarly encouraged by her father not to let anything stand in the way of doing what whatever she chose to do.

*“I think that the one thing that I learned from my father was that you can be anything that you choose to be and it’s really up to you and how much hard work you’re prepared to put in. I mean he always taught us from an early age that you can be anything that you want., and so the thought that he sacrificed and I saw him sacrifice for us to have a decent education and the fact that he raised us to believe that even though I was a girl I shouldn’t limit myself and that he believed that I had the intellect and the work ethic to get to wherever I wanted to go so I think that propelled me.”*  
Viola

**Intragroup dynamics:** Viola shared very interesting insights about being Coloured in Zimbabwe. She did not view Coloured people as a neglected group but rather saw them as crafters of their destiny and said that there was a culture of non-achievement within that community. Her views were that parents did not encourage their children to dream of making a life for themselves and saw their role as paying fees until the child finished high school.

*“One of my pet hates is seeing people not reach their full potential and I see that in Coloured people all the time. I say that to my children, I say that to anyone, Coloured people are, they underrate themselves, they are the ones that hold themselves back and limit themselves, they never go for the prize because they don’t think they deserve it so they are the greatest underachievers of all time. I*

*meet these people, I see their children, I see the potential and they just never take it anywhere, they don't, they stifle it”*  
Viola

When I shared with her that her views were the total opposite of those expressed by one of the Coloured participants in South Africa, her response was:

*“I get angry , I get angry when people say they didn't make it happen for us cause I look at what people do individually and if they have done that, what is stopping anyone else? ... I see that with my cousins, I see it with my husband's family, bright people, but have they ever pushed their child to get a university degree, no. As soon as they leave school, oh yeah I don't have to pay school fees but then the child is sitting on the couch for how many years because they can't get a decent job or they keep coming home because they can't afford the apartment anymore. And I say to my kids, I'm working for you, I'm giving you the best education, the best foundation and you need to fly after that, ... it's not that my kids were brighter than their cousins, their cousins are just as bright, I can see that when you talk to them you can see the potential of these kids but they didn't have that, they haven't had that same push and I've said to my in-laws, this kid needs to go to university, this kid could be an Olympic athlete, you're not challenging them, you're not giving them anything, so it's just said but for me, I don't like it. I look at the Americans, how many American people say, we were in slavery. I mean for goodness sake, how many years was slavery, you mean to tell me that you couldn't go get yourself an education in America and succeed, how many black people have succeeded, how many people of colour, how many people have gone to America with not a cent and gone and made it because they have that will to succeed and that belief that they were going to a better life and they were going to make it happen and they were prepared to do what it took and I hate this handout syndrome, I can only succeed if somebody gives me this for nothing ... I also would hate to get a job based on my race because there is that perception that maybe you're not as good as the other candidate so give it to me on merit, I'm very passionate about that.”*  
Viola

In both South Africa and Zimbabwe, the behaviours of the greater Coloured Communities as described by the participants Beryl and Viola were similar but the reasons given for them differed greatly. The view of the South African working class participant was that Coloured people were neglected and government had not done anything to uplift them whereas the Zimbabwean participant was of the view that Coloured people lacked the ambition and drive to improve their lot in life.

**Ethnicity:** In Zimbabwe, I was able to get three participants who came from different ethnic groups from those in the cities and organisations where the women leaders worked. Despite the tribal tensions between the two major African groups, ethnicity did not play as big a role as I had anticipated. Two of the women leaders went into the different environments when they were already at fairly senior levels and had no experiences of ethnic segregation. The third participant went into the environment in which she was an ethnic minority when she was still at junior levels in the workplace. She experienced being of a different tribe from a language perspective all the way to perceptions about her tribe being inferior in every way. However, as she climbed

up the corporate ladder, those incidents started to lessen to a point where she was seen as a trustworthy and competent executive.

Other findings that emerged but that did not form part of the study were pay parity and the “boys’ club”. These were not consistent among the participants but are issues that have been researched in studies on organisational dynamics and I felt it was important to incorporate them into this study. Sithabile experienced pay parity from both a race and gender perspective. In the early days of her career, she found out that she was paid less than her white counterparts. In later years, she discovered that her male colleagues were given entertainment allowances that she did not have.

*“I used to question a lot of things because you would be at the same level with one person but packages would be determined by race and I fought a lot within that institution”* Sithabile

And when she joined a different organisation as an executive:

*“Friday, men are given allowances because they are going to entertain brokers and it’s only the men that are given”* Sithabile

The participants also found the workplace to be a “boys’ club”. Across race, they found that while they could work quite closely and get on well with their male colleagues, they were not quite part of the club.

*“I really got a sense of we’re the good old boys, we started the meeting and they would be talking about the soccer the night before and the golf that they had over the weekend and I really couldn’t contribute to the conversation so the for the first 5-10 minutes I would sit there listening but not really contributing.”* Viola

*“[Laughs] I think you feel it more subtly than overtly like if you’re having a social event, you kind of felt that you were not part of the boys, maybe because they were mainly boys anyway, you know what I’m saying.”* Beena

*“you know they just tend to group on their own or even just to talks in chats among yourselves, you realise that these men think lowly of you until you really ascertain yourself and you speak out”* Sithabile

### **5.9 Lessons that South Africa can learn from Zimbabwe**

I asked myself if there are things that South Africa can learn from Zimbabwe based on the findings of this study. After all, Zimbabwe has been politically free (from a race perspective) since 1980 while for South Africa, democracy came only in 1994. I identified three key lessons. The first lesson is that transformation is not an overnight thing and needs political and corporate will and support over a number of years. The second lesson is that racial transformation will be the key focus until such time as the workplace leadership (in the

private sector) is transformed and starts to be reflective of the racial make-up of the country's populace. Only then will other elements of diversity, including gender, start to be taken seriously. The final lesson is that gender diversity is a bigger struggle because men have an interest in and are directly affected by race as it is one of their primary identities but gender is not. Once racial transformation has taken place, the risk that gender transformation faces, is that black men may have cultural biases which may act as a barrier to how they see the role of women. A conflicted leadership (whether in terms of race or gender) will not champion transformation and cultural conflict will lead to men to seeing certain jobs as being for women and others only suitable for men.

#### **5.10 Lessons that Zimbabwe can learn from South Africa**

Zimbabwe has had a head start in terms of trying to transform its labour force (Gordon, 1996). While its policies and the economic climate in the country have led to a racial transformation, the data from the study clearly shows a significant lack of success in the gender transformation. South Africa has a monitoring process in place that enables it to track the rate of both race and gender transformation on an annual basis. The Commission for Employment Equity report is comprehensive and enables progress to be monitored at both a provincial and annual level. Zimbabwe does not monitor and track the progress of implementing the policies of transformation and hence progress is not tracked closely. The National Statistics Agency has produced five reports between 1991 and 2016. The report does not provide meaningful information that can enable the user of the information to assess the progress and consistency thereof. This is an important lesson that Zimbabwe can learn from South Africa.

