UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

The glass ceiling effect in South African companies: an illusion or reality

A thesis submitted to the University of the Western Cape, South Africa in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD Management

by

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November 2022

Declaration Statement

"I declare that the glass ceiling effect in South African companies: an illusion or reality is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or assessment in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references".

T Mbuli 11 November 2022

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my support structure: my late mother who endlessly ensured I was in a position to receive the best education available and my late grandfather who understood the importance of education and encouraged me to study even though he had never had the same opportunity. My late daughter Queen Nandi – you remain an inspiration to me.

Acknowledgements

My life has been profoundly altered as a result of working on my thesis and I would like to express my gratitude to all the individuals who were part of this journey for their support and assistance.

I would like to extend my appreciation to my family for the support they have provided over the years. I would also like to thank my husband who is the pillar of my strength and my son who pushes me to shoot for the stars; both play an important role in my life.

To the women who took time out of their hectic lives to share their innermost thoughts and feelings, thank you.

Finally, to my supervisor who has been instrumental in making this journey tolerable, my gratitude.

The process was, at times, difficult to navigate but ultimately gratifying in its completion. Once more, I want to express my gratitude to everyone for their continuing support.

Abstract

Despite the existence of advanced employment equity legislation that addresses inequalities and discrimination in South Africa, the glass ceiling still inhibits the advancement of women to top positions in both the private and public sectors. The glass ceiling entails inherent and assimilated factors that contribute to barriers that limit women's advancement in executive positions. In South Africa, women are the majority, yet they are under-represented in leadership positions in corporates. A qualitative research approach was followed to explore the challenges experienced by women in their efforts to become leaders in the South African corporate sector. The study captured the real experiences of 17 women in corporate South Africa through unstructured interviews. The findings revealed that women were not climbing the career ladder as quickly as their male counterparts and tended to experience more obstacles on their leadership journey despite their skills and educational backgrounds. The study found that the factors affecting women's advancement to top management were rooted in societal, cultural and organisational circumstances. Furthermore, the study concluded that women are at a disadvantage based on their gender, perceived notions and stereotyped capabilities. Additionally, household expectations regarding women's roles and the influence of organisational culture on how women are perceived and treated as leaders in the workplace play a major role in their challenging journey to the top echelons. According to the study's findings and the reviewed literature, women face obstacles that hinder them from attaining leadership positions in the workplace. Culture and patriarchy are identified as the sources of these impediments that obstruct women's ascension to positions of authority. Since this was a phenomenological study, the participants' responses provided an initial understanding of the significance of social change and the contexts in which it is needed. The study offers a theoretical contribution to future research on women's leadership and gender transformation within organisations. It suggests that mentoring and networking initiatives be implemented to support aspiring female leaders.

Keywords: *barriers, bias, culture, gender, glass ceiling, inequality, leaders, stereotypes, women*

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

The Constitution of South Africa (South Africa, 1996) protects the rights of all individuals and promotes equal protection and freedom from unfair discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. However, South Africa's murky history is indicative of a past that was manufactured based on racial and gender prejudice. According to Flood, Hoosain, and Primo (1997), black South African women have been subjected to social and economic repression for several decades. Bhorat and Van der Westhuizen (2008) agree that South Africa continues to experience one of the largest wealth disparities globally, despite the gradual eradication of workplace discrimination against blacks, who constitute the majority of the population. Per the country's constitution and with the support of a gender equity legislative framework and a women's empowerment legislative framework, attaining gender equality in South Africa is an unavoidable national objective. This, together with the impressive collection of equity laws and regulations, demonstrates the importance South Africa places on gender equality. Applebaum (2006) defines the glass ceiling as an artificial barrier based on organisational prejudice that prevents skilled employees from ascending to upper-level management positions.

According to Manfredi, Vickers, and Cousens (2017), intangible obstacles such as leadership-gendered construction and perceptual bias perceive women as being in a less advantageous position than men, hence preventing women from succeeding in their jobs. According to Hailey (2006), the definition of leadership is comprehensive and encompasses a variety of concepts, yet no single definition encompasses all the numerous dimensions of leadership. Applebaum (2006) further elaborates on the fact that women still confront pushback in conservative business environments. Weyer (2007) concurs that the continuation of the glass ceiling prohibits women from ascending to senior management roles and, as a result, they are considered and viewed as unequal to men in terms of leadership responsibilities and as unfit for leadership positions. This suggests that there may be several obstacles preventing women from ascending to leadership positions.

Over several decades, South Africa's legal system gave certain individuals rights precedence over those of others. According to Worden (1994), the 1948 law legitimised the apartheid government's racial segregation-based discrimination regime. Gender discrimination in the

workplace was institutionalised during the apartheid era (South African Department of Labour, 2008). It was only in the early 1990s that South Africa embraced a democratic dispensation. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, prevalent political and economic shifts compelled the then-South African government to re-evaluate its approach towards the employment of black labourers (Kirsten, Van Zyl, & Van Rooyen, 1994).

The Republic of South Africa's Labour Relation Act (1997) stated that no one may be unduly discriminated against based on race, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language. A Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) 2019 report found that despite South Africa's progress in achieving gender equality and transformation goals through numerous policy and legislative frameworks, the implementation of these policy and legislative frameworks, including empowering relevant state organisations, has proven challenging to promote gender equality in the workplace. With the new regime and its alteration of the country's political, economic and social institutions, women needed to modify their character in terms of culture and customs (Talley-Ross, 1995). Few women had leadership or management positions in the workplace and those few who dominated these positions were white women (Nelson, 1981).

Conaghan (2000) argues that feminist movements that advocate for gender transformation should avoid essentialist positions that view the subordination of women across all races as a uniform experience. Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015) agree that feminists' racial categorisation has been hierarchical rather than interdependent, leading to a widespread feeling of invisibility among black women. While all women are oppressed, some women are oppressed more than others. Consequently, a process of gender transformation must also address the historical imbalances of women's oppression. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) posit that feminist scholars saw the gender division of labour, which was legitimised by the naturalisation of inequalities and connections between the different sexes, as the origin of this supremacy. Darmangeat (2015) further supports this notion by asserting that men have historically utilised their power to attain economic benefits, but these advantages were ultimately constrained, despite men's considerable influence.

According to Lipton (2007), history plays a significant role in the formation of the essential components of our consciousness, contributing to our views about what makes us who we

are, including the people – both friends and foes – with whom we identify. This also includes the development and formation of societies. According to English and Hay (2015), South African women continue to experience poverty. This affects the education and training of women, as well as their access to resources and housing. Accord (2022) concurs that the sluggish pace of women's empowerment at the local level is pervasive in South Africa, hence posing significant challenges to the achievement of gender equality.

Makama, Helman, Titi, and Day (2019) present a feminist strategy that considers the African region's historical, political, and economic frameworks. African-centred feminism recognises that various forms of oppression impact individuals of all genders. The fight against patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression does not focus solely on males but rather on the institutions that create these disparities, which all genders are part of. According to Bass and Alvolio (1992), the glass ceiling term has been used to graphically illustrate the obstacles women have encountered on their path to senior management positions. It has been suggested that these barriers are subtle and do not constitute discrimination; however, they are equally effective. Uneven gender relations that are connected with society connections create unnecessary obstacles for women who are already confronted with socioeconomic disparities that impede their access to education, the economy and vertical social mobility.

Botha (2006) states that South Africa faces a challenge in terms of growing and strengthening the skills and knowledge of its people, particularly in underprivileged segments of the population. Gender inequality continues to be a moral and social issue and has a negative impact on economic challenges for women who make up over 50 per cent of the world population, yet only generate 37 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), highlighting their exclusion from labour opportunities (McKinsey, 2020).

Northouse (2010) emphasises that impediments to women's access to leadership positions are widespread and result in women being over-represented in predominantly less authoritative leadership positions compared to men. According to Caligiuri and Tung (1999), gender equity has become a focus area specifically on women's issues around the world. Their study focuses primarily on how the glass ceiling notion affects women, as the effect not only

applies to women as individuals but also to women as a group who are prevented from rising in their careers owing to their gender.

As the female employment rate generally rises, the percentage of women participating in labour has climbed from 38 per cent in 1970 to 47 per cent by the end of the twentieth century (Lazreg, 2000). A more recent report from the World Bank in 2022 revealed that slightly over 50 per cent of women globally participate in the labour force, in contrast to 80 per cent of men. Nonetheless, women have fewer opportunities for career advancement or business growth due to their lower likelihood of working in formal employment. Furthermore, Coleman (1998) explains that the term glass ceiling has been more prevalent in societal discourse over the past few decades, yet this has not addressed the gender gaps in the workplace as women continue to be under-represented in leadership roles.

In addition, Brandser (1996) explains that gender represents the culturally influenced biological disparities between men and women. Goldin (1990) agrees that gender remains embedded in organisational class and/or hierarchy, as seen by the pervasive perception that senior leadership must always be male. This reinforces a gendered hierarchy where femininity is associated with inadequacy, and a masculine discourse is established as the unchallenged norm (Foss, 2010). Mkalipe (1984) emphasises that the former mode of thought, in which women were demoted to secondary status, persisted for generations uncontested. This is supported by Santho (1995) who concurs that the African culture and value system do not consider women as individuals but rather as societal additions. This is particularly evident in South Africa where women's responsibilities in the country's growth were limited, preventing their access to jobs, health and education (Wetzel, 1993).

Women have historically dominated the lower levels of corporate hierarchies and have been excluded from decision-making and executive positions (Struckmann, 2018). Lack of education and training made it difficult for women to get paid employment which was a major obstacle. According to a survey conducted by the British Council in 2021, in many countries, fewer than ten out of every 100 girls complete lower secondary education. Even when females have access to education, gender differences in learning results persist. Studies have identified several barriers that impede women's advancement to leadership positions and decision-making levels within an organisation. Women's family responsibilities, cultural,

religious and racial barriers, negative stereotypes, leadership styles, and organisational culture in the workplace are some of the most significant barriers (Clark, 2000).

According to Budlender (1998), before 1994, black people in South Africa had limited access to quality education, with girls being particularly disadvantaged; hence, the discriminatory educational policy was the first obstacle to be overcome. Vlasnik (2005) notes that when girls were permitted access to formal education, the emphasis was on preparing them for marriage and motherhood. Girls were taught topics such as home economics, while boys studied technical subjects. Gordon (2004) claimed that equal educational opportunity entails not only equal access to school but also the equal treatment of boys and girls within schools and classrooms.

South Africa's long history of gender and discrimination can be witnessed through established societal echelons. The country is working hard to overcome the historical legacy of patriarchal systems and gendered beliefs about women's responsibilities that have been passed down through the generations. Though it may appear that women have made great strides in advancing to the top of the ladder, they still battle stereotypes and experience the business world culture as hegemonically masculine. Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) define the idea of stereotyping as the habit of labelling and combining people into a unit and then assigning them traits depending on their membership in that unit. Concerning women's leadership styles in the workplace, prevalent prejudices persist. Women may hold leadership positions, but they are barred from decision-making positions (Tiessen, 2004).

This imbalance is a result of institutional frameworks that, having been dominated by men, for the most part, are insensitive to the needs of women and, therefore, exclude women from spaces of decision-making, significant roles and academic excellence (Zulu, 2016). However, women are still unable to advance to positions of executive leadership because there are unseen impediments that prevent their advancement. Schneider, Stahl and Barsoux (2014) argue that culture plays a crucial role in leadership. Yet, women in leadership positions are just as effective as men, according to a study done by Harvard Business Review (2011). This gendered pattern of hierarchical advantage has been the subject of considerable research (Petersen & Saporta, 2004). Research by Fernández and Campero (2017) indicates that the

pattern applies to the labour market as a whole, even though many studies on glass ceilings invoke the image of an internal labour market or a job ladder within an organisation.

UNU-WIDER (2019) proved that the large increase in the gender salary gap at the highest percentile since 2007 demonstrates that South Africa has been experiencing a growing glass ceiling effect. This corresponds to the glass ceiling limiting competent and capable women from obtaining highly compensated top management positions, despite their superior qualifications. Multiple studies, such as one by (Ragins, Townsend and Mattis 1998) have demonstrated that women are disproportionately assigned less visible positions, reducing their ability to form social networks and communicate with influential individuals. Implicit leadership theories, which are widely held beliefs about the characteristics that define a successful leader, can aid individuals in processing vast amounts of information. However, they may also create a distorted perception and evaluation of leaders who do not conform to the conventional stereotype (Forsyth & Nye, 2008).

To progress women in leadership paths and produce new practices, topics and subjects related to the glass ceiling effect, it is essential to comprehend the phenomenon's evolution. Specific studies have been undertaken on the glass ceiling effect; however, a thorough literature review on the glass ceiling has not been conducted and such a study is necessary to advance scientific understanding by offering a South African perspective on the research topic. The primary objective of this study was to shed light on the challenges experienced by female leaders, even after they have been promoted to management roles. In tandem with the increase in the proportion of women in the labour force, the demand for workplace equality has increased. Leadership has historically been portrayed primarily in masculine terms and many leadership theories have focused primarily on stereotypically masculine traits (Eagly, 2007). The study focused on the glass ceiling and the most significant career barriers for females in management positions in South Africa.

This study investigated the experience of women leaders in corporate South Africa with the glass ceiling impact through in-depth interviews. In addition, the study explored the participants' perceptions of the benefits and costs of shattering the glass ceiling, as well as their leadership journey and the lessons learnt. This study focused on the glass ceiling and the most significant career barriers for female senior managers and executives in South Africa.

The study sheds light on challenges women face and the biases created and learnt from upbringing. Examining the glass ceiling effect will aid not just in comprehending the notion but also in determining how to circumvent it.

1.1 Background

The World Economic Forum (2012) states that one might think that in the 21st century there is a place where "an individual's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities" are not determined by one's birth right; a place where young boys and girls can grow up secure in the knowledge that they will have opportunities in their lifetimes to realise their full potential.

Women as equal citizens should therefore have the same opportunities as their male counterparts in reaching top management, yet the number of women in senior positions tells a different story. Bogotch (2002) upholds that individuals with similar abilities and skills should have equal access to leadership positions and that they should further have equal access to economic and social capital. The study explores a theory of justice based on the social contract theory. The theory was developed by Rawls (1971) and clearly states that individuals have equal rights to basic liberties. Everyone has the same right to opportunities and an equal chance as another individual of similar ability.

According to Neff (1966), when women made it to the workplace, society was outraged that women had to support themselves and endured degrading wrongs as working women. In addition, Gallagher (1985) clarifies that during the 60s, 70s and even mid-80s, the women's movement used militant rhetoric and permissible action to eliminate evident discrimination. Strachan, Akao, Kilavanwa, and Warsal (2010) clarify that women's limited representation in leadership roles is associated with the income and poverty levels of countries globally. In particular, countries with lower economic indicators tend to have fewer women occupying senior positions in education.

However, the majority of the barriers that persist today are covert; a revolution could not locate them to destroy them. Rather, gender discrimination is now so ingrained in organisational culture that it is virtually undetectable. Oftentimes, even the women who feel its effects have a difficult time identifying its source (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). As Davies

(2011) contends, previous research has demonstrated that organisational culture is a significant hindrance to retaining women in the workforce, particularly in higher-level management positions.

However, the reality is that women are still under-represented in leadership roles. Catalyst (2022) states that, in 2021, only 26 per cent of all CEOs and managing directors were women. Several factors affect women in their leadership journey including gender role stereotyping that can manifest itself in women being passive in pursuing leadership positions. The invisible barrier symbolises a glass ceiling that stops women within corporations from attaining executive and leadership roles. According to Darling-Hammond (1997) gender differences must be considered within a comprehensive theoretical framework. These inequalities are preserved and replicated through unequal socialisation based on common human behaviour and the inclination to imitate gender role models. According to Collier (1994), ladies will inherently mimic women while boys will imitate men. Otherwise, gender studies may obscure rather than explain social realities by ignoring power dynamics and treating gender as a static concept (Witz, 1990).

Over the past few decades, the international community has made several commitments to promoting gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. These commitments include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1985), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Millennium Summit (2000) (UN, 2007).

Lahtinen and Wilson (1994) argue that a fundamental shift in attitude towards women and employment would be required to solve the typecast challenge, as opposed to the gradual shift proposed by Cooper and Lewis (1995). Society's fundamental structure consists of social, political and economic institutions. These institutions are responsible for coordinating and regulating the social, political and economic activity of their members (Rawls, 1971). The equality gap varies by country and may be caused by cultural attitudes that discourage women and minority groups from entering the workforce. Across humanity's civilisation, especially in the world's major faiths, there have been customs and restrictions that forbid women from holding positions of authority. Omoyibo and Ajayi (2011) state that gender roles are

established through socialisation and entrenched by systems such as culture, legislation and tradition.

Sandberg (2013) explains that women may internalise society's negative messages and have lower expectations for what they can achieve or aspire to in the workplace. For instance, girls are driven to adhere to certain deeply ingrained social inscriptions from the time they are young, making it impossible for them to dismiss their influence as adults (Kulkarni, 2002). Religion also plays a role in gender bias and disparity; for instance, the Catholic Church does not have women priests which is a leadership role based on an old tradition. Kamberidou (2020) affirms that gender inequality and disparities are intensified by traditions, cultural customs and religion and can have a great impact on where women are placed in a societal hierarchy.

Children acquire these roles through the process of socialisation, through which they learn to behave in accordance with societal values, beliefs and attitudes. At about the age of five, the majority of children are firmly rooted in culturally acceptable gender norms (Kane, 1996). The foundation of sexism is gender stereotypes and, according to Fiske (1998), these are typically based on sex, race, age, ethnicity or culture. Sexism refers to the prejudiced view that one sex is superior to the other. Brandt (2011) conducted a study to demonstrate that sexism in a society can predict gender inequality. Gender prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination are frequently referred to as a sort of sexism in which individuals of a given society prescribe predetermined beliefs, attitudes and notions concerning the nature of men and women and the respective responsibilities that each should play in society (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2011), thus, being designed to favour men both in policy and in reality, sustaining the gender gap in executive management (Oakley, 2000). These studies provide evidence that sexism legitimises the status quo in society and exacerbates the gender hierarchy.