#### **5.11 What Successful Women Do**

I used what I considered to be the common threads among the women leaders studied to define the strategies that have enabled them to not only navigate the workplace, but to rise up the corporate ladder. In order to be able to identify those common elements, I asked the participants what they would do differently if they could start all over again, as well as what advice they would give to younger women starting out in the workplace. Several common themes emerged in this regard and they are presented in [Figure 5](#) on page 230:



Figure 5: How women leaders have done it © Ncube (2017)

Table 17: Summary of Career Strategies

SUB- THEME # and NAME	FINDINGS AND	SUPPORTING QUOTES
<p><b>1. EXPERIENCE AND A STRONG WORK ETHIC</b></p>	<p>The right type of experience and a strong work ethic are key to being able to navigate the workplace, regardless of race and social class. The participants spoke of how important it was to get the necessary exposure and experience as that is what builds a strong curriculum vitae and access to opportunities. Sometimes getting the right experience meant fighting for it as it does not seem to be handed on a platter especially to black women. Once in the position, deliver, deliver and deliver. Delivery was not negotiable for any one of the women. This combination of experience and a strong work ethic enabled the women to gain confidence in their abilities and to get the attention of the organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“So I think I’ve had to work quite hard... Always very much a hard work kind of philosophy...”</i> Deborah</li> <li>• <i>“.. You must work hard, because it just doesn’t come easily...”</i> Beryl</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. CAREER PLANNING</b></p>	<p>Another recommendation was for women to get a qualification and plan for their career instead of waiting for things to happen. As seen from tables 5.1 and 5.2, most of the women in the study had a formal post-secondary education qualification and stated that it was important to advance academically as part of the career strategy. Career planning includes being willing to take risks by abandoning dead-end positions and applying for positions that are not a 100% fit to the experience (Fitzpatrick and Curran, 2014). It also includes knowing when to move and ensuring that not too much time is spent in one organisation as that has an impact on moving on to other roles in other organisations. There are consequences for women who do not manage their careers well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I think also having a clear plan of what it is you want to achieve while you are at a particular organisation and once you’ve achieved those objectives, being comfortable enough to move onto the next endeavour because I think sometimes we overstay our welcome because we’re too scared to make the change or the move. So being comfortable about when it’s time to leave, I think about being comfortable in your own skin as well and you as a person”</i> Annelese</li> <li>• <i>“Secondly I would plan better, I will try and not fall into this and fall into that. I will tough it out a little more than just if I’m fed up with something, leave it and then realise that I’m not happy with it.”</i> Beryl</li> <li>• <i>“I think for me what I would change about my career – I should have moved over from [name supplied] ..., I think actually, it was detrimental to my career, on my CV to have the same company ... I was in one company for so many years, I feel has hindered my ability to grow and I’ve battled to move out of, I’ve battled when looking for jobs because of that”</i> Deborah</li> </ul>

SUB-THEME # and NAME	FINDINGS AND	SUPPORTING QUOTES
3. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE	<p><b>Knowing and being true to yourself:</b> Women leaders needed to be authentic with and about themselves and not lose what makes them different from men – being a woman. Women do not have to behave like men to be effective and it is acceptable to cry and to be a woman. Part of being true to yourself means being upfront about expectations from the organisation at the interview stage and not taking on roles in organisations that do not match what women are looking for. This is similar to Dlamini’s findings (2013) that women needed to know themselves in order to be successful and effective leaders.</p>	<p>“[Sighs] <i>just be who you are and trust who you are. You don’t have to be anything else, and it’s ok if you’re a woman, it’s ok [laughs], no need to apologise for it</i>” Deborah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I would tell them ... I get called for interviews, I would say I don’t want to work for a company that is unfriendly to mother, to women. I’m a woman, I’m a mother and I’ve had to turn down jobs where I see that’s where it is and it’s the same with my religion. So I tell young ladies that you know what, don’t compromise yourself as a woman cause you want to be a given, you want to get to an executive role”</i> Thembi</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Knowing the politics in the organisation:</b> This was an element that was raised under the systemic influences. The women surveyed seemed to prefer to stay out of it but it has a real impact on how organisations work and how employees are impacted by them.</p> <p>There is another political element in the workplace that is not related to cliques and turf wars. It is the element of the previously advantaged (predominantly from a race perspective) protecting their space and feeling threatened by having to share it at their own expense. Hence the workplace becomes a hostile, unwelcoming environment and entrants who threaten the status quo need to be aware of this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I think it’s important for them to understand the environment that they are dealing with so, who are the players, so what are the ground rules and the unwritten ground rules and understanding how that influences and impacts you as an individual in the environment”</i> Arnelese</li> <li>• <i>“It’s a hostile environment, you haven’t been invited, there’s been codes that have been made and companies are kind of forced, you’re not welcome there... if we were welcome there, we wouldn’t need codes and we wouldn’t have to measure on equity. So it’s a hostile environment,... You need to know that, it’s not like high school”</i> Lerato</li> </ul>

SUB-THEME # and NAME	FINDINGS AND	SUPPORTING QUOTES
4. GETTING SUPPORT	<p>Women need to work together to change the environment for women; they cannot do this as islands and in isolation. This is also consistent with the recommendation from the studies of Dlamini (2013) study and Walter (2013) that women need the support of other women in order to be successful.</p> <p>In getting support in the workplace, it is necessary to work with the men and not against them. The reality is that they are in the majority when it comes to executive roles in most organisations and they are the threatened species when it comes to creating workplaces that are conducive for women. This finding is in line with Dlamini (2013), that the gender battle is not one that women will win alone.</p> <p>The support needed to progress in the workplace is not limited. It extends to needing support in the personal space as well and the recommendation from the women leaders was “ask for help”. One of them shared her experiences after she needed help and did not ask:</p>	<p><i>“The two ladies at Exco ..., So we’re working closely together to say, no why shouldn’t we be?”</i> Thembi</p> <p><i>“And then the last thing I think is that we shouldn’t be naïve and not think that it’s not a man’s world, it is a man’s world and we need to be comfortable with the fact that we have to compete with these individuals and that shouldn’t hold us back ... we must be aware that it’s going to be there in your face but you need to step up and to deal with it”</i> Annelese</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“I remember when we went to the leadership conference in CT, cause my husband and son actually flew with me and they went to my in-laws and when we came back my boss was on the same flight as the 3 of us and he asked me why didn’t your family stay with you in the hotel and I said to him no, ethically I felt it’s not the right thing to do and he said no, but it’s your family ... So I think the environment must be such that you are able to have those types of discussions and for the organisation to understand that you’re not just a working woman, you have other facets to your life as well and how do we accommodate those facets in the working environment”</i> Annelese</li> </ul>
5. NETWORKS	<p>In addition to supporting each other, networks among themselves as well as with men are a necessity in creating the relationships that support and, at times, facilitate career progression. Networks are an important part of career success and this is one area that women need to focus on building and tapping into as they progress in their career journeys (Dlamini, 2013; Eagly and Carli, 2007).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“I think it’s also important to realise that you need relationships in your working career and you need different types of relationships so you need people that helps you grow your career, you need people that you can talk to from a personal point of view that can give you emotional comfort and support, you need somebody that can tell you no, not this way, that way for your benefit as an individual and for your growth so it’s almost identifying who are these individuals that you believe can be impactful in your working life”</i> Annelese</li> </ul>

SUB- THEME # and NAME	FINDINGS AND	SUPPORTING QUOTES
6. CAREER SPONSORS	One of the women leaders raised the importance of having a career sponsor. The career sponsor actively supports and guides the career progress of the career aspirant.	<i>“If you don’t have support..... I have an aunt who likes to call it a sponsor at a senior level. Black people we don’t have sponsors, very few of us have sponsors”</i> Lerato
7. FAIL AND LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE	The women leaders also shared their fears of failure, which is a common fear among top achievers. Women need to recognise that failure is part of growth and allow themselves to learn from failure as well as from success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“don’t expect to be perfect all the time and understand that you will fall down somewhere along the line and its ok, its ok to do that but you’ve got to regroup and you’ve got to know who to talk to in those circumstances and where to get help but at the same token I always felt that if I ever went and said that they would be like oh she’s not perfect so she can’t be promoted next or whatever”</i> Viola</li> </ul>
8. SPEAK ABOUT YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS	One of the women leaders mentioned how women do not talk about their accomplishments but men do. Dlamini (2013), quoting Sandberg (2013), refers to this as the tiara syndrome which is a phenomenon where women do not speak about their achievements but expect their work to speak for them and lead to promotions and career advancement. Women need to speak out, and not just expect to be recognised, they need to shout about their accomplishments and not be apologetic. Women needed to be aware that if they do not talk about their accomplishments, no one else will be their mouthpiece and opportunities will pass them by.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Definitely about speaking out more often. I think as women we are very apologetic and we expect to be noticed for a project or work. Assert yourself, you’ve done something you’ve done it well, talk about it, sell it, we’re very, what’s the word I’m looking for, we’re very apologetic as females”</i> Thembi</li> </ul>

SUB-THEME # and NAME	FINDINGS AND	SUPPORTING QUOTES
<p><b>9. KEEP THE BALANCE, DON'T BUILD YOUR LIFE AROUND YOUR CAREER</b></p>	<p>Women should not compromise personal life for a career. Instead, they need to find a balance; there is a price they have had to pay for losing the balance. Upcoming career women need to focus on themselves as well as on the work.</p> <p>Thandeka was very eloquent in articulating those things which she wished she had known when she was younger and planning her career journey:</p>	<p><i>“So my daughter asked me the other day, she’s thinking of coming back to Jo’burg, and doing some job searching here ... and I told her if you can listen to your mum, that’s 44, that’s been diagnosed with burn out, it’s never worth it ... have balance, I would always like to tell them have balance, don’t be so hard on yourself, have balance. It’s tough for women to have balance, it’s much tougher for women to have balance than men”</i>  <i>Joanne</i></p> <p><i>“The one regret that I have now Linda is having focused on so much on my career that I have neglected allowing myself to be in a proper relationship where I can have kids and build my family ... I would be less hard on myself to prove myself to the world, to prove myself to men, I ‘m capable. I’m very capable. I am dedicated, I’m passionate. I don’t have to work till 11, 12 o’clock at night to prove that I can. I can stop at 7, know that I’m responsible enough to switch on when I know I can, or to know that actually this can wait until tomorrow. I would learn to re-prioritise so that actually I have time for my immediate family ... And my presence and my work will speak for itself as well”</i>  <i>Thandeka</i></p>
<p><b>10. FOCUS</b></p>	<p>The different “twists and turns” that women need to navigate in the workplace can be quite overwhelming. One strategy is focusing to navigate and jump the hurdles. Dlamini (2013) also discusses focusing on the end result and the reason for being in the workplace as a way of dealing with the challenges faced in the workplace.</p>	<p><i>“To focus on the prize, focus on the prize. I’m less distracted by people’s bias, racist outlook, I can’t help how he sees me, I just focus on my priorities”</i>  <i>Lerato</i></p>

## 5.12 Suggestions for Retention Strategies for Companies

The best people to advise on what organisations can do to retain their skills are the women themselves. The recommendations for retention strategies are based on the answers to two questions that were asked as part of the study. The questions were: a) In what ways did the organisations support or hinder your career progression? b) What can companies do to better support woman in their careers?

The common as well as unique suggestions that came out of the participants that could form the retention strategies of companies and create an enabling environment for women to thrive in the workplace are listed as follows:

- The introduction of flexi-time to enable the fulfilment of both professional and personal life demands.
- Forced sabbaticals for senior executives to achieve work-life balance and to avoid burn-out.
- Recognition of transformation as a strategic objective of the organisation and giving it the attention it deserves, like other key areas such as sales.
- Recognition that women in senior and executive positions bring value to the organisation that cannot be disregarded.
- Career support interventions such as coaching and mentoring and financing of studies for staff who want to advance themselves.
- Monitoring of the career exposure and experience being given to equity-appointment professionals and implementation of measures to ensure that it is holistic and fully develops them to meet the challenges of the assigned roles.
- Recognition of the value and contribution of women outside of formal appraisals.
- Education of the workforce about the importance of transformation and the benefits of gender diversity for the organisation.
- An understanding that employees come from diverse backgrounds and that some of them may be the first in their families to enter the formal workplace and provide support for the transitions.
- Programmes for graduate entry-level staff that include workplace readiness programmes that enable them to understand and not fear the workplace.
- Definition of personalised strategies that enable women to overcome various hurdles that have been defined in the theoretical framework.

## 5.13 Research Objective 5

*To create a holistic theoretical framework that explores the “twists and turns” that women have to navigate the workplace*

One of the objectives of the study was to create a theoretical framework that would enable women to navigate the workplace as well as to assist companies with strategies to retain women in the workplace. [Figure 6](#) on page 237 is a pictorial depiction of the holistic theoretical framework from the study.