Numerous attempts to define prejudice within the field of psychology have been made. According to Crandall and Eshelman (2003), prejudice cannot always be described as irrational or unjustified; therefore, it is preferable to define prejudice as a substantial negative opinion of a social group or individual. Institutional discrimination is the term sociologists use to refer to the discrimination that is embedded into the social system (Pincus, 1996). Discrimination is the unfair treatment of group members (Bergh & Theron, 2004).

Furthermore, Weiten (2014) explains that stereotypes are widespread perceptions that individuals exhibit particular features due to their membership in a particular group. According to O'Neill and Blake-Beard (2002), for stereotypes to exist, there must first be the categorisation of persons such as sexual orientation and ethnicity through visible factors that can easily identify an individual. Cox (1994) clarifies that when individuals stereotype, they adjudicate and evaluate others based on common perceptions of the group they belong to instead of the basis of individual features.

According to the US Department of Labour (1990), the number of women in managerial roles climbed significantly in the US during the 1980s. However, the percentage of women in executive roles remained low around the globe. Powell (1999) drew on numerous established theories of sex discrimination that hypothesise that senior management promotions are affected by the applicant's sex. According to Kanter's (1977) theory of sex discrimination, the subjective evaluation of an applicant is gender dependent and guides whether the individual will be a proper fit in the organisation and will drive promotional decisions for senior management positions when these applicants are evaluated. The transfer of societal gender preconceptions into the workplace prevents women from obtaining positions for which they are qualified (Weiten, 2014). This illustrates that both men and women consistently apply stereotypical constructions of gender in which narratives centre on discourses of male dominance and female submission (Boonzaier, 2008).

The rational bias theory by Larwood, Gutek, and Gattiker (1988) proposes that discrimination related to gender-specific promotion to top management levels and the decision-makers are interconnected and can be attributed to intentional bias on the part of individuals who are interested in personal gain and not necessarily the elimination or mitigation of sex discrimination within organisations. Theories of the unconscious biases of decision-makers, such as those of Motowidlo (1986) and (Perry, Davis-Blake & Kulik 1994), claim that males owning a template of the perfect candidate for a top management position as a male would be more likely to favour male candidates over female applicants. Thus, regardless of how hard women work or how much they prove themselves, they are not treated equally, resulting in job segregation. Numerous authors argue that female sex inferiority was the cause of sex discrimination (French & Meredith, 1994).

Doubell, Struwig, and Barrett (2014) observe that feminist theorists consider women or gender to be social creations as opposed to biological realities. Men, on the other hand, view the oppression of women as a historical natural order that governs not just men and women but all humans who live in a society. Feminism, according to Chowdhury (2009), is not a monolithic, unitary concept but rather a rich, multidimensional and diverse collection of frequently opposing heterogeneous views, making it difficult to provide a single definition for this complex field of theory.

However diverse the concepts may be, they always address women's subordinate status in society and the discrimination they endure due to the social, economic, political or cultural order. According to Rubin (1975) feminist approaches try to produce a broader explanation by seeing the origins of inequalities between genders as a result of the organisation and operation of society as a whole, whereas economic approaches often seek to rigorously identify the underlying factors concerning gender disparity in the workplace and provide a utilitarian interpretation. Harding (2004) concurs that feminism is a drive and beliefs about gender equality are a problem. Feminists contend that patriarchy, which asserts the supremacy of men over women, is restraining women. Through an examination of experience and one's place in society, feminism tries to gain a better understanding of the dynamics behind gender and sex inequality.

To expand on the glass ceiling and critical mass conceptions, Eagly and Karau (2002) developed a prejudice theory of role congruity that female leaders encounter to determine if prejudice was one of the reasons for the low percentage of females in leadership roles. The role congruity theory contends that males have a stronger benefit in upward work flexibility in female sectors because they exclusively compete with women whose gender norms are less congruent with leadership role qualities (Rakow & Nastasia, 2008). Likewise, Williams (1992) argues that gender stereotyping gives males a bigger advantage in female occupations than it does for men in male-dominated occupations.

Davies-Netzley's (1998) study on women in management builds on sociological and feminist theories comparing the perspectives of male and female American CEOs on corporate mobility and success strategies. According to Heywood (2017), ideologies and movements have common goals. These goals include the establishment of equal political, financial, personal

and social rights for women as women's liberation is seen as an impossibility in a societal orientation created by males and based on patriarchy (Coquery-Vidrovitch & Raps, 2018). In an ideal universe, both women and men in executive roles should be equal; they should be paid equally, and they should be treated everywhere, according to liberal feminist scholars (Aldoory, 2003).

In South Africa, significant progress has been made towards recognising the equal rights of South African women since 1994, however, these modifications are merely ornamental as they exist only on paper (Bentley, 2005). Historically, women are not permitted to participate in traditional leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Even though men have consistently occupied leadership positions, the leadership landscape is shifting and evolving as women gain access to a range of leadership positions. Women were previously viewed as minors and did not participate in community decision-making.

Patriarchal theories, such as that of Marshall (1984), suggest that women's journeys to top management roles are affected and impacted due to the inclination of male decision-makers who continue to influence and preserve control and authority over women. Daughters in the line of succession, regardless of their position (including being the firstborn of a hereditary chief), are not permitted to become chiefs according to an ancient custom (Matemba, 2005). With the introduction of democracy, male primogeniture is harmonised with gender equality, particularly in chieftaincy succession (Mireku, 2010).

Dema (2008) postulates that the discourse on organisational equality makes gender issues invisible not because organisations ignore or reject them but because the relationships and possibilities between men and women are unequal. Among the negative stereotype assumptions that distinguish men and women is the notion that women are more likely to prioritise family responsibilities over business concerns. All these obstacles to women's career advancement are exemplified by the term glass ceiling (Schein, 2001).

According to UNU-WIDER (2019), women may have achieved strides in labour force participation in South Africa with numbers rising from 44 per cent in 1993 to about 49 per cent in 2018. In the past, gender equality policy emphasised the so-called equal opportunity approach (Fryer & Loury, 2005). This method was based on a descriptive theory surrounding

women embracing a symbolic avenue in obtaining top-level jobs. Accordingly, it was believed that if women were provided with similar levels of education as men, they would be able to compete with males for top positions that they had previously been unable to obtain. Therefore, a programme was developed to encourage women to pursue higher education. Younger women, exposed to a changing family environment and educational opportunities, are breaking through the glass ceiling, according to research by Simpson and Altman (2000). These women are altering corporate culture, challenging stereotypes and making their way into an environment that had traditionally been viewed as male dominated.

However, there has not been much of a change in the wage disparity on average, which raises questions about whether or not affirmative action has successfully addressed the problems of the past. According to Gerhart and Rynes (2003), the vast bulk of the existing research on the gender pay gap focuses on the differences between men's and women's base incomes, while bonuses and other forms of incentives are typically ignored. A further indication of injustice is the gender wage gap which exists between male and female workers. According to Murphy (2005), the wage gap between men and women in the US who work full-time jobs remains at 77 cents for every dollar earned by males.

Galal (2021) affirms that, in South Africa, the female unemployment rate has steadily surpassed the male unemployment rate, reaching roughly 34 per cent of the entire labour force by the last quarter of 2020. Closer scrutiny of the country's score around economic participation and the disparities regarding gender equality corroborates this. However, Mosomi (2019) states that there has been a substantial decline from 40 per cent in the 1990s to over 16 per cent in 2014 in gender pay inequality. In addition, for the first time, South African women represent 50 per cent of the government's cabinet compared to a mere 2.7 per cent before the country's democratic election (People Assembly, 2020).

Institutional racism, where opportunities and rights were based on a person's colour and gender, has a long history in South Africa. According to Netshitenzhe (2015), black women have experienced "triple oppression": first, as members of a class that is underprivileged and marginalised; second, as people of colour in a society that gives preference to the white majority; and third, as women in patriarchal African cultures. In some cases, it is obvious that gender segregation in the workplace still exists and men are choosing fields that are

dominated by men despite the laws designed to address this. Hooks (1984) argues that black women's actual experiences shape their awareness to the extent that their perspectives differ from those with a certain degree of privilege. The chances provided to women in the workplace and formal and informal relationships were impacted by historical patriarchy (Hendrickse, 2004).

Johnson (2014) explains that patriarchy affects all spheres of our lives: communities, legal structures and families. Coetzee (2001) adds that democratic South Africa has not achieved the aim of equalising gender and is supported by Bain and Company's (2017) research that found that women faced challenges in the pursuit of leadership in the South African business environment. The findings also highlighted that women have more obstacles to becoming senior managers than men; even though women tend to be aspirational and confident about making it to the executive level, only a minority actually make it. In addition, Bain and Company (2017) research found that 31 per cent of corporates do not have a single woman in a senior leadership position.

According to the CGE (2019), there were slight improvements that favoured women in managerial positions between 1994 and 1998. Women have historically been marginalised and mistreated. This phenomenon is applicable worldwide and is not just a South African phenomenon (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). In addition to expecting women to be submissive to men, be powerless, have fewer realistic opportunities and even less access to resources, South African culture has historically given gender-related favours to men, according to the report that was produced in 2000 by South Africa's CGE.

Cook (1994) elaborates that there have been significant discussions about whether or not women's rights might be universal as women around the world are treated unfairly and are denied access to basic human rights even though international human rights concerning women were established and tools were designed with women in mind to solve the issues they face. A study by UCT (2017) concurs that in terms of the number of women who hold positions of power and authority in an organisation, South Africa performs poorly. According to recent data, only three per cent of companies have a female CEO, which is five per cent less than the global average as women represent only 28 per cent of senior management positions

in organisations. Furthermore, there are no women in top management roles in 31 per cent of SA enterprises.

Gillward (2018) lists one of the main obstacles as the absence of crucial assistance for women's professional progress and emphasises the lack of opportunity as crucial data regarding the status of women around the world. Adebowale (1994) explains that women should be aware that despite efforts, there is still a significant amount of gender inequality and segregation in social spaces and that achieving equality requires the participation of a large number of professional women and men.

1.2 Problem statement

On paper, South Africa has some of the most stringent laws on gender empowerment including affirmative action introduced through the Employment Equality Act of 1998. However, the absence of women in top executive positions in notable companies continues to be one of corporate South Africa's most glaring shortcomings. According to a PwC (2020) report, only six per cent of CEOs in JSE-listed companies are women. Invisible barriers still prevent females from reaching high leadership status and stereotypes still exist within the geographical area once females are involved. This emphasises the need for women to participate in all spheres of the economy.

However, women still find it difficult to climb the corporate ladder due to discrimination and the glass ceiling effect. Research conducted by Bain & Cummings (2013) found that women based in South Africa aspire to senior positions even more than men when entering the workforce. However, even though women begin their careers motivated to be leaders, they still do not necessarily reach senior positions.

A major difference in how women are viewed in the working sector in comparison to their male counterparts is evident. Several obstacles prevent women from rising through the ranks to positions of authority and are rooted in societal interpretations such as patriarchy and culture. This emphasises the need for women to participate in all economic sectors. Discrimination and the glass ceiling effect continue to make it challenging for women to climb the corporate ladder. This translates to a ceiling that prevents capable and qualified women

from obtaining highly compensated top management positions, despite being more qualified than men.

1.3 Research questions

The following research questions will be addressed:

- What is the meaning of the glass ceiling and is the glass ceiling concept a perception or reality?
- What invisible barriers affect women in their leadership journey?
- Are women aware of the glass ceiling effect and do they experience it?
- How does gender inequality and stereotypes affect women in business?
- What impact do social hierarchy and culture have on women's leadership journeys?

1.4 Purpose of the study

Beckingham (1974) states that a research purpose is a statement of why a study is being conducted or the aim of a study. This study tries to investigate if and how South Africa's corporate glass ceiling exists. This research seeks to evaluate the obstacles women leaders face and whether cultural or personal reasons restrict their advancement to higher management positions in South Africa. Furthermore, the study aims the to formulate inclusive and transformational policies that will address gender disparity in the workplace.

Wirth (2001) defines the glass ceiling as the behavioural and organisational prejudices that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their companies. Dambrin and Lambert (2008) refined the definition of the glass ceiling through their study undertaken in accounting firms. They argue that the simultaneous action of multiple organisational and behavioural biases causes women to exclude themselves from traditional corporate hierarchies early in their careers. Professional service companies do not place women in positions of prominence or with high-level customers which could lead to partnerships because of the long hours spent with clients and the potential or perceived conflicts with family commitments (Pinnington & Sandberg, 2012). Researchers are concerned about the lack of high-level women leaders and are speculating that women may face implicit bias while seeking leadership roles (Cook & Glass, 2014).

Cockburn (1991) affirms that rarely have studies attempted to examine class, gender and racial inequality in organisations as complex, mutually reinforcing or contradictory processes. Contemporary racism, according to Feagin (2000), is systemic and encompasses a broad array of practices such as the unjustly acquired political-economic dominance of Whites and the ongoing economic and other resource disparities along racial lines. Most studies have concentrated on a single category. As the image of the white male leader suggests, all of these inequalities are inherent in any organisational research, even when they are not formally identified and studied. In addition, Lupu (2012) points out that the paucity of women leaders results from the limited decisions women are forced to make in response to a sequence of challenges they face throughout their careers. Smith (2002) contends that the yield on power fluctuates by gender, even when companies spend similarly on human capital. To account for the parameters of the human capital approach, another set of theories illuminates wider societal and organisational components.

This study explored the existence of barriers that prohibit women from advancing to leadership roles that may be rooted in societal interpretations such as patriarchy and culture. Understanding the challenges women go through in their leadership journeys will provide insight for aspiring women in corporates. The aim is to develop a comprehensive comprehension of the fundamental theories of the glass ceiling phenomenon and to formulate inclusive and transformative policies that can tackle gender inequality in the workplace. The study will hopefully provide a basis for future studies on the impact of the glass ceiling, contribute to the knowledge of the phenomenon and add to the academia focusing on gender disparity and transformation.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The goal of this study was to analyse the impact of the glass ceiling on South African women. According to the US Department of Labour's (1991) definition, the glass ceiling encompasses artificial barriers supported by organisational bias that prevent qualified individuals' advancement to leadership positions.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the perceptions of South African women in leadership positions regarding the glass ceiling effect.
- To explore the invisible barriers affecting career advancement for women.
- To ascertain the impact of social hierarchy on women's leadership journey.
- To establish the effects of gender inequality and stereotypes affecting women in business.

1.6 Significance of the research

South Africa has a long history of discrimination. At the height of apartheid (2021), which was abolished in the early 1990s, women were most affected as they were deprived of education. Even after the abolishment, gender discrimination in the workplace still prevails and societal levels of relegating women to traditional lesser roles are evident. South Africa's long history of gender discrimination can be witnessed through established societal echelons. The country is however overcoming sexist systems, unequal ideas regarding women and gendered attitudes about their roles. Although it may appear that women have made great strides in advancing to the top of the ladder, they still battle stereotypes and experience the business world culture as hegemonically masculine.

Despite the appearance of gender neutrality, gender influences the masculine perspective of organisational rationality (Olofsdotter and Randevåg, 2016). It seems that a set of barriers which may be rooted in culture and traditions prohibit women from advancing to leadership roles. Research reveals that gender disparities in the workplace are a reality for women. Pew Research (2017) estimates that in the United States around 40 per cent of women have experienced some form of discrimination on the job due to their gender. Some research has demonstrated that those in a position of power can at times impose personal discrimination against women and other studies have particularly explored the impact of the level of sexist beliefs among decision-makers in discriminatory practices (Davison and Burke, 2000).

According to the ILO Global World Report (2019), women on average earn 28 per cent less than their male counterparts in South Africa. In addition, a United Nations (UN) Report (2000) states that the poorest South Africans are African rural women (49 per cent). This is further supported by the Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) which observed that full involvement and

contribution by women in the country's economy will be vital if the ideals of equity and inclusive growth are to be achieved.

The topic of this study was selected due to the gaps identified in the existing literature on the glass ceiling effect's impact on women leaders in corporate South Africa. Lack of scholarly research on gender issues and societal expectations of women leaders are examples of these gaps. In addition, through the literature reviewed it was revealed that the majority of studies covering the glass ceiling effect have concentrated on using quantitative methods such as Channar, Abbassi, and Uja' s (2011) study which explored gender discrimination in the workforce and its impact on the employees through a close-ended questionnaire. A qualitative study will therefore provide in-depth responses and thus bridge the gap.

The impact on women's experiences in leadership positions and their career progression conducted in this study will assist corporates in formulating inclusive and transformational policies that will address gender disparity in the workplace. Gender inequality remains not only a moral and social issue but has an impact on the economy. According to McKinsey (2020), women who make up over 50 per cent of the world population only generate 37 per cent of the global GDP, thus, highlighting their exclusion from labour opportunities. The study will make a theoretical contribution to future research on women's leadership and gender transformation within organisations.

1.7 Summary of chapters

This research study comprises five sections.

Chapter 1 is the Introduction and provides an overview of the glass ceiling and its historical context, research topic, aims, questions and study design.

Chapter 2 is the Literature Review. This chapter is the foundation of the study as it looks at reviewing existing literature linked to the study. In addition, the chapter identifies and covers the glass ceiling effect as a barrier hindering women who are in leadership roles.

Chapter 3 reveals the Research Methodology. In this chapter, the selected research method is discussed, including the rationale for the selected method. As this was a qualitative study, the opinions of the participants were solicited in their natural environment.

Chapter 4 reports the Data Interpretation. The chapter discusses data collection insights and findings. The researcher summarises the study's findings. The findings are linked to Chapters 2 and 3 – the literature review and methodology.

Chapter 5 presents the Conclusion and Recommendations. The analysis and findings presented in the previous chapters ground this section and facilitate the conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter.