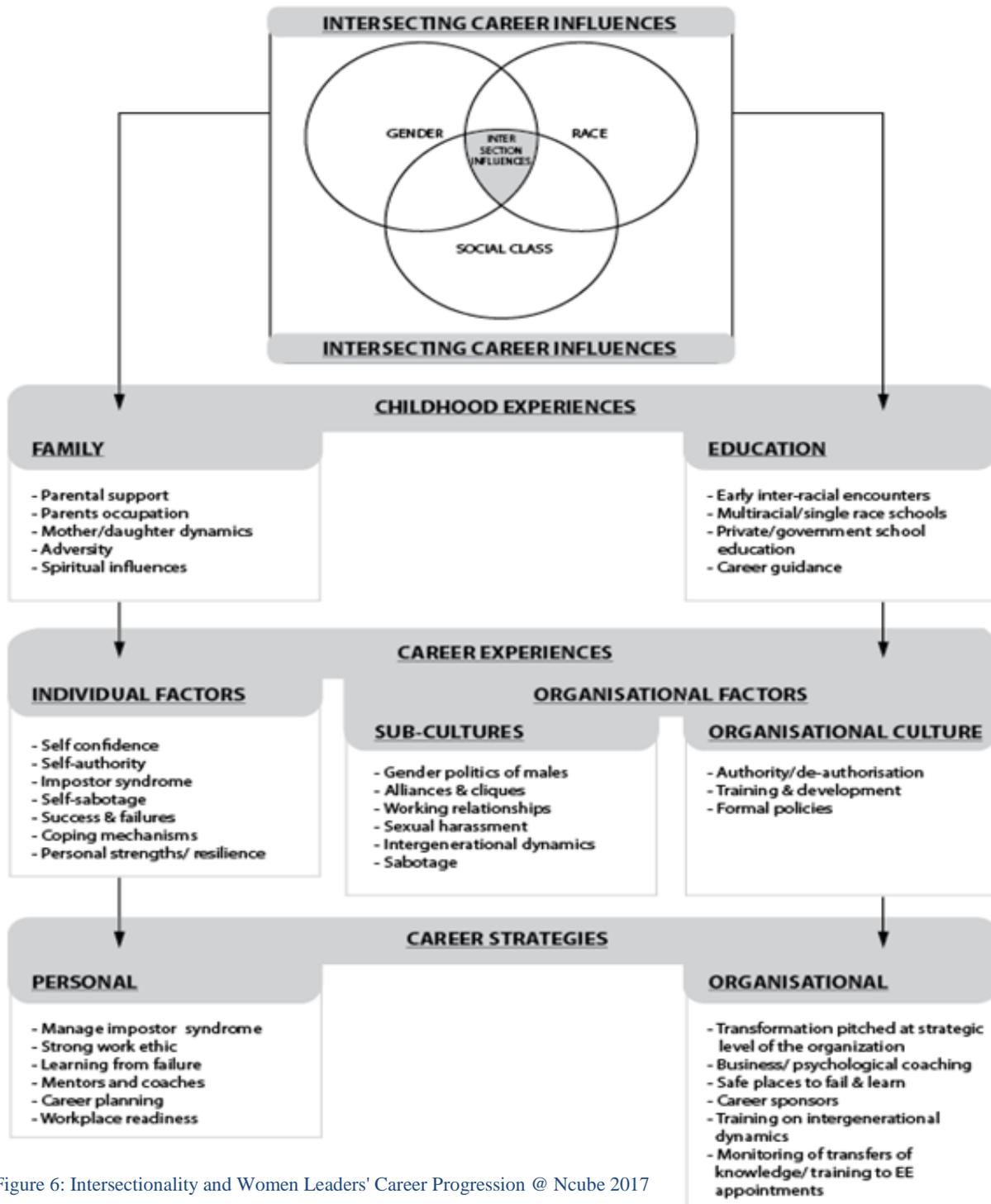


Figure 6: Intersectionality and Women Leaders' Career Progression @ Ncube 2017

Figure 6: Intersectionality and women leaders' career progression © Ncube 2017.

### 5.13.1 Childhood Experiences

The results of the study show that overall gender, race and class intersect in the career experiences and progression of women in corporates in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Gender, race and class have an influence on the starting lines and career journeys of women. Women were all affected by gender-related issues in the

workplace and therefore shared that irrespective of their race and social class. The biggest influences were race and social class in which the experiences of women differed from participant to participant.

The race of the participants played a role in firstly the opportunities that they had to enter to the workplace and then actual experiences once in the workplace. White women had an advantage over African, Coloured and Indian women in terms of the career opportunities right from the start of the career journey. The white participants found careers and were able to navigate the workplace with relative ease. They were often afforded opportunities that were denied of the women of other races. They didn't face hostility and being negated in their professional interactions with colleagues of other races. They were able to find career sponsors, mainly white, who were able to speak for and recommend them in the forums where decisions of career advancement and promotion took place. White men created an enabling environment for them to progress in the workplace and be afforded opportunities that facilitated progression up the career ladder.

The childhood experiences which had an effect on the career foundation of women are parental support, being in a home where the parents are professionals, the spiritual influences of the home, the childhood social class and the initial working experiences for women who start working at an early age. The participants received support mainly from their mothers although some of them spoke of both parents supporting them to pursue their dreams in making career choices or providing guidance in the choice of career. The participants whose parents were professionals in their own right were able to make informed decisions about the career paths that they wanted to follow. Having professional parents also enabled the participants to follow a life trajectory that was not forced by the need to assist the family from a financial point of view. The mother/daughter dynamics manifested themselves in various direct and indirect ways. Some of the participants were driven in a certain direction by their mothers who either chose career paths for them or guided them in a certain direction. Some drew their strength from watching their mothers face and overcome challenges that ranged from economic hardship to abusive marital situations. Others wanted to live a life that was directly opposite to that lived by their mothers- lives of economic dependence and subservience and were driven to succeed by these circumstances.

The childhood social class of the participants served as a mediator for them in their school and post school lives. The social class determined the choices and direction of their lives from a career perspective. Having professional parents meant that there were sufficient economic means for the participants to make choices that were not driven by adversity and they could follow their desires without being forced in a particular direction of working or continuing to secure a tertiary education. The childhood social class of the participants also determined the type of education that participants had. The participants who came from middle class families went either to private schools or to good government schools that provided a solid foundation for their career direction. Attendance of multiracial schools provided an advantage to participants that attended them as this enabled inter-racial contact at an earlier age and the resultant comfort of engaging with people from different

racial groups. The type of schools attended by the participants also determined whether or not they had access to career guidance and the types of different professions that they could go into.

### **5.13.2 Career Experiences:**

The career progression and experiences of the women leaders were affected by individual as well as organisational factors.

#### **5.13.2.1. Individual Factors**

The career experiences of the participants were a function of individual factors as well as organisational factors. The individual factors which affected the career experiences were self-confidence, self-authority, the impostor syndrome, self-sabotage, career successes and failures, coping mechanisms and the personal strengths and resilience of the women participants. The self-confidence was acquired at different stages of the career journey with some participants entering the workplace with a confidence that came from the childhood and schooling experiences while others faked the confidence as they worked their way through the workplace. The self-confidence became grew and became natural as the participants gained experience in their respective professions. The ability to self-authorise differed from participant to participant but in the main, it was linked to self-confidence and was linked to the experience levels and confidence of the participants. The impostor syndrome created a fear of “being found out” in the participants even though they were hard working and had excelled in their respective careers. Self-sabotage was identified in limited cases and characterised by concentrating on minor issues at the expense of major ones. The successes and failures of the women in their professional experiences all served as valuable lessons that were important milestones on the journeys. The developing of coping mechanisms differed from individual to individual one but failure to develop a way of coping was evidenced by physical burn out. The participants in the study were all at one time or another buoyed up by their personal strength or inner resilience.

#### **5.13.2.2. Organisational Factors**

The organisational factors that affected the career experiences of women were covert as well overt. Organisational sub-cultures were covert and tended to affect women predominantly from a gender perspective. The gender politics of males included gender bias and stereotyping in the workplace resulting in negative career experiences. Alliances and cliques that are predominantly male and serve as networking associations also resulted in women being left out of the informal decision-making processes and being prejudiced negatively in terms of career progression. Workplace relationships were an important part of being mentored and career progression and needed to be across gender and hierarchy.

Sexual harassment was experienced by women of every race and class and continues to be a negative experience faced by women. Another challenge faced in the workplace by women was that of managing subordinates who were older than them or of a different race. These intergenerational dynamics were particularly a challenge when it came to supervising older men. Sabotage was another of the sub-culture

factors that women faced in the workplace. Both men and women were saboteurs but the biggest culprits tended to be women.

The culture of the organisation was a formal organisational factor that affected the career experiences of the women. The organisations formally authorised the women leaders through the formal “written stuff” such as policies including the written delegations of authority which was linked to the positions held. The training and development offered by the organisation also served to capacitate and empower the women leaders. However, the organisations could de-authorise the women leaders by failing to adequately prepare them for the positions to which they had been appointed and this lead to negative career experiences.

### **5.13.3 Strategies**

The career strategies that are needed for women to navigate organisations and the responsibilities of organisations to retain women in their workforces resulted in a two-pronged strategy for the career advancement of women:

#### **5.13.3.1. Personal Strategies**

The personal strategies are those that need to be owned by the women in the workplace and will differ from individual to individual depending on their internal influences. Workplace readiness is an important part of entering the workplace and being able to find one’s feet as quickly as possible. Women need to own the process of managing the impostor syndrome and recognise that they are capable and they are in their positions because of their ability to deliver. A strong work ethic and the ability to learn from failures is a necessary part of the journey. Women need to plan their careers and to identify mentors. It is also important that they identify gaps in their knowledge and experience and work on getting the necessary exposure to overcome them.

#### **5.13.3.2. Organisational Strategies**

The most essential starting point for organisations that recognise the importance of having women in the workplace is to recognise transformation as a strategic objective and to have an executive team that reflects the talk around it. Transferring knowledge and exposing women to transformation appointments need to be managed and monitored as part of the responsibilities of those who are charged with implementing transformation objectives. Organisations need to create a culture where it is safe to fail and learn. They need to find sponsors for women who show potential to be part of the leadership and also provide business and psychological coaching interventions as part of their development. Part of the training of new managers should include dealing with intergenerational dynamics. It is important that women executives be sent on forced sabbaticals so that they do not burn out as they manage the multiple roles of wives, mothers and executives, among others.

### **5.13.3.3 The intersection of gender, race and class**

Gender, race and class intersect to form the foundational experiences from which women leaders launch into the corporate world. Gender biases including stereotyping and sexual harassment worked against the women leaders in the study. However, race worked to the advantage of white women by facilitating their entry and progression in organisations where white men are in positions of leadership. Social class enabled middle class African, Coloured and Indian women to acquire the education and career information that enabled them to make informed decisions and to be better placed to navigate the workplace challenges that they faced.

### **5.14 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of the fieldwork that was carried out using qualitative methods to understand the life stories of the participants. Under each research objective, a combination of grounded theory strategies and thematic analysis were used to identify the themes that emerged and to discuss their implications on the career experiences of the participants. The findings between the two countries were compared and contrasted and the lessons that the two countries could learn from each other were identified. The chapter ended with a presentation of the theoretical framework (figure 6) that could be used by women in corporates in order to be intentional about their careers and growth in organisations. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings and make recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the conclusions based on the findings that were presented in chapter 5. The contribution of the study including the theoretical framework that presents the required strategies from both the women and the organisations is also discussed. The chapter includes the practical and theoretical implications as well as the limitations of the study. The chapter ends with my suggestions for future studies and a reflection on the research journey. The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which the intersections of gender, race and class influence the career progression of women in senior and executive positions in corporates in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The study also explored the ability of women to exercise authority and whether this is in any way influenced by the intersection of gender, race and class. The effects of personal and systemic factors on the career progression of women were investigated and a theoretical framework of career strategies that women could adopt was presented.

### 6.2 Conclusions to the Four Study Objectives

Conclusions to the study are summarised in [Table 18](#) on page 246. The major findings were that in South Africa, gender, race and class intersected and affected the career experiences of African, Coloured and Indian women while in Zimbabwe, it was predominantly gender and to a certain extent, class that affected the career experiences of women.

The study also found that race and gender intersected to affect the ability of African women in exercising authority in the workplace and that the impostor syndrome manifested itself in the lives of African and Coloured women in South Africa while in Zimbabwe, the impostor syndrome was experienced only by the Coloured woman. Early family life experiences played a major role in the internal narratives of the women of all races in both countries. The final major finding was that the career journeys of women were affected by both the formal and informal systemic influences in their workplaces.

### 6.3 Contribution of the Study

This study has important implications for both women who want to navigate the workplace and for organisations that want to retain the talent of women in their workforce. It also has implications for the role that governments can play to better prepare young people to function in a diverse society from an early age.

**Theoretical implications:** Overall, one of the theoretical contributions of the study is that it provides information on the experiences of African women leaders and managers in corporations. It therefore contributes to the existing body of knowledge which has focused primarily on the experiences of women in western countries. Secondly, it is one of the few studies that uses the intersectionality framework to study the experiences of women leaders and managers in corporations. Thirdly, study highlights the issues of colouredness in both countries. Finally, the use of qualitative research methods addresses the issue of the dominance of quantitative methods in leadership studies.

On a country-specific level, the study made the following contributions:

**South Africa:** In South Africa, the study has expanded on Dlamini's (2013) South African study of women CEOs to include women in senior and executive management positions. It brought out the issues faced by working class women in the workplace which were not a major finding in Dlamini's (2013) study. The participants in Dlamini's (2013) study were from upper class families who had been educated abroad and did not face challenges that were related to social class. The participants in Dlamini's (2013) study had an average age of 51 while the current study average age of the participants was 40. This study also brought about the issue of intergenerational dynamics which were not a finding in Dlamini's (2013) study. This study brought to the fore the issue of sexual harassment in South African corporates, which also was not a finding in the previous studies using intersectionality as a framework. The current study also explored issues of authorisation and how organisations policies and politics have an effect on self-authorisation. The issue of the impostor syndrome was one the findings in this study was not in previous South African studies on intersectionality. Finally, the study advances the debate on transformation beyond representation to include the subjective experiences of women in leadership roles.