1.8 Conclusion

The chapter provided the context of the study including a description of the research objectives as well as a broad summary of the investigation. The research questions resulting from these aims were discussed. The chapter contextualised the glass ceiling phenomenon, which can be rooted in cultural interpretations such as patriarchy and culture that hinder women from ascending to leadership positions. It highlighted how discrimination and the glass ceiling effect persist and pose significant obstacles to women's advancement in the business world. Although women have made substantial progress in breaking through the glass ceiling, they still face gender stereotypes and the reality of male-dominated business environments. The subsequent chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study's objectives. The study calls for inclusive and transformative gender equality policies in the workplace.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The literature associated with the glass ceiling phenomenon is reviewed in this section. The researcher explores the glass ceiling concept, defines the theory and explores the different causes behind the identified leadership gaps between males and females in the workplace. Blackledge and Hunt's (2005) portrayal and assertion that each theoretical effort is analogous to a building block that is added to other building blocks to construct a house, the literature review in this study was conducted in an eclectic manner, drawing from, among others, theoretical perspectives and feminist and cultural reproduction theories.

Baxter and Wright (2000) clarify that, according to the glass ceiling hypothesis, it is more difficult for women to obtain promotion opportunities in workplace hierarchies and the obstacles women face in the workplace are much greater than those encountered by their male counterparts as they climb the hierarchy. Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman (2001) analysed the literature to provide substance to the glass ceiling notion and established criteria distinguishing the phenomenon from other types of inequality, asserting that inequality reflects a racial or gender disparity. Cotter et al. (2001) further explain that the glass ceiling effect

- cannot be explained by any of the other job-related features of employees, which strongly suggests discrimination
- is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels
- is in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not just the proportion currently there
- increases throughout a career.

Thus, the term 'glass ceiling' commonly describes discriminatory practices prohibiting women from achieving higher levels of success and leadership within an organisation due to their gender (Li & Leung, 2001). Despite the advances made by women in the workplace through women's movements and workplace policies to promote equality, females continue to struggle for significant representation in senior management. Bombuwela and De Alwis

(2013) highlight that gender disparities and stereotypical expectations of men and women persist in the workplace, posing significant challenges for women to shatter the glass ceiling.

Multiple ideas have been proposed to explain the presence of the glass ceiling phenomenon in the workplace. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) posit that the scarcity of women leaders in corporate structures remains a concern. George (2003) notes that the puzzle underlying this effect remains vastly diversified and intensifying.

According to Harding (1987), knowledge is understood to be founded on experience and the reason feminists' claims can be scientifically superior is that they are derived from and tested against a more complete and less distorted type of social experience. Informed by feminist theory, women's experiences may serve as a foundation for knowledge claims that are more comprehensive and less distorted than those of men. According to Manne (2018), feminist studies involve questioning and critiquing prevailing power structures, particularly androcentric philosophical justifications for sexism and patriarchal exclusion and violence.

In a study by KPMG in 2017 focusing on breaking the glass ceiling effect, Agah Uğur articulated the following:

> "In today's world, gender inequality has become one of the most important items on the global agenda. According to the report of the World Economic Forum, inequality dividing women and men concerning employment and equal opportunities is at its lowest level since 2008, at 59%. However, only a measly 3% of Fortune 500 companies have female CEOs. According to the predictions of experts, we will have to wait until 2186 to see gender inequality completely disappear. All data points in the direction of swift measures to eliminate all traces of inequality. And many prominent global figures are making similar calls."

2.1 Women in leadership synopsis

Cotter et al. (2001) argue that the phrase glass ceiling ought to be reserved for circumstances in which discrimination against women intensifies as they ascend the corporate ladder. Following her first failed presidential bid in 1998, Hillary Clinton stated that even though the hardest glass ceiling had not been shattered at that time, it had been cracked a million times

and there is light shining through (ABC, 2016). This would seem to imply that there is hope for women hoping to reach top leadership after all. According to the BBC (2017), it was in 1978 during a women's conference when Marilyn Loden coined the phrase 'glass ceiling', explaining that it seemed there was an invisible barrier to women's advancement that was not recognised. Over 40 years later the assertion remains relevant.

The 'glass ceiling term' was however popularised by the Wall Street Journal over two decades ago to describe the barriers faced by women and minorities in their quest to reach the top level of the hierarchy (Washington Post, 2018). Benschop and Brouns (2009) state that the glass ceiling entered academia and gained its prominent status in *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* by Morrison, White, and Van Velsor (1987). The authors state that in 1993, there were 26 publications sold; since then, there have been 30 to 40 publications a year. Benders and Van Veen (2001) posit that there are no indications that the quantity of media traces is decreasing, demonstrating that the topic remains relevant.

The glass ceiling encapsulates that although women appear to climb organisational ladders, just a handful attain the most influential positions. To advance their careers, women in leadership roles and those who aspire to be in leadership posts confront several obstacles. Contrary to previous options that were available a few decades ago, women are building career-advancing networks, however, a lack of clarity around women's leadership behaviour and talents remains (Davidson & Burke, 2012). It appears impossible to dispute the myopic belief that men are well-suited for leadership roles (Davidson & Burke, 2012).

Various leadership theories have been developed throughout the years. Daft (2021) explains that several theories such as the 'behavioural' and 'great man' theories are examples of leadership theories that have evolved. Contextually leadership is synonymous with authority and power; hence, the presence of women in leadership positions connotes the presence of women in positions of authority and power. According to the great man theory, women who hold leadership positions are almost entirely disregarded. Spector (2016) argues that effective leaders are those endowed with divine inspiration and the right attributes. Credibility is rarely accorded to female leaders; on the other hand, male leaders are accorded more credence.

Offermann and Foley (2020) propose a hypothesis, supported by research, that female leaders possess a unique set of leadership-related qualities, attributes, and behaviours that can benefit organisations. However, female leaders face several obstacles, such as unfair performance evaluations, which male leaders rarely encounter. To reap the benefits of diversity, organisations must strive to leverage the positive attributes of female leaders and create a level playing field for all leaders, irrespective of gender.

Throughout history, it has been highly visible that men held top positions and women who had ascended to top echelons only had power due to male heirs having been unavailable. Internationally, Queen Elizabeth took over the reins from her father King George VI as the firstborn of two girls and reigned as queen in the United Kingdom until recently. Lewis (2020) states that Cleopatra was the last pharaoh of Egypt and the last of the Ptolemy dynasty of Egyptian rulers and when she was at the height of her authority, she had practically complete control over the entire eastern Mediterranean coast cementing her position as an outstanding leader. Even in these rare circumstances, women demonstrated their capabilities of leading meritoriously. Not all female leaders hold political authority or traditional, professional leadership positions (Gasa, 2007).

2.2 Place of women in leadership: an African perspective

The notion of leadership in Africa has always given respect to the male agency – a situation that has been in existence for a considerable amount of time. Oladejo (2015) summarises the perspective of the difficulties that African women experience, particularly regarding gaining access to political leadership positions. In Africa, the subordination of women takes a variety of complex forms that are rooted in patriarchal culture and history (Coetzee, 2001). The patriarchal structure based on male authority subjugates women via various institutions (Allanana, 2013). Carrim and Nkomo (2016) highlight the significance of personal and social identities in shaping the professional identities of Indian women in management in South Africa, based on their research.

Within and across African countries and contexts, diverse ethnic, sociocultural, ethical, political and historical norms influence power relations and explain the formal and informal ways in which women can and do lead (Amadiume, 1998). According to Tamale (2000), the

postcolonial African education system mostly focused on preparing graduates for responsibilities within the home, which left African women unfit for positions of leadership. Oladejo (2015) explains that the opinion of colonial governments in Africa transferred their Western 'Victorian ideals' which had a negative impact on the status of women during the time of the colonial era, further contributing to the marginalisation of African women that already existed.

In African history, women have taken on some significant roles. They include Queen Hatshepsut of ancient Egypt, whose 21-year rule is remembered as a time of peace and prosperity, and Amina Mohamud, who was a Hausa warrior queen of the city-state Zazzau in what is now Nigeria's North-West region. Her grandfather saw her early leadership potential and allowed her to attend state meetings. It is said that the valiant Queen Moremi helped the liberation of the Yoruba tribe from oppression. Queen Nzinga, in what is now Angola, formed strategic alliances and was tenacious in resisting Portugal's colonial aspirations (Accord, 2022). These women demonstrate that when given an opportunity, women excel in leadership positions. Recent research on women's leadership during the pandemic was published in Harvard Business Review (2022) and quantitatively proved that women were better leaders during a crisis.

Ngcongo (2003) explains that in African culture, there is a notion that men lead, and women follow. In remote African villages, it is not uncommon to see men strolling in front of women. There may be a variety of reasons for this, but it ultimately illustrates the strongly held notion that leadership is masculine. The findings of Roth (2015) reveal that both male and female leaders are compelled to adopt masculine and macho behaviours. According to Matshidze (2013), comparatively few anthropological studies have studied the position of a distinct class of women in traditional leadership in Africa and, in particular, South Africa. In many African societies, the rituals and rites of passage of the boy child prepare them for positions of leadership at the local, national, corporate, political and public administration levels (Kiamba, 2008).

Women were raised to dread their fathers or males and this culture has been instilled in them. According to scholars, such as Lytton & Romney (1991), women face traditional and parental cultural inhibitions reinforced by socialisation. Jacobs (2016) argues that society's purposeful

upholding of the tradition that the optimum place for a woman is in the home has led to actions that violate women's constitutional rights in some circumstances. Dickie (2019) agrees that conventional gender role assumptions support women as caregivers and men as breadwinners. In the African environment, traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes regarding women's standing and roles within their communities persist and many women who are a part of this system find it difficult to separate themselves from this culture and tradition for fear of social exclusion (Kiamba, 2008). In the absence of role models at the managerial level, people in positions of authority tend to adopt the prevalent male norms and values, according to the principle of role concept (Chiloane-Tsoka, 2010).

In the early years of the feminist movement, according to Ortner (2014), there was a need to discover if there were cultures in which women had power and authority comparable to that of males. For instance, the makhadzi, the father's senior sister, holds an important place within the Venda socio-political structure; even though in most African societies women are subservient to men, there is a class of women who play a crucial role in the public arena and are highly regarded by society (Matshidze, 2013).

The feminist challenge to management is to create an organisation that values and includes women and members of other sections of the population in a manner that accords them with dignity, treats them fairly and improves their standing and opportunities sustainably. Rakow and Nastasia (2008) suggest that the feminist tradition seeks to clarify, investigate and distinguish between the many distinctive roles women play in society. Kiamba (2008) states that in Kenya, progress towards women's participation in politics was initially relatively gradual and only in the last decade have substantial developments occurred. According to Nzomo (1997), Kenyan women were not afforded the same political access as men even though the post-independence government created new opportunities for political participation. However, Clayton (2015) posits that in recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women in positions of political power. This shift has largely been driven by the fact that over several countries have adopted some sort of gender quota in the form of new electoral laws.

2.3 South African women in the corporate world

Hofsted (1998) posits that the South African organisational culture accepts the notion of a culture that is more male-oriented, deferential, supporting and submissive. Men are required to be confident, tough and focused on material success, whereas women are projected to be more subdued, soft and concerned with life quality. It is sexist and out-of-date for a culture to rely on the men at the helm because men dominate the corporation. In addition, Khunou (2019) claims that in South Africa, black women face glass ceiling barriers in the social and business contexts due to cultural, demographic and individual factors.

Chiloane-Tsoka (2010) concurs that male role models dominate the corporate culture in South Africa. Kirai and Kobia (2018) clarify that the assumption that male preferences and behaviours are conventionally more desired and are the ideal standard is a result of organisational practices, hierarchies and attitudes. Over time, feminism and political reform have made it possible for women to actively participate in the workforce and to rewrite entrenched gender norms, (Giddens & Sutton, 2021). However, issues of gender inequality are persistently visible in every corner of the globe.

The greatest obstacle for women is patriarchy and male dominance. Equality of opportunity and treatment in the labour market is fundamental to decent work. Unfortunately, women in South Africa and throughout the world continue to confront extra obstacles to employment. Appointments to decision-making roles and occupations in certain industries or with particular attributes remain elusive once individuals are employed (Stats SA, 2021). Adler (2004) contends that labour market segmentation is not incidental but rather that ethnicity and gender influence hiring decisions because they influence service interactions. Furthermore, Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert, and Hatfield (2006) state that the most difficult obstacle for the normal South African worker and their company is juggling the needs of work and family. This is especially true as the number of single parents and couples with two incomes continues to rise. The family is three times more likely to suffer than the employee's job performance when there is a conflict between work and family.

According to Stats SA report (2021), the South African labour market still favours men over women, regardless of race; men are more likely than women to have paid employment, while

women are more likely than men to perform unpaid labour. The proportion of employed males is greater than that of employed women; more men than women engage in the labour market, as men have a higher labour force participation rate than women. The unemployment rate among men is lower than that of women. According to the official definition of unemployment, the unemployment rate for women in the second quarter of 2021 was 36 per cent, while it was 32 per cent for males.

According to a PwC (2020) survey, women comprised only 14 per cent of the 329 chief executive officers of companies listed on the JSE. South Africa's democracy brought with it an influx of opportunities for women to become part of the economy through employment and opportunities that previously did not exist, yet the majority of women still do not form part of the decision-making bodies of corporates in the country. During the last two decades, the country has seen some meaningful developments in ensuring that gender quality not only becomes part of the agenda but a societal reality. However, closer scrutiny of the country's score around economic participation and the disparities regarding gender equality tells a different story as encapsulated by a National Business Institute (2021) report that found that women earn only R72 for every R100 earned by a man. It is important to highlight that the creation of meaningful gender equality in South Africa will only be achieved through equal economic involvement in the country.

Statutory and social debate on gender equality concerns has not been able to fully equalise gender representation in organisational management structures in South African society. Despite recent changes in gender equality (such as putting women's empowerment and emancipation problems front and centre to strengthen administrative roles), the sociological evaluation of women's performances and advances has had a limited assessment (Schein, 2007). A McKinsey (2015) report also discovered that the global GDP could add about $12 trillion by 2025 through the advancement of women's equality. Yet even impressive figures do not seem to motivate corporates to give access to women leadership.

Coetzee (2001) elucidates that democratic South Africa has not achieved the aim of equalising gender as top management remains gendered, favouring men over women in different ways. While a minority of women now occupy management roles, men are still dominant in senior-level positions. Women's leadership remains a challenge. A Bain and Company (2017)

research found that 31 per cent of corporates did not have a single woman in a senior leadership position which indicates that a third of the studied companies did not have women representation in their leadership structures, revealing that women empowerment targets are uneven and that women face challenges on the pursuit of leadership in South African business environment.

Similar sentiments were also echoed through a 2017 Businesswomen's Association study that reported that only a handful of women occupy top management positions at 20 per cent of directors. The findings also highlighted that women encounter more obstacles in becoming senior managers. Despite the implementation of some actual affirmative action measures, there is still a significant lack of African women in positions of power and influence across the continent (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2020). Countries like South Africa have implemented legislation that encourages equality in the workplace, such as South Africa's Employment Equity Act which necessitates parity remuneration for women and men, therefore prohibiting the notion of paying women a lower wage than men simply based on gender. Considerable advancement has taken place for women but even with these advancements in a variety of fields, the problem of women failing to attain positions of power is still prevalent in society.

According to several research studies, women are unlikely to be promoted to senior positions rather than their male colleagues who have the same qualifications (Blau and Devaro, 2007). The lack of female participation in leadership positions could be attributed to the glass ceiling preventing women from climbing the corporate ladder. Daily, Certo, and Dalton (2000) describe the effect as a theory representing a metaphorical barrier preventing women from rising to the highest organisational levels.

2.4 Theories of the glass ceiling effect

Much of the literature on leadership that examines identity focuses solely on gender, (Fitzgerald, 2003). The rising emphasis on gender and race in leadership not only broadened the scope of leadership studies beyond traditional male conceptions but also added complexity to the notion of leadership identity. Several researchers, such as Kezar (2002), have proposed that focusing on a single component of a person's identity restricts

comprehension of complex social events. Multiple identifiers such as “race, gender, and class” are hypothesised to form and reinforce individual perspectives (Haraway, 1991; Pedulla, 2018). Since identities are multifaceted, fluid and context-dependent, their relationship to the system of power within a culture or community varies. According to Kezar and Lester (2010), leadership ideas and behaviours are shaped by one’s identity, context and access to power. Plato’s model of leadership comprised the characteristics of being appetitive, courageous and reasonable (Cawthon, 2002).

Since the 1980s, the emphasis has been on the characteristics and benefits of female leaders in organisations, rather than on proving women’s humanity and ability to work in higher positions, (Mustakallio, Sevelius & Tanhua 2008). Positionality theory originated in the 1980s alongside Sandra Harding’s influential feminist studies (Harding, 1991). Positionality theory, a notion derived from postmodern feminist theory, posits that identity is fluid, dynamic and subject to historical and social change. Mannix and Neale (2005) explain that according to studies, the racial, gendered, ideological and religious labels used to describe other people are also the labels that are most unique in their respective social contexts; thus, the notion focuses on the junction of many components of an individual’s identity, such as race, socioeconomic status and gender, in creating leadership viewpoints.

According to Cech and Blair-Loy (2009), researchers have approached the glass ceiling from two perspectives: as a systemic issue or as an individual motivational issue. Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) elucidate that gender inequity can be grouped into three categories: bias-centred, person-centred and structural-centred theories.

2.4.1 Bias-centred theories

Hopman and Lord (2009) explain that bias-centred theories assume that society or a dominating group that creates a stereotype or prejudice is the primary cause of inequality and discrimination is based on differing treatment grounded on a person’s sex or race. Heilman, (1995) asserts that sexual discrimination occurs when employees are judged based on their sexes rather than their performances or attributes. Adair (1999) elucidates that discrimination is the different treatment of individuals based on their traits, such as gender or race.

2.4.2 Person-centred theories

Several academics have suggested person-centred theories. These theories suggest that a lack of socialisation techniques and behavioural inequalities among gender leadership cause the glass ceiling (Powell, 2000). Moreover, in comparison to males, it is alleged that women lacked essential leadership attributes such as ambition, self-assurance, aggressiveness and persuasiveness (Singh & Terjesen, 2008).

Maupin (1993) found that both men and women believe that women are viewed to require male-oriented features in terms of managerial style and that to be successful, they must act in a manner that is not typically female, thus, according to Dambrin and Lambert (2008), leading to a double bind where women are expected to demonstrate male characteristics to succeed in traditionally male roles; however, when they do this, it is perceived as a negative quality. Surprisingly, the majority of women admitted they were not good with numbers and lacked killer instincts, thus influencing their career decisions and discouraging them from taking risks for leadership positions (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015).