**Zimbabwe:** The narrative provides data on the experiences of women in corporations in Zimbabwe. There is no record of previous leadership studies in corporates which used intersectionality as a framework being conducted there. The data in Zimbabwe also confronts the issue of sexual harassment in workplaces which tends to be taboo and not addressed by the victims. The study highlights the extent to which patriarchy is a problem in Zimbabwean corporates including parastatals.

**Practical implications:** The practical implications of the study are that companies need to interrogate the gap between transformation as a strategic objective and the experiences of employment equity employees and to move the organisation beyond compliance and numerical targets. It requires that companies educate the workforce about the importance and benefits of gender diversity. The study further demonstrates the significance of recognising the importance and value of women outside of formal appraisal systems and for providing career support interventions such as coaching and mentoring. The monitoring of career exposure at different levels of the organisation is recommended as a performance deliverable if organisations are to ensure that employees are adequately prepared for senior and executive leadership roles. Companies need to invest in work readiness programmes for first-time employees and to equip human resource personnel with the skills to enable them to assist staff members in developing individualised career development strategies.

I think it is important to note the comments that were made by two of the South African participants about not knowing how to move from a racist political past to inclusivity. With this in mind, I think at national government level diversity and transformation studies should be introduced as part of Life Orientation in primary school. There needs to be intentionality in teaching children to be cognisant and embracing of differences between races and cultures in the same way that there was intentionality in teaching about white

supremacy during apartheid. At organisational level, race is an elephant in the room and there have to be deliberate and conscious efforts to have race conversations if there is to be authentic transformation in the workplace.

The study highlights the need to take men along the journey of gender transformation. Without their understanding of the strategic imperative of having women in positions of leadership and the financial as well as sustainability issues that are at stake for organisations, the gender battle will continue to be fought in organisations for years to come. In both countries, there are policy implications as a result of the findings. In South Africa, it is clear that white women are benefiting more from the Employment Equity initiatives than African, Coloured and Indian women. It may be time to review the policies around white women qualifying to be classified as employment equity candidates. In Zimbabwe, African men have been the biggest beneficiaries of affirmative action policies. The policy review that is required is one that monitors the extent of implementation of existing policies to ensure that the gap in gender equality that is enshrined in the Constitution is addressed in a meaningful and tangible manner.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study were that only three social identity categories were investigated and that men were excluded from the study as the focus was on life story narratives of the women themselves. The results of the study cannot be generalised across the population. A further limitation was that the study used one on one interviews only. The use of focus groups in addition to the one on one could have revealed more layers of data than was done in this instance. The data could not therefore be triangulated in a meaningful way.

#### **6.5 Suggestions for Future Studies**

A study of this nature can never be totally comprehensive and there is always room for exploring other areas that are relevant to the study of women and the workplace. Some of the suggestions for future research are as follows:

- a. Investigating ethnicity and women in the workplace (intragroup dynamics).
- b. Exploring the experiences of competent women who have been forced to leave organisations and how they recovered.
- c. Investigating race, gender and social class with a focus on the born-frees and how their early interracial interactions are impacting their workplace experiences.
- d. Colouredness in the workplace.
- e. Career experiences of women in organisations that are run by women.
- f. Ethnicity and women in the workplace.
- g. Role of spiritual beliefs in the career journey.
- h. Interviewing women in white-owned businesses in Zimbabwe.
- i. Focus groups of both men and women exploring the issues around women career experiences and progression.

- j. Identify interviewees who have been “glass cliff” appointments and investigate how they managed to move on with their careers after such experiences.

Table 18: Outlines of Major Findings of the Study under each Objective

#	SOUTH AFRICA	ZIMBABWE
OBJECTIVE 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race, gender and class do impact on the career experiences of women, right from the time that they are born.</li> <li>• The social background and the schools attended by the participants affected the extent to which further education and the resultant career choices could be pursued. South Africa’s political past cannot be ignored as it plays a role in creating an environment that supported these imbalances and ensured that the system supported white people while it suppressed the black citizens.</li> <li>• The current political system has introduced laws at employment level but does not adequately address the schooling system that prepares learners for the workplace.</li> <li>• So while government may have an Employment Equity Act, the annual results of the employment equity report show very little progress in getting women to the top of the career ladder and the experiences of the women in the study have shed some light on some of the reasons that work against women in the workplace.</li> <li>• Race, gender and social class are part and parcel of how women are able to navigate the workplace and not only gain exposure and experience, but make the impact that is necessary for them to be recognised and promoted into senior positions of leadership.</li> <li>• Women are not valued in terms of their contribution, they are doubted in terms of their ability and this all links to how they experience the workplace and progress in their careers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Zimbabwe, gender, race and class intersect to inform the career experiences of women.</li> <li>• For the participants, gender played a bigger role in the workplace than race and the role of class was limited to the organisations for which African women could work.</li> <li>• This however did not limit their career options.</li> </ul>
OBJECTIVE 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to exercise authority and having authority respected by subordinates and colleagues alike was affected by the intersections of gender, race and class for some of the black participants.</li> <li>• The confidence to exercise authority grew with experience. The impostor syndrome manifested itself in African and Coloured women leaders and sabotage by other (mainly white) women was either experienced or observed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The findings were similar to those in South Africa, save that the impostor syndrome was experienced only by the Coloured woman leader.</li> <li>• Intragroup sabotage was experienced by some of the participants, and observed by one participant being done by one female boss to another female colleague.</li> </ul>
OBJECTIVE 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are multiple internal influences that impact the career progression of women. These factors are varying and each woman experiences them differently.</li> <li>• Parental and economic situations were prevalent, as well as the extent of racial integration in the formative years as influences on the internal narratives of the participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The internal influences, as in South Africa, were also varied but included parental support.</li> <li>• The age of childhood integration did not have an impact on the internal narratives of the women leaders in Zimbabwe.</li> </ul>
OBJECTIVE 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The informal systemic influences had a greater impact on the career progression of the participants than the formal ones.</li> <li>• The main issues for women once they are in the workplace are networking and understanding the political space and how to navigate it, and understanding which moves will make, stagnate or break their career.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Zimbabwe, the formal systemic influences played the bigger role whereas the informal influences were barely mentioned by the participants.</li> </ul>

## 6.6 Conclusion

In chapter 2 I presented the metaphor of a career labyrinth that Eagly and Carli (2007) use to describe the career journeys of women. Figure 5 is a pictorial representation of what a labyrinth looks like, based on the findings that have emerged from this study, thus confirming that there are indeed many “twists and turns” in the career journeys of women in corporates in South Africa and Zimbabwe. These twists and turns consist of internal and external barriers that women need to be cognisant of as they navigate the corporate world and, indeed, any workplace.

## 6.7 Final Thoughts and Reflection

Being able to arrive at this point and fulfil what has been a dream for a very long time has been a test of resilience. Many times I thought of throwing in the towel as the cost was seemingly too high. The journey with my supervisor was a real test of being able to take negative feedback and not be paralysed by it. I spent a year without touching my work as I wrestled in my mind with whether or not to continue with the studies. Many a time, I worked right through the night to try and put in the required hours and balance studying with the demands of work. As I look back at my own career experiences and compare them to those of the women leaders that took part in my study, I realise the importance of hearing the stories of the lived experiences of the other women. Their stories made me realise that the path to the top is not easy for any woman. There are negative experiences strewn across the journey. It is not a one-woman route, nor is the route the same for every woman but the experiences are

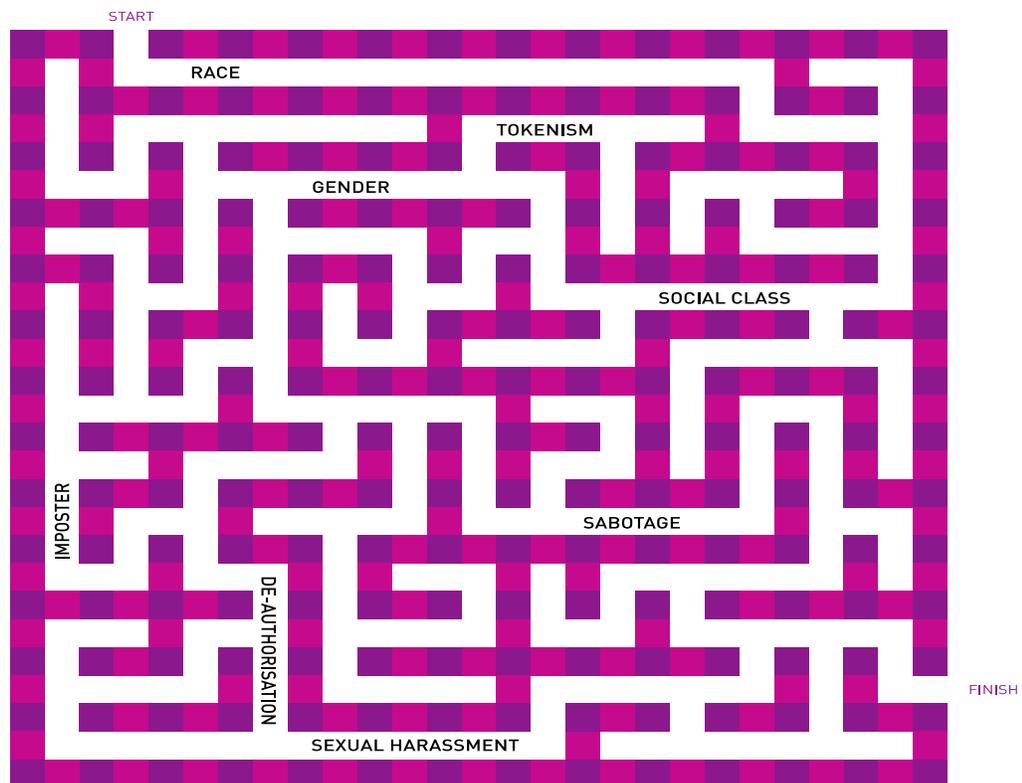


Figure 7: Career labyrinth revisited

so similar. Had I known then what I know now, I think I would have approached my career differently and responded differently to some of the situations that I faced and thought were unique to me. This journey has equipped me, for myself and all the young women who call me mum, auntie, sis Linda, and look up to me, with the ability to mentor and give advice, guidance and counsel. I can truly say it has been worth it and I am a better woman leader than I was when it all started .....

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# Appendix 1: SBL Ethics Committee Clearance Form

Graduate School of Business Leadership, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003, South Africa  
Cnr Janadel and Alexandra Avenues, Midrand 1685, Tel: +27 11 652 0000, Fax: +27 11 652 0299  
E-mail: [sbl@unisa.ac.za](mailto:sbl@unisa.ac.za) Website: [www.unisa.ac.za/sbl](http://www.unisa.ac.za/sbl)

## SCHOOL OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (GSBL CRERC)

04 April 2016

Ref #: 2016\_SBL/DBL\_005\_FA  
Name of applicant: Ms L Ncube  
Student #: 8789061

Dear Ms Ncube

**Decision: Ethics Approval**

**Student:** Ms L Ncube, [nakhosi@gmail.com](mailto:nakhosi@gmail.com), 083 222 9493

**Supervisor:** Prof P Mnguni, [mngunpp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mngunpp@unisa.ac.za), 011 652 0374

**Project Title:** The intersectionality of gender, race and class and career progression of women leaders in Southern Africa.

**Qualification:** Doctorate in Business Leadership (DBL)

Thank you for applying for research ethics clearance, SBL Research Ethics Review Committee reviewed your application in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.

### Outcome of the SBL Research Committee:

**Approval is granted for the duration of the first phase of the Project**

The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the SBL Research Ethics Review Committee on the 17/03/2016.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the SBL Research Ethics Review Committee.

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Graduate School of Business Leadership, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003, South Africa  
Cnr Janadel and Alexandra Avenues, Midrand, 1685, Tel: +27 11 652 0000, Fax: +27 11 652 0299  
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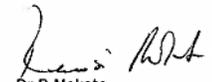
- 3) An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.
- 4) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

Kind regards,

  
Prof R Ramphal

**Chairperson: SBL Research Ethics Committee**

011 - 652 0363 or [ramphrr@unisa.ac.za](mailto:ramphrr@unisa.ac.za)

  
Dr R Mokate

**CEO and Executive Director: Graduate School of Business Leadership**

011- 652 0256/[mokatrd@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mokatrd@unisa.ac.za)

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## **Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

11 April 2016

Title: The Intersectionality of gender, race and class and the career progression of women leaders in Southern Africa.

#### **Dear Prospective Participant**

My name is Linda Ncube and I am doing research with Professor Peliwe Mnguni, a professor, in the Department of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour towards a Doctor of Business Leadership at the University of South Africa. We have funding from UNISA for the study. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled “The Intersectionality of gender, race and class and the career progression of women leaders in Southern Africa”.

#### **WHAT IS THE AIM/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

The aim of this study is to investigate how the intersections of gender, race and class affects the career experiences of corporate women leaders.

I am conducting this research to find out how the career experiences of women in middle and senior/executive management have been affected by their gender, race and social classes and how the simultaneous impact of the three has affected their ability to exercise authority in the workplace.

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

I have chosen you to participate in the study because you fit the profile of the women I need to take place in the study namely, you hold or have held a middle or senior management position in a corporate in the past 5 years.

I anticipate to interview about 8 women in your country.

#### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY /WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?**

Your role in the study would be to avail yourself for a face to face interview with me.