2.4.3 Structural-centred theories

Structural-centred theories postulate that the core causes of disparity are the structural practices and policies of a social system, such as a social structure dominated by men that exacerbates discrimination against women (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). The patriarchal structure of society has historically supplied men with positions of authority and women with childrearing and domestic responsibilities (Hartmann, 2010). Wajcman (2000) suggests that the masculine culture in firms is so ingrained that people are not even aware that they are gendered. This inferiority complex is perpetuated by the theory of workplace patriarchy as defined by Walby (1998) as “a system of social structures” in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.

Hofmeyr and Mzobe (2012) allude to a systemic approach that focuses on understanding the issue as an organisational and underlying cultural problem that advantages males over women, whether in the ‘old boy club’ or in a perceived division of labour that favours men over women. Le Jeune and Root (2009) define ‘old boy club’ as a mentality that permeates workplace practices and management styles as a result of the male-dominated mentality

surrounding it. In the business environment, women are frequently overlooked for promotion and advancement and are paid less on average than their male counterparts.

Burke (1997) conducted interviews with women serving on Canadian boards of directors and discovered that the nomination process is frequently the result of an 'old boy network' in which personal contacts and visibility to male board members were crucial to appointment decisions. According to a study conducted by Shin (2012), women CEOs, who make up only 2 per cent of Fortune 500 businesses, climb more than they lift. This contradicts Insch, McIntyre, and Napier (2008) who anticipate that female CEOs who are aware of the glass ceiling would help promote women as they climbed the corporate ladder.

Chapter 3: Global Perspective of the Glass Ceiling

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed literature relevant to this study. This chapter examines the global perspective of the glass ceiling. According to Powell and Butterfield (2003), the glass ceiling is a challenging and elusive barrier in the workplace that prevents women from occupying top management positions. Despite the significant increase in the number of women in the global labour force over the past few decades, the situation for women in terms of organisational leadership and senior management roles has not improved significantly (Saleem, Rafiq, & Yusaf, 2017). According to several scholars, including Eagly and Carli (2007), the glass ceiling effect is to blame for the low numbers of women in senior management roles. Regardless of their credentials and achievements, many women fail to advance to executive management positions in their jobs. Mabaso (2020) states that, in South Africa, women currently occupy 10 per cent of directorship positions of Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) led companies.

3.1 Presenting the glass ceiling

Mancini-Billson (2006) clarifies that the twentieth century manifested a global transformation in gender relations and opened doors that may have previously been closed for women. Golding (1990) notes that gender has been constructed to differentiate between males and females, highlighting their differences and society's view of their roles and capabilities, thus, supporting the notion that inequality exists and can be experienced in the workplace. Eagly (2005) contends that society is unaccustomed to women possessing power and authority and that there may be prejudice towards women's leadership with undesirable outcomes.

Life experiences shape both perceptions and attitudes and the societal and cultural influences on the socialisation of gender (Kiser, 2015). This is consistent with Pillay's (2005) assertion that men frequently fight the admission of women into various domains, notably senior management, due to patriarchal ideas and attitudes. According to Rawls (1997), modern adaptations of the social contract theory assert that a group of rational individuals will create a reciprocal principle of justice as the basis for regulating all rights, responsibilities, power and wealth.

Eagly (2005) further notes there may be doubts about women's competencies which may lead to resentment on the toppling of the customary hierarchies between men and women as societal prejudices still view men as being more successful in high-level jobs than women. According to Rosener (1990), later studies realised the value that women brought to leadership positions and men began adopting interactive management styles that were previously associated with women and aligned more with the transformative leadership style. This new wave of thinking has however not benefited women, especially at senior levels. Calas and Smircich (1993) state that stereotypes of male management are still viewed as ideal traits for certain senior posts that are deemed tough.

Bayram, Aytac, Sam, and Bilgel (2012) notes that existing inequalities rooted in basic employment and available opportunities are not solely attributed to personal characteristics but to what is deemed appropriate by society. Burke and Collins (2001) state that women have a distinctive leadership style that is transformational and focuses on problem-solving and cooperation. Bernay and Cantor (1992) note that previous research on leadership characteristics between genders associate leadership qualities with individuality as opposed to collaboration. Lawson and Lips (2014) suggest that the use of a directive leadership style by women is not regarded as socially acceptable and studies indicate that it is viewed negatively.

However, Eagly (2005) alludes that management roles are undertaking hierarchical changes and command and control behaviours associated with male traits may no longer be preferred; they are being substituted by transformational leadership styles favouring feminine traits. Parker (2005) further contends that transformational leadership stresses the importance of social change and liberation which encourages efficient leadership.

Table 3.1 provides the chronology of the glass ceiling concept.

Table 3.1 Chronology of the glass ceiling concept

The Glass Ceiling Concept	**Authors**
Kanter's (1977) study on gender proportion at companies noted the gender imbalances at the top in current times because it seems no trajectory has taken place since then; women are still a minority at leadership levels. Kanter	Kanter (1977) MacKinnon (1979)

The Glass Ceiling Concept	Authors
further contends that when it comes to management or leadership positions, organisational duties take precedence over gender roles; this is true regardless of the gender of the person serving in the same leadership capacity. In the mid-1970s, modern feminist literature began to critique workplace structures and culture as the primary cause of sex discrimination (MacKinnon, 1979).	
The 'glass ceiling' is a metaphor used to describe the obstacles women face when trying to progress in managerial hierarchies. According to Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986), the concept emerged in media and management literature on gender in the early 80s.	Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986)
In their landmark study, Morrison et al. (1987) identified several variables that contribute to women's lack of company development, including a small business base, 'ageing out', prejudice, family concerns and self-imposed limits.	Morrison et al. (1987)
Morrison and Von Glinow drew attention to the dearth of research on minorities in management and noted contextual prejudices as exclusionary mechanisms that subtly keep minorities and women outside of firms Rowe, , Jacobson, & Van den Oord (1990), refers to these environmental biases as 'microinequalities' and he explains how they work to exclude the 'different individual' and reduce the effectiveness of their work. In addition, Powell (1990) further affirms that ultimately, leadership disparities between men and women are negligible since they are cancelled out when considering all research as both sexes use equal proportions of task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles.	Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) Rowe, Jacobson & Van den Oord (1990) Powell (1990)
Scholarly books, such as *Shattering the Glass Ceiling* and *The Glass Ceiling in the 21st Century*, have supplemented numerous theoretical and empirical studies of glass ceilings	Davidson and Cooper (1992)

The Glass Ceiling Concept	Authors
and scholarly reviews of such research, for instance, Powell (1999). In addition, Powell (1990) further affirms that ultimately, leadership disparities between men and women are negligible since they are cancelled out when considering all research as both sexes use equal proportions of task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles.	
Powell and Butterfield (1994) drew upon human capital and sex discrimination theories to hypothesise an indirect influence of a candidate's gender on promotional decisions for top management positions through relations to human capital factors. The glass ceiling eventually drew the attention of the United States government, which led to the formation of the Glass Ceiling Commission (1995). It quickly acknowledged the presence of the glass ceiling, which "prevented the advancement of women and people of colour".	Powell and Butterfield (1994) Glass Ceiling Commission (1995)
Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman, (2001) identified the glass ceiling as an invisible but impassable barrier that stops minorities and women from climbing the corporate ladder regardless of their talents and achievements and concluded that interpersonal and situational factors, such as the extent to which managers serve as mentors, the prevalence of an 'old boy network' and potential connections with organisational decision-makers, not only contributed to employees' perceptions of the persistence of the glass ceiling but also influenced whether or not individuals were promoted within the organisation.	Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman (2001)
To answer those who questioned the reality of the glass ceiling and its effects, Elacqua, Beehr, Hansen, and Webster (2009) conducted a study on female managers' perceptions of advancement barriers in the workplace.	Elacqua, Beehr, Hansen, and Webster (2009)

The Glass Ceiling Concept	Authors
Elacqua et al. (2009) found that mentorship — or the lack thereof — has a major impact on employees' views of biased treatment. Women had fewer "mentors, informal networks, influential colleagues, role models, and stretch assignments" than men, according to their research. Moreover, the existence of an 'old boy network' and the associated preferential treatment that frequently results from relationships with influential decision-makers is a significant barrier for women who are less likely than their more visible male counterparts to establish these crucial connections.	Elacqua et al. (2009)
Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) employ the term 'double whammy' to characterise the difficulties of black women who have two minority identities. Livers and Lewis (2009) use the phrase 'concrete ceiling' to characterise the insurmountable obstacles that hinder black women from ascending to the upper echelons of corporate America. Therefore, the glass ceiling conversations are crucial when addressing women in management according to Cansu (2013). Schaap and Shockley (2020) expand on the idea that despite significant advancements in women's leadership over the past decade, they still face multiple challenges, and gender equality has not yet been achieved. Nevertheless, there are more women in leadership roles today than ever before, and there has been a shift in attitudes towards women in leadership, with traditional masculine traits now being accepted alongside feminine traits.	Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) Livers and Lewis (2009) Cansu (2013) Schaap and Shockley (2020)

Kanter (1977) was one of the first authors to put gender in the spotlight in terms of understanding the dynamics of organisational behaviour during a time when women were

largely absent from management positions. Since 1986, a great deal of research has been conducted on the advancement of women in the workplace and the conclusions on the causes of the glass ceiling have been extremely consistent. However, as per Table 3.1, scholars such as Morrison et al. (1987) explain that although women are proficient in advancing to higher levels, they are eventually halted by invisible barriers. It applies to women as a collective who are prevented from advancing due to their gender.

One of the most powerful metaphors for analysing the inequality that exists in the workplace is that of the 'glass ceiling', which refers to the unseen hurdles that prevent women from advancing in their careers. This is confirmed by the findings of research conducted by Weyer (2007) who found that the lack of female leaders is related to the treatment women receive at work which includes continued hostility and bias. It is unmistakable that women have been subjected to discrimination in the workplace at various points in history and they continue to be under-represented at higher levels of organisations. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) back up this perspective, stating that women at the top echelons of business are still uncommon. This supports the opinion that women are still under-represented.

3.1.1 Geographical conceptualisation of glass ceiling

The ILO (2022) reports that, globally, women are more educated than men and are more actively participating in the labour force than ever before. Despite these encouraging gains, women's representation in top positions still lags behind that of men. During the Victorian era, society made it impossible for women to advance in any way. Regardless of their social standing, women were considered second-class citizens in the eyes of the law (Gallagher, 1985). Furthermore, women and children were classified as helpless beings requiring the protection of strong men.

Despite a rise in female leaders globally, the number of male leaders remains vastly greater. In developing nations, female leadership is more difficult due to a distinct lack of opportunities, limited resources and unique constraints. In developing countries, women face unique challenges, such as balancing work and family life, navigating patriarchal systems and overcoming discrimination (Panda, 2018). Work and family life are frequently viewed as two

distinct aspects of a working woman's life but, in reality, they overlap for most women and frequently hinder their career advancement (Chaudhary & Gupta, 2010).

Low levels of women's empowerment are typically associated with patriarchal and cultural systems that favour maintaining high fertility rates (Phan, 2013). According to Ngo, Peng, Shi, and Wong (2009) women face obstacles in leadership positions all over the world. This means that it includes developed nations that, at first glance, may appear to be more advanced than they actually are. A Harvard Business Review (2009) study of 2000 leaders of the world's top-performing companies found only about 1.5 per cent of the current CEOs were female, an even smaller percentage than that of the Fortune 500 Global list which lingers around 2.5 per cent.

Eurostat (2021) concurs that, for instance, only 3.3 million women held managerial positions as compared to 6.2 million men in Europe in Quarter 3 of 2020. Although women represent almost half of all employees at 46 per cent, they are under-represented among management at only 34 per cent. In 2019, women accounted for only 28 per cent at the board level and 18 per cent of senior executives in publicly listed companies. As demonstrated by Figure 2.1, Asia has the lowest number of women in top leadership positions.

Region	Percentage of Women in Senior Management
Africa	38%
Eastern Europe	35%
Latin America	33%
European Union	30%
North America	29%
Asia Pacific (APAC)	27%

Figure 3.1 Proportion of women in senior leadership per region

Source: Eurostat 2021

3.1.2 Glass ceiling: a European perspective

A McKinsey (2007) European study revealed that companies with strong female representation on their boards or in top management outperformed those without such diversity. Specifically, these companies outperformed their industry from 2005 to 2007 in terms of return on equity, operating results and stock price growth. The CFO magazine (2020) pointed out the scarcity of female chief financial officers (CFOs) in Europe as a mystery and baffling, taking into consideration the steady rise of women in finance in the last few decades and also considering that women account for more than half of all universities' graduates in the region.

In 2006, there were no female CFOs in Europe among the largest 100 companies in any company in Germany or France, highlighting the impoverished state of affairs when it comes to women in leadership positions. Germany has implemented a quota system for women. This is because female executives at top of companies are very uncommon (Webster, 2011).

A study done by Corporate Women Directors International (2004) found that German women only retained 10 per cent of board seats in comparison to US women who were above 17 per cent. The Germans were still in a better position in comparison to French women who only occupied about seven per cent of seats. The report also discovered that out of the 22 companies in the Fortune Global 200 list, women held only 25 per cent of the seats and only three were German. CHRO (2017) concurs that women with dual roles of being professionals and mothers also have an uphill battle to progress in the workplace.

Holst (2006) notes that a glass ceiling exists in managerial positions which also affects countries such as Germany where women can be faced with societal expectations that prevent them from reaching top positions. Jeremiah (2018) concurs that Germany has a concept dubbed 'raven mother' suggesting that women who go to work after giving birth have abandoned their children, which results in fewer than 16 per cent of mothers with children younger than six being employed full-time.

Scholars such as Antonczyk, Fitzenberger, and Sommerfeld (2010) used data from Germany and studies conducted across nations to investigate the glass ceiling. The studies examined barriers such as glass ceilings in conditional distributions as well as a widening income

difference between men and women who are in comparable positions and have identical features in the sets of explanatory variables included in each individual set based on conditional quantile regression. In Sweden, for example, similarly qualified men and women have comparable wages and wage progression during the early stages of their careers but women's wage growth lags after childbirth (Angelov, Johansson, & Lindahl 2016).

Women, Business and the Law (2021) elucidates that initiatives to eradicate preventing women from participating economically have been gradual and inconsistent throughout various regions. McKinsey (2007) describes a syndrome called 'double burden' which discovered that women in Europe dedicated more than twice as much time to domestic duties in comparison to men. This illustrates how women begin the race from a point of disadvantage already as societal expectations favour men.

In 2022, the European Parliament introduced pioneering legislation aimed at promoting gender equality by increasing the representation of women on the boards of large corporations in the EU. The law requires that by July 2026, large publicly traded companies in the region take measures to increase the number of women in leadership positions. The "Women on Boards" regulation requires large companies to ensure that women hold at least 40 per cent of non-executive director positions or 33 per cent of all board seats on publicly listed companies.

Figure 3.2 demonstrates the levels of women's leadership roles in the region demonstrating that the majority of the countries have less than 40 per cent of women in leadership thereby not meeting the quota as set out.

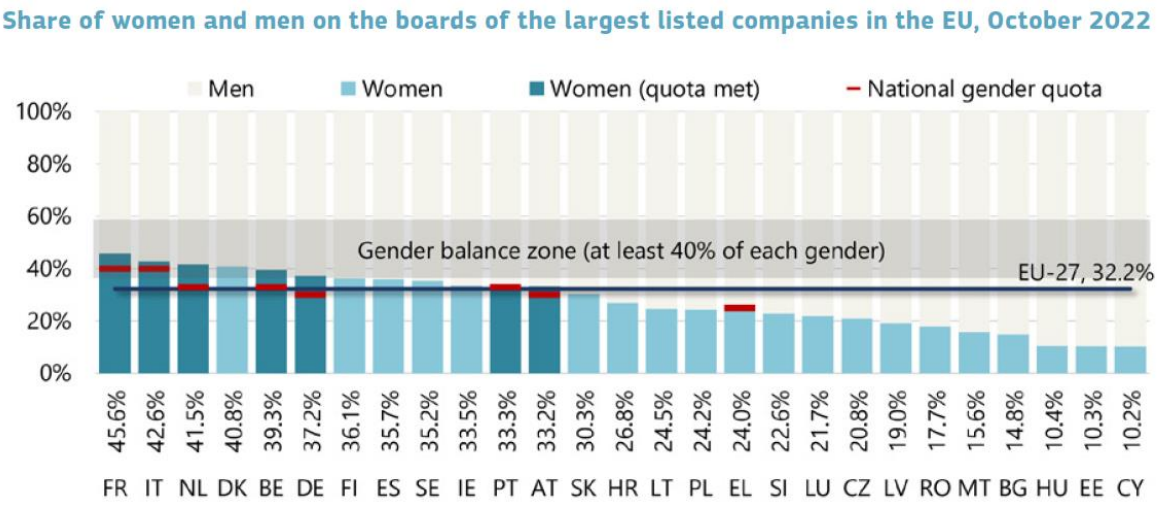


Figure 3.2 Women and men on boards of the largest listed companies in the EU, October 2022

Source: European Institute for Gender Equality (2023)

3.1.3 Glass ceiling: a North American perspective

In the history of the United States, the oppression of the selected few has been documented. Aiken, Salmon, and Hanges (2013) state that in 1848, the women's movement officially began when the issues of American women were openly outlined. The Women's Trade Union League was established in 1903 in response to this movement to lobby for improved working conditions for women. Following World War II, American companies underwent tremendous changes. The breadth and intricacy of the war effort necessitated that manufacturing continues and the millions of home-bound women filled that hole (Aiken et al., 2013).

According to Hoffman (2016), in 1964, since the Civil Rights Act was enacted, giving specific protections against discrimination such as gender, the American corporate sector has had to adapt and proactively discover ways to be equitable. Recent advancements in workplace equality and justice for women's rights are observable, although some observers anticipate a probable halt in growth.

Historically, African American women in the United States were first subjected to oppression and discrimination as slaves and domestic servants (Freeman, 1995). According to Nash (2004) the work of black women occurred within two distinct spheres that were both mutually reinforcing and antagonistic. Their houses and neighbourhoods served as a single workplace,

the nerve core of community spirit. As early as the era of slavery, wives' and mothers' desire to care for their kin grew from the private domain into public activities that advanced the interests of black people as a group, creating an overlapping set of obligations between family and community welfare. Jones (1985) contends that while this employment won black women's respect among their people, working in the slave economy only served to further cement their place as second-class citizens in the United States.

The phrase 'glass ceiling' first appeared in the Wall Street Journal 20 years ago (Hymowitz, 1986). Since then, the term has been used to describe a phenomenon that continues to attract considerable attention. In 1991, the Glass Ceiling Act was incorporated into the US Civil Rights Act in an attempt to decrease discrimination against women in management and Johns (2013) suggests that is when the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was established. According to Warner (2014), in most nations, including the United States, women are still understated in virtually every measure of management, including in politics, the media and business. These are significant because they indicate a lack of economic power.

According to McCall (2001), the type of inequality can change dependent on the composition of economic activity in different regions of the United States. McCall demonstrates that gender and racial disparities cannot be reduced to each other nor do they correlate. Chang-Tai, Hurst, Jones, and Klenow (2019) conducted an exercise to calculate the amount of economic growth available due to the under-representation of women and minorities in certain occupations. According to their calculations, the reduction of barriers for white women, black men and black women to enter into historically under-represented occupations accounted for around a fifth of the growth in US GDP per person between 1960 and 2010.

Having and maintaining a well-compensated job is a crucial component of women's economic independence (Warner, 2014). Similar sentiments were expressed in studies on women in the US workforce, where women with comparable education and qualifications were paid less than their male counterparts (Sumner & Niederman, 2002). In addition, the salaries of women grew much more slowly than those of men (Goldberg, Finkelstein, Perry, & Konrad 2004).

The situation in the United States is not so different to Europe. Catalyst (2021) reports that the majority of companies in the region are still run by men. The report found that one in 13

companies are run by women in comparison to men even with the record high number of Fortune 500 women CEOs in 2020. Despite holding approximately 52 per cent of all management and professional positions, there is still a lack of representation of American women in authoritative roles (US Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2018).

This highlights that women CEOs are still scarce commodities. A study conducted by Nixdorff and Rosen (2010) in the US found that women tend to exhibit leadership styles that are very similar to one another and, until recently, they lacked both role models and self-confidence. The study aimed to examine the glass ceiling encountered by corporate women and female entrepreneurs. The Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) affirmed that the low percentage of women in management positions had significant negative effects on the US economy and suggested that demographic changes in the labour force and among consumers necessitated new efforts to ensure that this situation was rectified.

Chesters and Welch (2010) stated that negative biological notions and sexist surroundings were the two main obstacles for women seeking senior leadership positions in organisations. As practically all CEOs are men, the corporate sector is sexist and will not allow women to advance. As companies fulfil or surpass stockholder expectations, little is stated or commented on regarding the gender composition of CEOs and boards, except for a loud minority of women who have attempted advancement (Catalyst, 2021).

In American culture, masculinity is associated with characteristics such as strength, determination, success, equilibrium, power and emotional reserve (House, Dallinger, & Kilgallen, 1998). In contrast, femininity is characterised by physical attractiveness, courtesy, passivity, emotion, nurturing and concern for others and relationships. However, Anderson (2008) clarifies that masculinity's traits have softened up and become more flexible and more modern compared to prior eras, whereas femininity's traits have remained traditional and unchanged.

It is also imperative to note that women confront excruciating barriers when advancing to first management roles as witnessed in the US where in 2019 women were almost half of the labour force yet only occupied about 40 per cent of entry-level management roles (ILO, 2021). The situation is even direr for women of colour as they hold a drastically smaller share of

management positions. Catalyst (2021) reports that in the US, black women are at four per cent while white women are a third at 32.3 per cent of leadership roles. Furthermore, women are also concentrated in the support function such as human resources and only a handful make it to operational management.

According to Kim and Patterson (2022), family responsibilities impact the advancement of women. Women are typically responsible for juggling job and family obligations, even though US legislation permits both sexes to take time off to care for children. This is reinforced by a Pew Research (2015) indicating that most respondents believe that remaining at home to care for the children should be the mother's responsibility, while only one per cent believe that fathers should stay at home. This perception impedes women's job advancement because employers equate devotion to family duties with a lack of passion and dedication to their careers. Kirchmeyer (1998) concurs that research studies show that women endure greater job interruptions than men due to family responsibilities and this has impeded their advancement historically and currently.

3.1.4 Glass ceiling: an Asian perspective

According to Yukongdi and Benson (2005), the glass ceiling concept is different in Asia compared to the West. Previous studies conducted in Asia used the lack of females in managerial positions as an indicator of the glass ceiling effect. Even though Asian economies have experienced rapid growth in recent years, which should have had some positive effect on women's career opportunities, there are still barriers preventing women to reach C-suite positions.

The ILO (2012) stated that the economies of India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were expected to have increased by 7.8, 7.0 and 6.1 per cent, respectively, in 2011 and the growth of these three countries' economies has been the most notable in South Asia. Despite the high percentages of women involved in economic activities, women still seem to be relegated to menial jobs in Asia with major contributors being traditions stemming from cultural and religious beliefs. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) clarify that gender relations are not only embedded in people's cultures but also make their mark on the economic domains of formal and informal sectors. Yukongdi and Benson (2005) explain that the number of women

entering the workforce has increased as a result of the rapid growth of the economies in the region.

In Asia, women continue to face harsh societal perceptions, however, in countries, such as China, the one-child policy established to curb population growth has had a positive effect on women's participation in the business environment. In 1979, the Chinese government's new family planning measures resulted in the official one-child policy (Zhang, 2017).

Sudbeck (2012) concurs that Chinese culture that previously emphasised having a son continued in conjunction with the policy, which resulted in a new social and economic structure for the country. The status quo has also benefited the girl child as there is a drive to actively promote education for girls. Being the only child in the family has shifted the dynamics of gender in China by affording women more opportunities to be part of the economic agenda. In addition, girls no longer have to compete with male siblings for parental acknowledgement, which has translated into higher self-esteem for women (Zhang, 2017).

According to the ILO (2015), on paper, China continues to rank among the top countries in terms of the proportion of working women in the workforce but in reality, women are still disadvantaged as they still have to compete with men on an unequal footing. Just like their peers globally, Chinese women face significant discrimination in the workplace and do not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. ILO (2022) reported that the Chinese government introduced constitutional commitments to gender equality in 2005, yet discrimination remains part of its regime.

The irony for the Chinese government is that its employees are required to retire at different ages, classed according to gender. The mandatory retirement age is 60 for men, while women are required to retire at 55. This can thus be viewed as perpetuating perceptions that women are physiologically incapable of working as long as males, deterring companies from recruiting women for long-term roles. Mandatory early retirement for women has not assisted with the trajectory as women must retire earlier than men on the assumption that they are the primary caregivers and are therefore disadvantaged and removed from contention at their peak. This can also be seen in countries like Malaysia where employers frequently utilise geographical immobility as a reason not to promote women, stating that women will decline job rotations

required for upper-level managerial positions owing to family duties (Peariasamy & Mansor, 2008).

Female executives at the CEO level in China are still poorly represented. China Daily reported that in 2011 that only nine per cent of the CEOs they employed were women, highlighting a pattern where women move quickly into management positions, however, the top-most senior level positions then become elusive due to barriers. A study by Kang and Rowley (2005), found that an overwhelming number of females from South Korea, 96 per cent, believed they were more challenged in finding full-time work compared to males. It is clear that women in the Middle East are still at a disadvantage and may probably experience the glass ceiling effect to a greater degree in comparison to other nations.

Schmillen and Tan (2019) state that closing the gap between men's and women's economic prospects may raise per capita income by 26 per cent or by an average of US$ 2247 annually for each Malaysian. In addition to making economic and social sense, removing barriers for women in Malaysia can contribute to the nation's development objectives on a scale beyond the individual and family level. As Malaysia continues on its journey to becoming a high-income, developed nation, WEF (2015) states that to achieve sustainable and equitable development, Malaysian women must receive guaranteed equal access. Saleem et al. (2017) asserted that work-family conflicts are the most significant contributors to the glass ceiling and provided evidence indicating that women are less committed and unfit for time- and attention-intensive roles.

A hostile corporate climate is viewed as a major impediment for the few Japanese women who have attained managerial positions in Japan's biggest firms (Holden & Wiener, 1992). Large Japanese firms' corporate procedures are the principal method for excluding women from managerial and decision-making positions. For example, Japanese corporations push young female employees to marry male employees. The firms then utilise anti-nepotism regulations to force women, not men, to resign (Steinhoff & Tanaka, 1988).

Moreover, 43 per cent of all women in managerial positions report sexual harassment (Holden & Wiener, 1992). Van Vianen and Fischer (2002) concur that the vast majority of senior managers are men and they define a gendered culture that excludes and marginalises women.

The authors posit that this culture is comprised of norms and organisational practices that promote and define masculine values, stereotypes, behaviours and a vision of management and leadership. Eagly's (1987) social role theory argues that widely shared gender stereotypes, about sex differences and similarities in social behaviour, develop from the gender division of labour that characterises a society. According to Block and Crawford (2013), gender stereotyping occurs when men and women are assigned traits, behaviours and roles based on their gender. It is counterproductive for women's growth and their orientations towards relationships for them to pursue positions of power and leadership that conform to the traditional definition of those terms Gilligan & Attanucci (1988).

A study by Batool, Mansor, Bashir & Zainab (2021) shows that these negative association values are consistent with recent research demonstrating that Pakistan is a predominantly masculine country and that working women in Pakistani society face an inner glass ceiling. Based on the belief that their job advancement will be limited regardless of self-efficacy, the inner glass ceiling encourages these women to minimise their efforts for reaching particular outcomes. Similarly, women in Bangladesh are frequently viewed as inferior participants in the labour market, largely due to traditional societal beliefs that women's primary role is to fulfil reproductive and domestic responsibilities rather than to participate fully in education, training and paid work (ILO, 2006). There are widespread misinterpretations and justifications for unequal opportunities based on the misconception that women are the weaker gender (Gartzia & Van Engen, 2012).

3.1.5 Glass ceiling: an African perspective

The continent of Africa was dubbed the dark continent in the past and was presumed to be behind in all aspects of transformation. The past few decades have been about Africa finding its way and there has also been a steady rise in women participating in the business environment. Several countries have also implemented legislation that encouraged equality in the workplace, for instance, South Africa's Employment Equity Act (2000) which mandates "equal pay for men and women, forbidding the practice of paying women less than men based on gender alone". There has not been a comprehensive investigation of gender in the context of oppression, although it might have a place in conversations about hierarchy and power (Myers & Murray 2006).

In many African jurisdictions, legislation or the incorporation of gender considerations into regulatory policies is becoming increasingly common. Kenya, for instance, has constitutions that reserve board positions for women in state-owned enterprises. The Central Bank of Nigeria also mandated in 2012 that 30 per cent of board seats and 40 per cent of management positions be reserved for women in Nigerian banks (Myers & Murray 2006). The ILO (2015) found that in six African countries – Botswana, Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa – the proportion of women in managerial positions has increased during the last decade; the ILO (2020) found there was a slight decline in Ethiopia and a significant decline in Uganda.

Samkange and Dingani (2010) concur that the glass ceiling effect is construed to be a covert and conspicuous architecture preventing women from climbing the corporate ladder. Ajala and Wulemat (2013) examined the marginalisation of women in Nigerian politics. Their findings revealed that patriarchal politics in Western Nigeria exist with women being pitted against gender stereotypes and household labour. In Nigeria, women face stereotypes in several fields, including education (Gberevbie, Osibanjo, Adeniji, & Oludayo, 2014). These gender stereotypes about women negatively influence their evaluations and decisions (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). The majority of gender stereotypes are unintended and mostly based on personal beliefs and experiences (Staggenborg, 1998).

According to Dogo (2016), patriarchal Nigerian culture and, by extension, African culture in general, is organised in a system where a man engages in social production and so serves society. Consequently, in the early stages of their careers, women managers are assigned different responsibilities than men (Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002). It has been noticed that women in Nigeria are degraded to the status of infidels and seen as citizens of lower social classes; hence, the generalisation of the view that the most appropriate place for women to be is in the kitchen is widespread (Allanana, 2013).

The ILO (2015) found that in a survey in Cameroon, almost 94 000 enterprises indicated that while 27 per cent of their employees were women, only 10 per cent had a female manager and there was no female CEO of a large company. The total female labour participation rate in the country was 67 per cent in 2009 compared to about 66 per cent in 1980 (World Bank, 2011). According to Okpara (2014), the worth of women is hindered since they are not

adequately represented in the majority of countries around the world. According to World Bank (2020), the problem stems from an increase in the proportion of Cameroonian women participating in the country's labour force and who enter a world that has been dominated by men for centuries, putting them at a disadvantage.

According to Maideen and Dongmo (2016), the Constitution of Cameroon guarantees gender equality. However, the country's legal system is comprised of the Napoleonic Code, common law, customary law and written law. Arrey (2009) adds that this structure frequently impedes gender equality. In reality, the country lacks a legal definition of discrimination and certain provisions of civil law continue to be prejudicial to women. Cloutier (2010) clarifies that Cameroon's labour market attitudes and practices are rooted in a traditional patriarchal system that hinders the advancement of women's economic activity. Even though the employment trends of women have improved, the sociological and cultural burdens continue to relegate Cameroonian women to second place by reducing their activities primarily to fulfil family obligations and maternity constraints.

According to BWASA's 2012 report, the percentage of female chief executive officers remained around 3 per cent from 2009 to 2012, down from 4 per cent in 2011. South African women constitute 52 per cent of the total population and contribute 41 per cent to the national labour force (Chiloane-Tsoka, 2010). Mkhize and Msweli (2010) predict that the greater the participation of women in economic benefits, the greater the improvement of South Africa's economy. According to a McKinsey (2020) report, South Africa has a low score when it comes to the number of women in management positions. The report states that there was only one female CEO found in the top 40 listed JSE companies reviewed; in addition, about 68 per cent of all senior management positions are held by men and women hold only 32 per cent of executive positions.

Statistics South Africa (2021) estimates the country's population at about 60 million people, with females as the majority accounting for 51 per cent. The assumption would be that since women are the majority of citizens, they would therefore be the majority in leadership roles within corporates, however, the reality is that in the corporate world women leaders are still minimal. This is not only applicable to South Africa but across the world; men still dominate leadership positions across business sectors. According to a PwC (2020) report, women

comprised only 14 per cent of the 329 current CEOs of companies listed on the JSE. The majority of women still do not form part of the decision-making bodies of corporates in the country.

The struggle for social equality has always been at the heart of the South African revolution for democracy. The South African constitution guarantees a society founded on democratic values and social justice, among others. Gender equality is one of the fundamental principles enshrined in the South African Bill of Rights, which focuses on social justice (South Africa, 1996). The principle of equality not only upholds and protects women's rights but also expressly prohibits gender-based discrimination.

HBR (2020) states that substantial progress has already been made but even with the significant advancements made by women in a variety of fields, the problem of women failing to attain positions of power is still prevalent in society. The literature reveals that the labour market is more favourable to men than to women; even though in South Africa the rights of women are protected and enshrined in the constitution, believed to be one of the best in the world, women's advancement still lacks (Stats SA, 2004). South Africa with its discrimination history was coerced to end its societal belief of discrimination and sexism, yet in reality, women still face discriminatory practices in the workplace (Kornegay, 2000). Women in South Africa are paid up to 20 per cent less than men in comparable positions, even though women now earn more than they ever have in the past (Chaudhary & Gupta, 2010).

Even though for the longest time in South Africa, the education of girls was not prioritised, there is definitely a need for the trajectory to change if the country is to be prosperous, globally competitive and create a flourishing society. WEF (2020) clarifies that women's skills and capabilities need to be leveraged as talent shortages can be projected to become more severe in a developing world, so increasing access to feminine talent may be a strategic imperative for any business. Despite the existence of advanced employment equity legislation in South Africa addressing inequalities and discrimination, women still face many obstacles. The Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) suggests that even with similar education achievement, drive and dedication to a prosperous career, men still advance faster than women.

According to Stats SA (2019), in South Africa indicators, such as literacy, earnings, expenditure shares and access to the majority of basic services, revealed that women consistently performed worse than men. At all educational levels, women trailed men in terms of earnings. Furthermore, Stats SA reports that women with no education earned 54 per cent of the income earned by men, while those with a high school education earned 68 per cent of the male equivalent and those with a postsecondary education earned 63 per cent.

Mdluli (2002) concurs by stating that only 9.3 per cent of managerial positions in South Africa are held by women and this low percentage can be attributed to several factors, including misperceptions about the leadership skills and potential of women. Considering that women comprise 55 per cent of South Africa's population, such a low proportion of women in managerial positions is indicative of discrimination in the workplace (Mdluli, 2002). The notion of tokenism is also noted. Kanter (1977) studied the workplace experiences of women and concluded that tokens are likely to have bad workplace experiences due to their tiny numerical representation.

Burke (1994) suggests that the first female appointments to boards of directors are frequently symbolic. Valenti (2007) finds that corporates are more likely to replace a departing female board director with an alternative woman than to add several women to the board when there is already a female director present. The author concludes that this lends credence to the token argument because companies believe that if there is a female director on their board, it is assuaging to special interest groups and satisfying to affirmative action advocates. Kanter (1997) further clarifies that the tokenism theory is when there is a situation where there is a significant under-representation of a certain group within an occupational work setting, the individuals from that group are more likely to be treated as tokens rather than as unique people. However, Yoder's (1991) research revealed that tokenism is more complicated than focusing on the numerical representation of tokens in the workplace. Haslam, Ryan, Kulich, Trojanowski, and Atkins (2010) suggest that women who are seen as symbolic leaders may face more scrutiny and scepticism similar to that directed at an outsider.