The study involves audio taping semi-structured interviews. I will ask questions about your background, childhood and school experiences as well as your career journey. I have attached the questions that I will be

asking for you to scan through and establish if you would be comfortable to answer them. I will need two hours of your time to conduct the interview and a possible telephonic follow up. There may be need to have a follow up interview via telephone for me to seek clarity on any issues that I may come across as I transcribe the interview.

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

If you are interested in issues related to women in the workplace, then this study will be of interest to you. The added benefits of participating in the study are the contribution to the body of knowledge and bringing about an African view to the field of study.

### **WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

This interview questions may delve into some sensitive areas such as experiences of sexual harassment or issues that bring about suppressed and potentially painful memories. There are no potential foreseeable risks to the participants in the study. Participants and the organisations they represent will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the study.

### **WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a fictitious code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

*I will transcribe the data myself and should there be need to use the services on third parties, these individuals will sign confidentiality agreements.* Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including a transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, e.g. research report, journal articles, conference presentation, etc. *(A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report).*

#### **HOW WILL INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of 5 years in a locked cupboard in my home for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected personal computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Indicate how information will be destroyed.

#### **WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

There are no payments for participating in this study. You will not bear any costs for participating in this study.

#### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences, UNISA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

#### **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS?**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Linda Ncube on +27832229493 or email on nakhosi@gmail.com. The findings are accessible for 5 years.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Linda Ncube, email:nakhosi@gmail.com; mobile number:+27832229493.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Professor Peliwe Mnguni: email mngunpp@UNISA.ac.za;phone number:+27116520000.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank \_\_\_\_\_ you.

Linda Ncube CA(SA)

## Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

### Informed consent for participation in an academic research project

#### THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER, RACE AND CLASS AND THE CAREER PROGRESSION OF WOMEN LEADERS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Dear Respondent

You are herewith invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by LINDA NCUBE, a student in the Doctor of Business Leadership at UNISA's Graduate School of Business Leadership (SBL). The purpose of the study is to investigate how the intersections of gender, race and class affects the career experiences of women leaders in Southern Africa. All your answers will be treated as confidential, and you will not be identified in any of the research reports emanating from this research.

Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may however choose not to participate and you may also withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Please would you kindly avail yourself for a two hour interview to answer the questions that I have prepared for the study. The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request.

Please contact my supervisor, Professor Peliwe Mnguni email [mgunpp@UNISA.ac.za](mailto:mgunpp@UNISA.ac.za) if you have any questions or comments regarding the study. Please sign below to indicate your willingness to participate in the study.

Yours sincerely



LINDA NCUBE CA (SA)

I, (NAME SUPPLIED), herewith give my consent to participate in the study. I have read the letter and understand my rights with regard to participating in the research.

---

Respondent's signature

---

Date

## Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

### INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to participate in my study. The study seeks to understand gender, race and social class impact the career progression of women and the ability of women to exercise authority in the workplace. The findings of the study will be used to create a theoretical framework that women can use to help advance their careers in organisations. The interview is in two sections, early life and work life experiences. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time, should you no longer wish to continue. You can also choose not to answer questions which you are not comfortable answering.

#### Section 1: Early Life Experiences and family origins

- **To start our conversation, would you perhaps tell me about the place/s where you grew up and what it was like for you to grow up there. (Age) Please include details like the structure of your family, number of kids and so on**
- What is your ethnic background?
- **In which ways do you think growing up there influenced your career choices?**
- **In which ways do you think growing up there shaped the kind of person/woman/leader you are today?**
- How would you describe your family and your experiences of growing up in it?
- In which ways do you think growing up in your family influenced your career choices?
- **In which social class would you say you grew up? Why do you say that?**
- **Which social class do you consider yourself to belong in now? What informs this self-categorisation?**

#### Moving on now to your school life:

- **During school years, what are some of the things you were told about academic performance and career choices for girls and boys?(Co-ed and single sex)**
- To what extent did these statements influence your career choices?

#### Completing the first part of the interview

Was it easy to talk about your early life experiences, what part was hard? Anything you would like to re-visit before we conclude this section?

---

---

## **Section 2: Work Life Experiences**

In this section of the interview I would like to know about your professional life and your career experiences.

### **Career Influences – Internal and External factors**

- **What is your highest level of education?**
- **What is your current position and for how long have you been in management?**
- **What have been 2-3 of your career highlights to date? <Probe>**
- **What are some of the challenges that you have experienced in your career? <Probe>**
- **What did you learn from both the positive and negative career experiences?**
- **In which ways do you feel that the organisation/s that you work/ed for supported or hindered your career progression? <Probe>**
- **What are some of the things that your employer organisation/s could have done differently to support your career progression?**
- **To what extent do you think your race, ethnicity, gender and class influenced and continue to influence your career experiences?**

### **Your experiences as a woman leader**

I would like to hear about your experiences as a leader to date:

- **How would you describe your leadership journey to date? /what have been some of the highs and lows?**
- **How comfortable and confident do you feel exercising authority as a leader?**
- **Are there situations when you feel/have felt less comfortable/confident exercising authority? <Probe>**
- **How did you overcome any challenges that you experienced with exercising authority?**
- **Do you ever doubt your own abilities to execute/deliver in this role as a leader?**
- **To what extent do you think your race, gender and class influenced and continue to influence your experiences as a leader?**
- **To what extent do you think your race, ethnicity, gender and class influenced and continue to influence how you exercise authority as a leader?**

### **Organisational Dynamics**

- **How easy has it been for you to form close working relationships with co-workers within and across gender, race, and class? <Probe>**
- **Have you ever experienced sexual harassment at any point in your life?**
- **How have your relationship with co-workers of different genders, races and classes impacted on your career experiences?**

- **What are your thoughts on the suggestion that sometimes women sabotage their own career progression?**
- **What of the suggestion that sometimes women do not support each other enough, that they in fact sabotage each other at work?**
- **Have you ever experienced sabotage (Probe)?**
- To what extent do you feel supported by your employer organisation in your role as leader?
- What are some of the things that your employer organisation could do differently to better support women leaders?

### **Personal Impact – Understanding of self**

- In which ways do you think you have been effective/less effective as leader?
- Do you think achieving success is different or similar for different races? Why?
- Do you think achieving success is different or similar for men and women?. Why?
- To what extent do you think one's race impacts their effectiveness in the role of a corporate leader? <Probe>
- To what extent do you think one's gender impacts their effectiveness in the role of a leader? Why/how so?
- If you were to start again, and given the benefit of hindsight, what are some of the things, if any, that you would do differently in your career, how so?
- What are some of the things that you wish the women who came before you could have told you?
- What lessons have you learnt that you could share with aspiring young women, the do's and don'ts?

### **Closing**

Is there anything you would like to restate or mention before we wrap up? Do you have any final thoughts or questions?

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences, I appreciate your honesty and will respect your privacy.

I will email you the transcribed interview once I am done so that you can comment as to whether I have accurately reflected the discussion that we have had today. Thank you.