Table 3.2 presents the conceptualisation of the barriers affecting women in the workplace per region. From the global scenario it presents, it seems invisible barriers affect women in the workplace regardless of the region in which they are based.

Table 3.2 Comparing the geographical conceptualisation

Regional Concept	**Region**
According to Eurostat (2015), even though 60 per cent of recent university graduates are female, men outnumber women in EU corporate leadership roles. Women make up an average of 22.7 per cent of the boards of the top publicly traded companies in the EU. This represents a significant increase from 2010 when the European Commission first prioritised the problem of women in senior posts. However, there is still a long way to go before attaining gender parity. As such, not utilising the skills of highly skilled women is a waste of talent and a loss of opportunity for economic success. Several studies indicate that organisations that have a greater proportion of women at senior levels have superior organisational and financial performance.	Europe
In their study, Monroe and Chiu (2010) found that in even though the genders are equally represented at the graduate level in the United States, significantly fewer women than males go on to work in higher education (Gardner, 2007). Those women who achieve senior positions can also anticipate lower compensation than their male peers. Since the late 1970s, the average compensation of female faculty members has remained at 81 per cent of that of male faculty members. In addition, the average wage for women with the same academic rank as males is lower. In higher education, discrepancies exist not just in terms of income but also in terms of rank, tenure and time to promotion between female and male employees (Lanier, Tanner, & Guidry, 2009).	Northern America
Catalyst (2020) reported that even though China has the highest percentage of working-age women, at nearly 60 per cent, higher than the European Union and the US, the country's representation has not translated into a higher representation of executive positions. Just as in other Asian nations, stereotypes and gender	Asia

Regional Concept	Region
roles tied to traditional attitudes hold women back through a lack of education and labour opportunities. Only in Taiwan do women managers firmly believe that there are improved opportunities for employment and promotion for females in comparison to previous generations despite the evident glass ceiling effect staining many of the Asian nations Chou, Chen, Fosh & Foster (2008).	
In Africa, the subordination of women takes complex forms rooted in patriarchal history and culture (Coetzee, 2001). Leadership connotes authority and power; women in positions of leadership connote authority and power. Allanana (2013) defines patriarchy as the system of male dominance that oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Diehl (2014) states that some studies indicate that societal and institutional constraints influence women's personal decisions about leadership ambitions in South African society; women have been regarded as responsible for home duties and unable to dedicate time and energy to leadership positions.	Africa

Several similarities are common in describing women's roles and their leadership journeys. The phenomena of gender equality and the representation of women in senior managerial positions have recently become the most pressing issues. It is evident that women's career growth has been constrained and their advancement to senior management positions is limited in almost all significant organisations. Cultural ideas and societal schemas are the most pervasive features of the glass ceiling within organisations and result in barriers such as the gender wage gap which is prevalent across the globe. This is also according to scholars who investigated the factors related to the glass ceiling (Carapinha, 2013).

3.2 Agents of the glass ceiling

The glass ceiling effect has been described as an invisible barrier preventing women from reaching top levels at organisations. Women continue to face challenges in the workplace particularly in traditionally male-dominated work environments. Although men and women have always coexisted socially, a separate spheres ideology has been prevalent in the workplace, resulting in a division (Walby, 1988).

According to the Centre for American Progress (2015), women's under-representation in high-level leadership positions is a well-documented phenomenon with vast contributing factors, including cultural, societal and organisational factors. These could emanate from ancient gender hierarchies and patriarchal practices that do not only exist in the workplace but also in family and societal settings.

Previous research assumes that there are some symbiotic relations between gender and race and that the glass ceiling in organisations highlights challenges and barriers that affect women and black people in reaching executive positions (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). Some of the most noted predominant barriers mentioned in the literature on the glass ceiling effect are individual, cultural barriers and organisational structures (Johns, 2013). These barriers make it difficult for women to penetrate and be accepted as equals in the workplace and can be classified as agents of the glass ceiling.

3.2.1 Gender and culture

Gender discrimination remains a reality and can be viewed as a social construct. Britton (1997) explains how gender as a social construct can generate contradictions in organisations, highlighting the inequality regimes within organisations that are not only limited to gender, class and racial inequalities. Billson & Mancini (2007) clarify that the twentieth century manifested a global transformation in gender relations and opened doors for females that may previously have been closed. In the previous century, women contrived to access the workplace domain. Wirth (2001) observed that women grabbed working opportunities to participate in the labour force and penetrated careers and professions that were previously not available to them.

Social change due to economics and expansions also compelled women to be part of the business environment. As far back as 1797, women have been fighting to participate equally in the workplace. A study by RepresentWomen (2021) explicates that it was Abigail Adams who brought gender equality challenges to the White House in the 18th century, emphasising the importance of educating girls and appealing for equal rights for men and women. There's been a vast improvement in the acceptance of women in the workplace, yet women may still struggle with new freedoms and identities that have liberated them. Alas, women continue to form a disproportionately small group in senior management positions across the globe.

In some countries, national policies such as South Africa's Gender Policy Framework (2002) have been instituted to ensure that women's participation in the business world increases, albeit not that progressively. Gruber (1998) posits that it is also widely known that conventional male-dominated policies and practices are slow to adjust to modern realities and change may take time. Most countries still struggle with the emancipation of women and cultural and social perceptions remain barriers to women's advancement.

Cotter et al. (2001) agree that a glass ceiling can be detected from other types of inequality as the effect encompasses a specific type of gender or racial inequality. Krefting (2003) expanded the idea that women and minorities often experience subtle and nonverbal unpleasant interactions at the workplace. While black managers experience the complexity of both racism and sexism, the interactions create negative situations which may not necessarily impact white women (Bell & Nkomo, 2001).

Black women may experience what can be termed a double impact where both their race and gender put them at a disadvantage. A McKinsey (2021) report found that black women, in particular, still experience discrimination in the workplace and have expressed that they still experience microaggression as much as they did in 2019. The report also notes that women of colour are more prone to be disrespected in the workplace in comparison to everyone in that work environment. Having fewer women at the top can re-enforce the stereotypes that women, due to their gender, are not meant to be at the helm.

Researchers replicated the findings of Miron, Warner, and Branscombe (2011) and discovered a disparity in the quantity of evidence each group required to conclude that existing gender

economic inequality is unfair to women. For males to arrive at this conclusion, they required a greater quantity of evidence than did women. McKelway (2018) explains that the impact of traditional cultural settings and behaviour patterns becomes vital when gender-based social learning acquired by women re-enforces beliefs that women are less capable than men.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory identifies the process by which an individual learns and is influenced by the behaviour of others, imitates that behaviour and is internally motivated to do so. According to Nabavi (2012), Bandura's theory of learning incorporated a social element after he recognised that direct reinforcement was inadequate to explain all types of learning. Bandura contended that individuals acquire knowledge by observing others. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory posits that an individual is better able to deal with prejudice against their ingroup if they have a strong sense of identity with that ingroup.

3.2.2 Societal norms and biases

Paluck and Ball (2010) state that a social norm is roughly what people in some groups believe to be normal within that group and that can be a typical or appropriate action. Singh and Terjesen (2008) clarified that the existence of the glass ceiling was attributable to gendered social systems where patriarchy-defined work roles by gender lead to gender discrimination and stereotyping. In addition, these systems perpetuate the exclusion of women where promotion systems work in a gender-biased way (Singh & Terjesen, 2008); it is expected that career paths for these corporate leaders remain untouched. Kiser (2015) defines gender polarisation as the phenomenon that happens when males in powerful positions do not use their authority and influence to promote women but rather are comfortable with the status quo.

Social bias can have an adverse bearing, positive or negative, and refers to being in favour or against individuals or groups based on their social identities. Included are the stereotypes and societal norms exposed through attitudes and actions. Hurley and Choudhary (2016) state that cultural stereotyping refers to beliefs which are culturally embedded within individuals' minds; such beliefs are inclined to work counter to women's promotion to management positions.

Cotter et al. (2001) state that the existence of invisible barriers deters hierarchical uprising. According to Mikkola (2011), feminine and masculine characteristics are not the result of physiological facts but are culturally learnt or acquired. Parents unconsciously treat their children differently, beginning with the toys with which they make them play and extending throughout the gender socialisation process. According to Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), discrimination against women persists in a variety of seemingly impartial work practices and cultural norms. According to the authors, the norms are common and mundane and they are woven into the fabric of an organisation's status quo, which is why it is not easy to notice or question them. However, they create a subtle pattern of systemic disadvantage that prevents most women from advancing in their careers.

Nyane (2019) concurs that in patriarchal societies roots are embedded in masculinity being supreme and there may be measures that control the role of women making the under-representation of women in executive positions the acceptable norm. In these societies, there are expectations that men ought to be dominant in comparison to women and dominate women. Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, and Mdlongwa (2018) also found that in a country like South Africa, the communities are traditional and certain practices such as patriarchy are influential in how the society reacts and treats men and women, causing women to experience inequity in a variety of societal contexts. These scholars also noted that patriarchy, as a "normative and institutional pillar, is embodied in the social values, beliefs and assumptions that consciously establish the ground rules that people in an organisation follow and to which they conform".

Mooney and Ryan (2009) believe that women are forced to conform to male standards, which are founded on male conceptions and managerial systems, as a result of patriarchy-defined gender roles that have been in place for a long time. Bartol, Martin and Kromkowski (2003) have concluded that in patriarchal organisations, men perceive their perspectives and norms to be representative of gender-neutral organisational structures and assume that the structure is asexual. Previous studies allude to the domination of the think-manager-think-male framework in leadership literature. Schein (1975) originated the concept which has been replicated internationally in several environments. One such study was replicated by Heilman, Block, Martell and Simon (1989) and the results were similar to those of the earlier studies,

showing that men are still viewed and described as better managers than women and, therefore, suitable for leadership positions rather than women.

Ellemers (1993) found that group identification among disadvantaged members was greater when they believed social mobility was impossible compared to when they believed they could migrate to a more socially valued group. This could be an element of unconscious bias, a phenomenon described by Fitzgerald (2018) as associations that instinctively change our perceptions thus influencing our behaviour and decision-making which can result in increased stereotypes and disparities in the workplace. Female candidates are allegedly passed over for promotions due to a conscious or unconscious belief that they lack the leadership skills necessary to manage men (Mason, 2009). Ademuson (2016) contends that even though women possess equal capabilities to those of men, they continue to be marginalised in most aspects of public life.

Previous studies like Furnham & Paltzer (2010) have found gender stereotyping to have a substantial impact, as women scored much higher on feminine measures and men on masculine measures; however, neutral measures were not significantly different. Interestingly, when those in charge of rating were all men, males were rated much higher than females, but when there was a mix of genders, females were rated higher (Bowen, Swim & Jacobs, 2000). Due to sex role socialisation of perceiving management as masculine and the fact that managerial positions are overwhelmingly controlled by men, the performance evaluation system may mistakenly continue to repeat the glass ceiling effect. There may have been interventions to encourage gender equality and empowerment but the traditional structure is still patriarchal with traditionally dominant males at the helm. Cabrera (2009) also found that women face challenges in trying to pierce historically male-dominated work environments which stem from outdated gender hierarchies and social norms that reign in families and societies.

Mainstream scholars, such as Warner (2005), have proposed that organisational and societal infrastructures must change if women and men are to achieve parity in terms of success. Ntuli and Wittenberg (2013) agree that unarticulated ideas and actions promote and reinforce discrimination based on gender and sustain gendered norms in society and the workplace. Jaga et al. (2018) concur that men use this theory to rationalise the sexist treatment of women

by society including the relation of women to subservient roles. Poor repercussions of experiencing bias include diminished self-esteem, a loss of feelings of control, negative future expectations for the self and decreased general psychological well-being (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002).

Taking into consideration that women can be losers in these instances, social hierarchies are highly pervasive across human cultures and they appear to emerge naturally in social groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Raja (2015) state that women internalise societal stereotypes thus creating a psychological glass ceiling. This leads to women feeling less qualified for leadership positions which discourage them from engaging in self-promoting behaviours which is a key leadership trait. In addition, the trait and great man theories advocate that certain people have special innate or inborn qualities or characteristics that make them leaders (Northhouse, 2010). Justifiably women frequently attend to complications of the many roles they play both at home and work. They are required to make several sacrifices which are not expected from males and have to be creative in how they balance work and family life; this can have a huge impact on their career progression (Sarika, 2015). The term 'opt-out revolution' was coined by Belkin (2003) to describe the small trend of women leaving professional, often prestigious, jobs to focus on raising their children. This so-called exodus garnered considerable media attention and has been cited as proof that women do not desire powerful positions (Boushey, 2008).

Women tend to be judged based on the stereotypical assertion of being women rather than their individual traits. Marx and Goff (2005) state that women are stereotyped as not being suitable for leadership roles as leadership styles are closely associated with common perceptions. As there were even fewer women in leadership positions in the past, these theories were developed with male leader traits in mind. According to Marrujo and Kleiner (1992), women appear as social leaders while men are associated with being task-oriented leaders.

Previous research also demonstrates how in reality both genders emulate this behaviour in their leadership styles. Men in leadership positions tend to have instrumental traits and use a transactional leadership style, whereas women use a transformational leadership style. Northhouse (2010) affirms that stereotypical masculine characteristics such as assertiveness

and initiative are viewed as congruent with leadership. The situational approach posits that different situations call for different leadership styles, whereas the participative approach asserts that the leader should involve subordinates in the decision-making process. Thus, patriarchy remains present in how business is conducted and can manifest itself in different ways. Neither an individual's sex nor gender should have bearing on their leadership journey, however, reality shows something different as women are still at odds when it comes to climbing the corporate ladder.

3.2.3 Organisational culture

Organisational culture has been described as the beliefs and assumptions mutually shared by an organisation's members or employees and has been cited as a factor that may hinder women's progress. Theories of organisational culture such as Schein's (1985) model elucidate that culture exists simultaneously on three levels: artefacts, values and assumptions.

Organisational culture is said to operate instinctively, defining the organisation's view of itself and its environment. Ali (2015) asserts that the only way an organisation can survive is if it has competent leaders who direct and steer it in the right direction. Individuals can vastly influence organisational culture through their intended and intended behaviour by projecting their beliefs onto the organisation (Ali, 2015). For instance, Baker (2002) argues that if women are viewed as caretakers, organisations may develop a culture that discourages women from reaching senior management positions because they are not as competent as males.

Also increasing is the need for a shift in the perception of women in leadership positions. Gherardi (1995) argues that gender is socially generated through processes in which organisations actively participate and by which these organisations are shaped: practices produce and replicate social connections, material culture and the artefacts that sustain them. Mastracci and Arreola (2016) explain that the theory of gendered organisations posits that practices and behaviours based on gender stereotypes will persist despite changes in workforce demographics. Ali (2015) also notes that with nearly 75 per cent of executives being male, women need to have effective strategies to overcome the challenges they face.

According to Roth, Nguyen, Forouzanfar, Mokdad, Naghavi, and Murray (2015) the gender breakdown of all UN workers in 2007 revealed that women comprised 44 per cent of all

employees and were disproportionately represented among lower-ranking professionals, 55 per cent. Ostroff, Kinicki, and Muhammad (2012) clarify that the overall gender representation of an organisation affects the organisation's agenda concerning gender discrimination, policies and the predominant climate as far as gender diversity is concerned. In addition, corporate culture can be exclusive and may not necessarily embrace the individuality of all its employees.

Previous studies of the glass ceiling phenomenon have identified organisational culture as one of the reasons that may avert the advancement of women beyond lower managerial roles (Mooney, 2007). In the long history of organisations, women were typically assigned to low-ranking, repetitive positions. Rarely did they serve as line managers (Yazdani, Roshanzade, & Seyed-Javadin, 2007). According to Parker (2005), the conceptual framework comprehending gender conversations in organisations has led to the marginalisation of certain members or sections of organisational leadership while privileging others. Recently there has been heightened interest and attention on gender inequality yet the barriers to women's careers still prevail. Catalyst (2021) found that companies with male domination practices tend to harbour primary barriers to women's advancement.

Furthermore, Burton and Parker (2010) argue that it is more challenging for women to reach senior management levels in the workplace as women are prone to confront more challenges compared to men as they progress up the corporate ladder and that a barrier exists that is at the highest level of business that women hardly pierce. Men on the other hand are not typically hindered by stereotypes and gender-based discrimination. Women continue to face several challenges in the workplace particularly in traditionally male-dominated work environments. This could emanate from ancient gender hierarchies and patriarchal practices that do not only exist in the workplace but also family and societal settings. These customs can make it difficult for women to penetrate and be accepted as equals in the workplace.

A 2018 Harvard Business report revealed that in male-dominated industries, such as investments, the more similar the investment partners, the lower their investment performance, thus, demonstrating that diversity does influence the performance of an organisation. The report found that companies that are willing to maximise female partner hiring experience growth in their overall fund returns annually. According to Adler (2007),

corporate organisations tend to be structured in policies that endorse male socialisation, therefore, favouring men. As a result, there is a need for overall progressive repositioning from a societal and an organisational perspective to challenge and transform the current status quo of prevalent beliefs about leadership qualities and male dominance in the workplace.

Kantor (1977) explains that men appear to have a more political disposition and arsenal than women. Willer and Cupach (2008) claim that women are more inclined than men to experience negative effects of indirect social aggression, such as anger, hurt, embarrassment, depression and anxiety, due to their strong desire to be accepted and, in the most extreme cases, suicidal thoughts. Archer (2004) state due to social aggression perception women managers might then face an additional difficulty such as the queen bee syndrome. This syndrome describes how some women managers who have made it to the top feel as though they have had to work extremely hard to get there. They believe that other women should exert equal effort for success (Keeton, 1996). Wrigley (2002) also notes a tendency where women in managerial positions sabotage those in lower levels and are uninterested in helping other women in lower levels advance to leadership positions.

Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000) reaffirm that relatively, men are most likely to benefit from the 'old boy network', which is an invisible network but women will have to circumvent these situations and seize every opportunity to avail themselves so that they can benefit through improved sponsorship and mentorship networks, Granovetter (1973) stated that individuals with ties in a higher number of locations had more access to resources. Using the concept of network heterogeneity, which refers to the various types of individuals in a network, some assess the diversity of a network. Despite the progress currently taking place and the concrete foundation laid by several women's movements through legislation and policy change to encourage women's representation leadership, women continue to struggle for recognition and placement in top positions (Davidson & Burke, 2012).

To survive and succeed in male-dominated environments women may reject their traditional feminine characteristics and adopt masculine traits which may seem needed for successful leadership. According to Bobbitt-Zeher (2011), women view and experience the work environment differently from men. Men tend to compete for power and status as driving

forces while women are motivated by contributing to the overall company achievement and doing a good job. Walker (2013) elucidates that with a certain aversive stimulus that affects women in male-dominated careers, women remain under-represented in those sectors as there are no rewards enticing women to remain in those fields. Women's unique work experiences, taking into consideration the outdated work-life role structures based on gender, manifest distinct challenges to career-oriented women, particularly in traditionally male-dominated careers (Hartmann, 2010).

A study by Nelson and Burke (2002) found that 82 per cent of companies stated that the lack of management skills and line experience is a major contributing factor in decisions not to promote women. Auster and Prasad (2016) also found that certain company promotion strategies are more favourable to men and there is a radical difference in their approach depending on the gender of the employee. In addition, it is difficult for women to find mentors in businesses dominated by men (Hansman, 2002) – a catch-22 situation because if women are not allowed to lead organisations, how will they acquire line management experiences? Yet another study found some companies have extensive numbers of qualified women but do not consider them for senior positions (Burke & Collins, 2000).

While Dozier and Broom (1995) concluded that attaining management positions was more dependent on experience than gender, other studies have provided evidence that gender discrimination exists and keeps women in technician positions longer than men. Several government acts, the opening of facilities willing to educate women and the opportunity to continue their education at a higher level gave women the right to receive an education after a long struggle against gender discrimination (Wood, 2009).

Rosette and Livingston (2012) discovered that when organisations are performing well, African American women, men and white women are rated comparably, whereas when organisations are performing poorly, black women are sanctioned disproportionately compared to black men and white women.

Parker and Fagenson (1994) state that relatively, men benefit from existing 'old boy networks' and women need to find alternative ways for them to benefit and enjoy the rise to leadership positions. The study further observed that women's lack of enthusiasm to actively seek

sponsorship is amply justified as they view that women's proximity to the senior executive is perceived as being more than just a professional relationship thus the avoidance of proximity to leadership. Frequently, women lack a sponsor who promotes and sells their skills and abilities to other members of the organisation and fights for their advancement up the organisational ladder.

According to HBR (2011) women either underestimate or fail to cultivate sponsorship's impact on career mobility. The reasons for this ranged from women's perceptions that advancing through connections is inappropriate for women and senior men's reluctance to establish sponsorship relationships because it is frequently misconstrued as sexual interest. Hendriksen (2019) elucidates that toxic masculinity takes place when respect and reverence are misguidedly combined. Traditional masculinity typically involves the belief that respect or admiration for one's abilities should be equal and mutual between colleagues.

According to Griffith and Dasgupta (2018) male-dominated environments may impede women´s career motivations and contribute to low retention and promotion rates for women. A previous study in the banking sector revealed that female representation in senior management was uncommon and males stood better opportunities of moving upwards and of promotions to senior management (Dah, El-Kassar, & Dah, 2009). In addition, Marshall (1995) interviewed women who had reached middle and senior-level management positions and then had either left or contemplated leaving employment. Isolation was a major theme for these women, who reported considerable evidence of men banding together in reacting to individual women and a general male-dominated environment.

The 'gentleman's club' which is another barrier for women and part of the glass ceiling may constitute double jeopardy for women due to unequal participation of women in comparison to men in the labour market. Women in employment sectors are still disadvantaged. Even though they possess the necessary qualifications and experience, they still are a minority in terms of those in managerial positions (ILO, 2015). Howard-Hamilton and Patitu (2012) contend that African American women in higher education routinely face double danger in the form of racist or sexist remarks, sneaky remarks, harassment and/or discrimination. Unchecked prejudice (on any front or combination of fronts) can hinder the retention of black women administrators and their desire to join the academy.

A previous study found that women in middle management face a glass ceiling in their working environment inhibiting the promotion of females thus creating a barrier to career development opportunities for women, revealing that women may not necessarily have sufficient organisational support, such as mentoring (Dimovski, Škerlavaj & Man, 2009). Shea (1998) defines mentoring as a connection that allows individuals to share their professional and personal skills and experiences and to grow and develop as a result. Another theory is that women lack mentors and executives who take an interest in them and expose them to the proper people to succeed (Murrell & Blake-Beard, 2017).

Redwood (1996) touches on another sphere of the work environment stating that research also implies that the fundamental source for the glass ceiling is the perception of white males who believe they are getting the short end of the stick and losing their competitive edge due to the direct results of including women in the workplace. They may believe they are losing control and available opportunities focus more on the upskilling of women and minorities. During a literature study on leadership, Amey and Twombly (1992) found that scholars typically used aggressive and war-like language that perpetuated the great man style of leadership. This language implies that women would be challenged in their leadership roles since these establishments are designed for males, fuelling a leadership stereotype.

HRD (2013) reported that the retention of senior female executives is a major battleground for organisations and new research has revealed that the glass ceiling remains intact and male-dominated corporate culture is the biggest barrier to women reaching the board level. According to Ying (2011), three key restrictions fuel glass ceiling occurrence: “customary gender roles, expressions of sexism in the workplace, and lack of sponsorships”. As women have been conditioned to believe they are not worthy of being leaders but rather should be followers, they may judge themselves and others as not being skilled to be at the helm of companies. The self-doubt can be destructive not only to themselves but to other women.

Tlaiss and Kauser (2010) describe ‘old boy networks’ as casual relations that are usually formed over business lunches or deals reached on golf courses. This has had significant repercussions for women, who have found it harder to challenge the increasingly paternalistic culture and aggressive management style as a result of the ‘old boy network’ and a more aggressive approach (Pritchard, 2001). There is also the new ‘old boy network’. Gamba and

Kleiner (2001) elucidate that as a result of the Internet's growing influence, predominantly younger men are enabled to form business relationships. Nonetheless, this observation predates the rise of social networks such as Facebook, which also provide women with opportunities to build networks for career advancement.

Risper (2011) affirms that these networks represent casual male social systems that stretch across organisations and exclude women from membership. They may favour males who have attended similar institutions or begun their careers at the same time and are more comfortable with those that are similar to them (Brijbans, 2015). Masculine organisational culture makes it more difficult for women to hold positions with power and authority due to women's gender identity (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008). Socially constructed methods will help emancipate and transform female equality and exclusion in organisations (Creswell, 2007).

A previous study found that women in middle management face a glass ceiling in their working environment inhibiting the promotion of females thus creating a barrier to career development opportunities for women. Zölitz and Feld (2018) concur that several studies suggest that while both genders tend to undervalue women´s expertise, men may do so more than women. According to Fassinger (2008), women can experience a "cold workplace climate". This hostile environment is exacerbated by double standards, particularly in unfair evaluation practices that discriminate against assertive women. Fassinger (2008) further lists as a barrier the exclusion of women from information and social networks that enhance promotion opportunities.

The impact of traditional cultural settings and behaviour patterns becomes vital when gender-based social learning acquired by women re-enforces beliefs that women are less capable and in turn have low self-confidence thus restricting them further from pursuing career ambitions (McKelway, 2018). This view is supported by Sandberg (2013) who suggests that it is often women themselves who hold women back, not others. However, the more time women take off from work, the less likely they are to be promoted or they are perceived as being less ambitious for promotion (Dreher, 2003). There may have been interventions to encourage gender equality and empowerment but the traditional structure is still patriarchal with traditional dominant males at the helm.

Studies by Eagly and Karau (2002) found that women may be subjected to stereotypes contributing to their under-representation in leadership positions, which may further exacerbate how female gender roles are observed as different to the requirements needed for successful leadership roles. Perrone-McGovern, Wright, Howes, and Barnum (2014) define gender roles as standards denoting the behaviours, activities and positions deemed suitable for each gender in developed Western societies. Women tend to be judged based on the stereotypical assertion of being women rather than their individual traits. Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) describe a deficiency theory that describes women as lacking the qualities necessary for leadership. Powell (2018) added that the standards of performance are based on male constructs and management structures and purport an idealism that organisations have.

Figure 3.1 indicates that women are still under-represented at the C-suite level and account for less than 20 per cent in comparison to male colleagues. Women are still not part of the decision-making body for the majority of companies and their inclusion remains a challenge for companies to incorporate into their leadership structures thereby creating a void in diversity and inclusion.

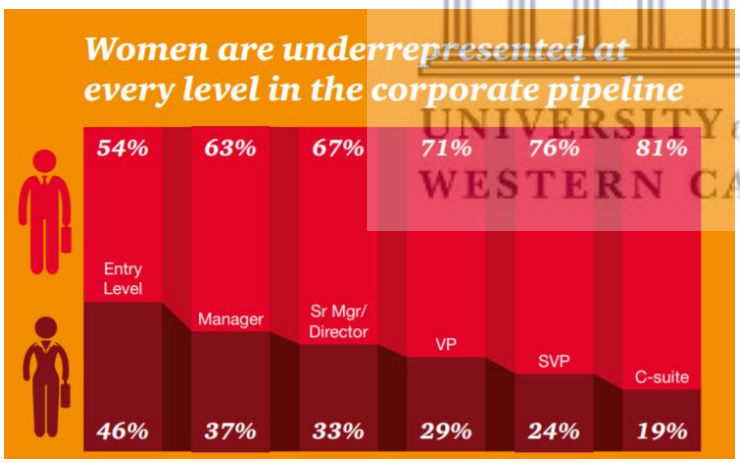


Figure 3.1 Women's under-representation

Source: World Economic Forum (2016)

3.2.4 Women and leadership roles

The first black US congresswoman Shirley Chisholm stated to Congress: "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair", (Huffpost, 2017). Since almost the beginning of time

women have been demanding inclusion and equality. Northouse (2004) defined leadership as a process in which an individual stimulates others to achieve a common goal. Merchant (2012) affirmed that the biological assumption has always leaned on highlighting that women and men are built differently and that their behaviour and thinking are not the same, thus, assuming that leadership is biologically determined. This translated to the assumption that leadership is heavily determined by biology Appelbaum, Audet & Miller (2003). Consequently, this implies that attaining male leadership values and qualities is essential to be a good leader.

Larson and Freeman (1997) acknowledge that gender construction is evident in the presence of feminine and masculine characteristics in leadership styles. Elements such as gender, race and class of social difference are recognised to play an important role in the development of leadership styles. Additionally, research has been conducted on how gender may impact leadership (Waring, 2003). While sociologists have studied African American female leaders, few studies have examined how race and gender interact to influence their leadership development, (Byrd & Stanley 2009).

Martins & Parsons (2007) note that men and women are often treated differently in the world of work. Gutek (1996) clarifies that these disproportions can surface when individual choices are attributed and credited to gender characteristics rather than to an individual's qualifications or job performance. Ritter and Yoder (2004) further provide proof of the differences in gender roles in leadership positions. A 2016 study by Stellenbosch University found that female students have a higher probability of graduating from university than male students, yet over 31 per cent of corporates have no women as part of their senior leadership (Bain, 2017). This collaborates the notion that women start off aspiring for greater participation at work but tend to 'disappear' along the way to the top. Mouw (2003) states that having the right resources such as higher-status contacts will multiply work opportunities and outcomes, including job authority and earnings. Raidén and Sempik (2013) also argue that research has established that some male co-workers are promoted not based on merit but on gender.

In line with the social role theory (Eagly, 1987), management's image and representation are often associated with masculine qualities. Consequently, social role and identity theory proposes that men and women act in accordance with the social roles (e.g., class, gender and

race) which are ascribed to them and determined by the stereotypical nature of their genders. Oshagbemi and Gill (2003) noted that there is a correlation between gender roles and leadership styles and that masculinity is associated with task-oriented leadership styles while femininity is with relationship-oriented styles. In previous leadership studies, Lowe (2011) there is compelling evidence supporting the tendency for women to adopt a more collaborative leadership style whereas men tend to be a lot more competitive and direct.

Jamieson (1995) developed the concept of the femininity/competency bind illustrating that behaving feminine is associated with incompetence and behaving masculine is associated with competency. According to Weyer (2007), these masculine qualities exhibit traits such as authority, independence, competitiveness and aggressiveness. Manfredi et al. (2017) believe that this manifests in the concept of leadership being defined by restrictions of male parameters based on merits from a societal construction. Eagly's (1987) social role theory argues that widely shared gender stereotypes, about sex differences and similarities in social behaviour, develop from the gender division of labour that characterises a society. According to Block and Crawford (2013), gender stereotyping occurs when men and women are assigned traits, behaviours and roles based on their gender. It is counterproductive for women's growth and their orientations towards relationships for them to pursue positions of power and leadership that conform to the traditional definition of those terms (Gilligan, 1982).

Powell (2012) suggests a different outcome on gender-inconsistent leadership style, finding that transactional leadership is viewed more negatively than transformational leadership. Galen and Lowe (1996) also found that transformational leadership was viewed as being more effective than transactional leadership in almost every setting. Sczesny (2003) indicates that holding a leadership position could be problematic for women due to the schemas held by individuals. This suggests that whether or not the style is consistent with gender stereotypes may be less critical than the use of the actual style.

According to Eagly (2005), a meta-analysis of studies comparing gender differences to leadership styles found that managers who practice transformational leadership create greater equity within their organisations because they communicate the values and purpose of the organisation's vision while encouraging individual employee achievement. By keeping

men in positions of corporate power, corporate policies and practices subtly maintain the status quo (Lockwood, 2004).

Eagly (2005) elucidates that transformational leaders avail space for employees to contribute their diverse experiences, advancing the entire organisation towards a more collective vision. Eagly (2018) further states that substantial headway has been made in understanding the structural and psychological barriers that women face in achieving and retaining leadership positions. In America, survey polls have consistently found that most men in America believe that women are not occupying leadership roles in business and politics because they are too emotional; interestingly, a third of American women hold the same view (Dolan, 2014).

Figure 3.2 illustrates how women are still under-represented as far as leadership positions are concerned, at less than 15 per cent for C-suite levels.

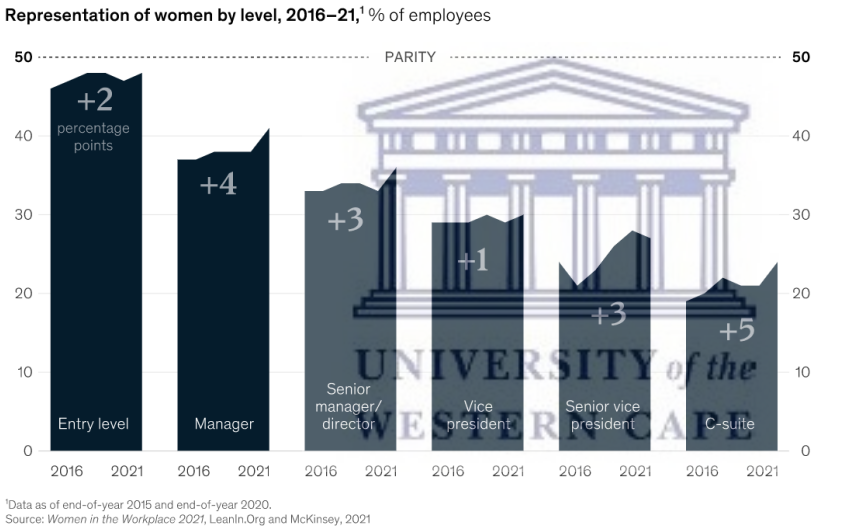


Figure 3.2 Representation of women in leadership positions

Source: McKinsey (2021)

Women's leadership characteristics are still viewed as different from males' and are not associated with effective leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Gender-specific leadership labels thrive with female leadership styles being associated with being transformational and male leadership styles tending to be transactional (Weyer, 2007). Many studies have found significant differences between men and women in their respective leadership styles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

According to Flanders (1994), other commonly held beliefs include aspects such as the following:

> … women lack the leadership qualities to head a team or organisation; women dislike power and decision-making; women are less assertive than men; women lack the ruthlessness required to succeed in a competitive environment and women are better suited for nurturing careers such as teaching and nursing; the male managerial style is more accepted and effective; and the culture trap, which means that women's own culture prevents them from achieving their full potential.

Echiejile (1995), for example, characterised gender-related leadership styles into masculine and feminine management. Feminine management includes expressive traits and a participative set of leadership behaviours whereas masculine management comprises an autocratic and task-oriented set of leadership behaviours. In addition, female leadership styles are described as nurturing and facilitative while male leadership styles are normally described as agentic and associated with achievement behaviours (Weyer, 2007). Such gender stereotypes contribute immensely to considerable barriers to female leadership. They take away from the diversity that can be injected by having women in top leadership positions which could provide a different perspective and contribute to new ways of doing things, thus providing a fresh perspective.

Several studies such as Schein (2007) have alluded to gender stereotypes affecting both men and women in leadership roles. The work environment still lacks gender diversity mainly at the leadership level; women are still understated. Catalyst (2022) states that only a staggering 21 per cent of executive committees of the top 100 companies are women. Considering Kanter's (1977) study on gender proportion at companies, it becomes important to note the gender imbalances at the top in current times because it seems no trajectory has taken place since then; women are still the minority at leadership levels.

Table 3.3 illustrates that when women are allowed to be leaders, they score well above their male counterparts in every level of management. Table 2.3 dismisses the stereotypes but women are still not viewed as leadership material.

Table 3.3 Overall leadership effectiveness by gender by position (percentile scores)

	Male	Female
Top Management, Executive, Senior Team Members	57.7	67.7
Reports to Top Management, Supervises Middle Managers	48.9	56.2
Middle Manager	49.9	52.7
Supervisor, Front Line Manager, Foreman	52.5	52.6
Individual Contributor	52.7	53.9
Other	50.7	52.0
Total	51.3	55.1

Source: Folkman Inc. (2011)

Catalyst (2015) notes that men are more likely to be considered for leadership positions than women and that women's identity may disadvantage them in being viewed as having abilities to be effective leaders. Companies are implementing leadership development programmes aimed at women's leadership success. The programmes are aimed at detecting barriers and obstacles preventing women from reaching the top and companies find ways to evade such barriers. What may add to this idea is the cultural construal of women and leadership role requirements.

According to Fagenson (1990), the advancement of women to leadership positions can be influenced by personal, organisational and social factors. Rosette, Koval, Ma, and Livingston (2016) found stereotypes about women's leadership are impacted by race and ethnicity. Ghavami and Peplau (2012) state that African American women experience the bulk of the stereotype of the strong black woman narrative which can negatively impact their journey to top management. These stereotypes become a burden that women must carry and they slow them down in their journey to become leaders. Women also tend to feel that they are caring for the whole gender on their shoulders and that they represent every woman, adding to the pressures that they may already have.

The invisible barrier prevents women from reaching top management positions as they are women. Historically females are considered emotional beings, less combative and lacking initiative and thereby being eliminated from leadership roles that require aggressive and direct mannerisms. McGlen & Sarkees (2018) states that several studies have found that

women in managerial roles tend to be more intuitive, less hierarchically oriented and to a certain extent more cooperative than men. Women are known to be more social with an emphasis on interpersonal relationships while men rarely adopt the participatory and democratic styles.

Yet, many organisations are still unprepared to open their leadership doors to women who can bring a different view and take to a uniform industry and corporates. Corporate culture can be exclusive and may not necessarily embrace the individuality of all its employees. Kanter (1977) further states that the attributes and behaviours of women can at times be overgeneralised and regarded as stereotypes. Women are viewed as being warm and such stereotypes can affect how women are measured as leaders and can hinder their ascension to top management citing that they are not combat-ready or do not possess combat or completion skills and traits.

Figure 2.3 shows that there is a belief that women and men are different and that their leadership styles can also be different. There is also a belief that they can both have a better approach to leadership. Rice (2010) believes that men are willing to put in the work and time needed to be successful, which they self-define as higher pay and big promotions and that women now have the same opportunities available to them as men but that they are choosing not to take those opportunities because they are more concerned with personal fulfilment than with success.

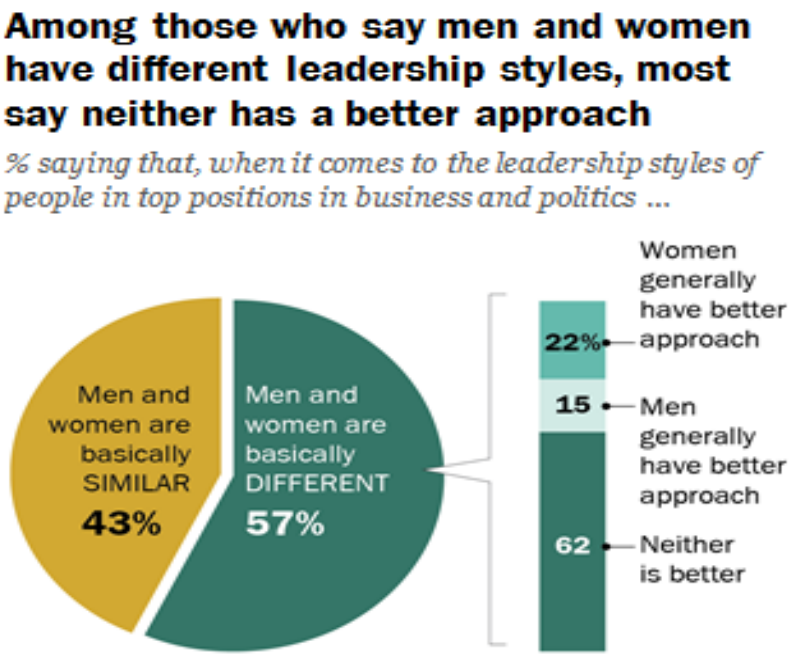


Figure 3.3 Leadership style of the genders

Source: Pew Research Centre (2018)

Social role theory and social stereotypes play a significant role in restraining the advancement of women. In environments run by promotional systems based on gender bias, career paths cannot be broken. According to research, persons who accept international leadership positions are more likely to receive career progression possibilities as a result of these challenging assignments (Shortland, 2021).

According to Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) the simple act of not considering a woman for an overseas appointment, as opposed to allowing a woman to decide, is a form of second-generation gender bias which arises from cultural assumptions, organisational structures and practices and patterns of interaction that inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage. Such systems function to exclude women who may need maternity leave or have to work part-time due to family commitments and structure the glass ceiling (Singh & Terjesen, 2008).

Women's leadership styles can be advantageous and have a great impact on businesses as they are different from the traditional style mainly associated with males. Women's leadership can bring new and unique ways of engagement if they are allowed to lead.

With the demands of leadership positions, it became a tendency for men to assume leadership roles because they were deemed to be task-oriented before the social leadership styles associated with women emerged as also valuable (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Previous research also demonstrates how in reality both genders emulate this behaviour in their leadership styles. Men in leadership positions tend to have instrumental traits and use a transactional leadership style, whereas women use a transformational leadership style.

3.2.5 Barriers to advancement

Throughout history, women have taken a back seat when it comes to official work. The past decades have seen more women entering the labour fraternity. As more women have entered the workforce, researchers have attempted to incorporate women into career models based on the careers of men (Sullivan, 1999). Previously women were restricted to traditional family roles while men were defined by their work (Chi-Ching, 1995). Internationally, women like Creola Katherine Johnson broke all stereotypes by being a black female mathematician whose calculations of orbital mechanics as a NASA employee were critical to the success of the first and subsequent US crewed spaceflights, (BCS 2021).

Women face barriers to progression in the work environment, barriers which are not necessarily faced by their male counterparts. Other gender-discriminatory business practices, as well as culture, are among the psychosocial elements that are equally implicated as barriers for women in the workplace (Oakley, 2000). In many countries, women are gaining managerial experience, however, they still encounter the glass ceiling phenomenon. Research results from earlier studies such as Mansor, Ariffin, Baharudin, & Hamzah (2021) confirm that career blockages for women appear at much earlier stages than for men. As women move up the managerial hierarchy, they are prohibited from enrolling for certain jobs resulting in gender discrimination which is the ultimate psychological barrier. Mullins (2009) posits that the primary obstacles to the advancement of women to top management positions are cognitive barriers, valuation barriers and legal barriers which exist despite the absence of a logical explanation for women's backwardness.

Damaske (2011) finds that occurrences such as gender stereotypes and prejudice can negatively affect women's psychology in male-dominated occupations. Beliefs of under-

utilisations, discrimination and bias among women in male-dominated occupations can be experienced. Literature shows that women are persistently under-represented in leading positions and high-paying occupations (Kahn & Ginther 2017). Women and candidates from ethnic minorities may not be accurately evaluated. This may result in the statistical discrimination described by Phelps (1972). Statistical discrimination occurs when women and ethnic minorities are evaluated based on the average characteristics of their group rather than their characteristics. Therefore, statistical discrimination is closely related to error-based discrimination in terms of the systematic underestimation of the abilities of women and ethnic minority directors (Wolfers, 2006).

According to Barreto, Ryan, and Schmitt (2009), the concept of the glass ceiling is a complication which can be separated from legitimate barriers to career advancement such as work experience. There is also a belief that women select social subjects that lead to their not reaching the executive level and contribute to the scarcity of women in science and engineering fields, thus enabling the glass ceiling effect. Gibelman (2003) notes that women experience a range of economic and psychological barriers. The barriers are instrumental in keeping women at low-level and dead-end jobs.

De Pater, Van Vianen & Bechtoldt (2010) argue that organisations have also contributed to biased treatment towards women, thus, resulting in lower salaries, less training and fewer promotional opportunities. Dominici, Fried and Zeger (2009) concur that women's under-representation in leadership positions remains a challenge and the root cause of the persistent lack of gender equity at the highest ranks of leadership. The status characteristics theory posits that gender serves as a widely accepted social distinction in which male actors are generally accorded a higher status than their female counterparts (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006).

In addition, Du Plessis and Barkhuizen (2012) identify inadequate training and mentorship opportunities as the primary professional barriers to integrating women in the field of engineering. According to Brewer, & Brewer (2016). in mentorship, the mentee is the relationship's driving force, whereas, in sponsorship, it is the sponsor who guides and energises the relationship.

In their study of a large sample of female accountants in the United States, Cohen, Dalton, Holder-Webb & McMillan (2020). emphasised the significance of interpersonal factors in the occurrence of the glass ceiling. They discovered that a lack of mentoring opportunities, networking opportunities, social support from male organisational leaders and high-profile job assignments had a significant positive influence. Naff (1994) suggests that other factors, such as mentoring and mobility, are significant and that women's advancement may be hindered by informal policies or practices. Since women suffer from gender imbalance in career growth and a scarcity of women in managerial positions exists, mentoring is utilised as a strategy to help them advance in their careers (Stoessel, 2006). Stanford-Blair and Dickmann (2005) find that despite newly developed mentoring programmes, leadership training and professional development, women continue to advance at a slower rate than men.

According to Rowley and Paik (2009), organisations that desire employee harmony may promote after-hours get-togethers that revolve around informal socialising but also allow for the discussion of work-related issues. Women may be excluded from this network and left out of important decision-making processes because they are required to return home to care for their families and home responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, tend to view their female co-workers as uncooperative and disloyal to the company due to their absence at these events.

Holland (1997) and Schreiber (1998) assert that some of the barriers to women's success are the result of weak individual insights which stem from the traditional belief that men are more natural leaders than women and that men are better suited for authority because they are more aggressive due to the history of reproductive competition, while women are frequently criticised for being too emotional. Bell and Nkomo (2001) demonstrate how black female managers face 'everyday dosages' of sexism and racism, such as co-workers not listening to them, questioning their authority and ignoring them. They also demonstrate that divides between black and white women impede collaboration that may benefit both groups in male-dominated contexts.

A PwC (2015) report states that when choosing whether to accept a job offer, more and more female talent will only decide after exploring the diversity of the employer's leadership teams and understanding its diversity demographics. Hughes (2009), states that the majority of

women remain primary caretakers in addition to the roles they hold in their companies. Time constraints and job demands following a promotion put many women in a corner and they are faced with the choice of their family or career.

According to Hancock, Pérez-Quintana & Hormiga (2014). masculine characteristics, such as task-oriented leadership, are preferred in the workplace and are associated with success, while women are stereotyped as nurturers and selfless and not suitable for executive positions. Morgan (2006) posits that formal organisational structures are based on Western male values and males have dominated jobs with a bureaucratic approach while devaluing traditionally regarded female values such as intuition, nurturing and empathetic support. Masculine characteristics are still linked to successful leadership and achievement by most companies.

The advancement of women in corporates remains a challenge due to the lack of organisational support, lack of development opportunities and biased corporate practices. Cultural beliefs and norms also affect how women are viewed, resulting in women believing they have to work twice as hard to even stand the slightest chance of recognition for achievements. Kunze (2008) states that women still face challenges in their career advancement because they lack support from companies, a predisposition to corporate policies and practices, insufficient training opportunities for women to develop their capabilities and the absence of role models.

According to Bandura & Walters (1977) the social learning theory is useful for describing how role modelling works as individuals examine the behaviour of others in certain settings and take note of the results of their actions. People are socialised to accept the values, abilities, anticipated behaviours and social knowledge required for their new responsibilities, particularly in organisational life (Louis, 1980).

There is however a different view on the existence of the glass ceiling. Morparia (2013) said, **"**the more we talk about the glass ceiling, the greater disfavour we do to ourselves as women". Morparia further stated that she does not believe that there is a glass ceiling and that the concept was a myth. The financial industry in her country, India, had adopted policies that encourage women to occupy management roles. In addition, she believes the private sector

in India operates on merit which remains the key criterion in determining hiring and progression decisions. Goy and Johnes (2012) disagree stating that institutional barriers are segmented to drive segregation which works against the interest of women. Discrimination may arise from horizontal or vertical dimensions with the genders assigned different roles and statuses of occupations.

Babatunde, Babaola and Opawole (2012) stresses that there is a vast difference in what men sacrifice compared to what women give up weathering the challenges associated with career progression. In the past, women were constrained to prioritise parenting over professional needs, which frequently resulted in them forsaking their professions to conform to cultural and societal expectations around gender roles (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008).According to Clark (2000), work-life balance is the level of fulfilment and well-meaning functioning at work and home with the smallest level of role conflict. Work and home life are becoming increasingly I ndistinct due to increased pressures and the altered academic culture (Simkins, 1999). Finding a balance between personal and professional life is a persistent challenge cited by women, according to a study by Coronel, Moreno & Carrasco (2010).

Work-life balance is essential to achieving a successful career; therefore, with increased responsibilities in the workplace, the line between work-life and private life requires further clarification (Fapohunda, 2014). Women face a lifestyle conundrum when they are expected to juggle job and family duties; they either need to prioritise one over the other or find a way to be effective at both (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009). Work is increasingly intruding on the home lives of women and this is disrupting the person-environment fit between women and the institution. This shift in emphasis has proven intolerable in some cases (Tinsley, 2000). Another issue of concern is the perception that women are likely to leave their jobs after marriage or having children; consequently, recruiters prefer male employees (Upadhya & Vasavi, 2006).

Sampson, Gresham, Applewhite, and Roberts (2015) observed that some of the obstacles women face are self-imposed due to family or personal decisions, while others stem from a lack of role models or mentors. Another significant barrier that can be noted is the femininity/competency double bind (Catalyst, 2008); in this instance, femininity is linked to incompetence and masculinity to competence. Maloney's (2003) time-use data shows that

women work longer hours than men work and are still behind their male counterparts in perceptions of competency. Often, women leaders must walk a tightrope between being perceived as extremely feminine, which makes them appear capable but unlikeable, and overly masculine, which makes them appear competent but unlikable. However, to advance, women must be both competent and likeable.

According to HBR (2013), significant research demonstrates that, for women, the subtle gender bias that remains in businesses and society impairs the learning loop that is fundamental to becoming a leader. It is not sufficient to discover and impart the appropriate abilities and competencies in a social vacuum. It has also been stated, quite surprisingly, that most women are less ambitious than men, which limits their potential for professional advancement Gino, Wilmuth, & Brooks, A. W. (2015). Gammie and Gammie (1997) suggest that women prioritise their careers differently than men and are unable to balance the long hours typically associated with the work profession and their family lives. By definition, the dual-career situation places a burden on both partners to coordinate, integrate and balance their respective family and professional responsibilities (Rachlin, 1987).

Although the impression that women are not concerned about their elevation to high managerial positions due to the challenges of balancing work and life priorities has been widely criticised (Cansu, 2013). From the women's perspective, an opposing perspective to gendered attitudes and perceptions is the noticeable reluctance of women to pursue leadership possibilities in the workplace due to the experience of poor outcomes (Walker, 2013). There is a culture that discourages women from seeking out leadership roles. Leadership may be associated with males and requires sturdier qualities and is perceived to be indifferent to the female gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Other studies found that leadership requires risk-taking with a belief that females are less likely to take risks and make risky decisions when compared to males (Eckel & Grossman, 2002). Leadership is not gender-based; it is more about the individual's capability, attitude and ability. Women should have a seat at the table.

3.2.6 Gender wage gap

"Women must earn less because they are less intelligent and weaker than men," said Janusz Korwin-Mikke (2017), a Polish Parliamentarian. Gender inequality continues to be a challenge in the workplace as patriarchy still exists in society. Abrams (1991) states that the workplace can be viewed as inhospitable for women due to the presence of several forms of gender inequalities. Lockwood (2004) points out that the glass ceiling phenomenon is related to barriers, such as the gender pay gap, women face in trying to reach top management positions. Due to this contemporary occurrence, research into the barriers that prevent women from advancing in the workplace remains a topic of interest across disciplines and industries (Lockwood, 2004).

This phenomenon illustrates how women face obstacles at every stage of their careers, from recruitment to promotion (Kirmak, 2017). According to Murphy (2005), this has been the scenario since 1993. Women earned 59 cents for every dollar earned by men in the 1960s. However, it was deemed acceptable during those times as women were just starting to pursue work opportunities and advanced education, thus, what was termed a merit gap existed. The theory explained the reasons why women were less educated than men, that the women's work tenure was unequal to men's and that they held lower-skilled positions in comparison to men. Despite a growing economy, the gender wage gap widened in 1994, (Murphy, 2005). Yet, as women had successfully closed the education gap, equal pay should be the norm rather than the exception.

According to a PwC (2022) report, since January 2020 there has been minimal progress towards gender balance in senior positions at major JSE-listed companies. An Accenture (2019) study found that improving gender equality could add R319 billion to South Africa's GDP. The study also found that upskilling more women through creating a culture of equality and leading and accelerating change could achieve gender equality in the workplace and create more jobs. As men and women require different amounts of evidence to conclude that the current economic inequality is unfair to women, both genders perceive the social inequality of the gender wage gap differently (Miron et al., 2011). Men require significantly more evidence to recognise this injustice than women. Women are still negatively discriminated against through earnings and the gender wage gap (Peterson & Morgan, 1995).

The gender pay gap has been described as the difference in wages irrespective of seniority favouring men when compared to women. Gould and Kroeger (2016) state that even when the required skills and performance levels of males and females are similar, the rates of pay and promotion favour men. A researcher can examine the consequences of socioeconomic disparities by figuring out the overall wage gap or the classification of women and men into different types of industries and occupations based on gender norms and expectations. Booth, Francesconi, and Frank (2003) demonstrate that in full-time employment, even though women are just as likely as men to be promoted, they receive smaller wage increases.

Comparable to the theories described previously, sociological theories provide explanations for gender wage gaps. Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) contend that gender also incorporates status beliefs that ascribe greater competence to males than females and, thus, justify inequalities, such as wage disparities. These status beliefs may play a larger role in highly compensated positions, such as if women are viewed as incompetent managers. Furthermore, gender inequality in companies is multifaceted and can be experienced through processes and structures.

The World Economic Forum's (2022) gender gap index concurs that since 2013, gender parity in the labour force had been changing along distinct paths until sharply declining in 2021. The global labour force participation rate for women is just over 50 per cent compared to 80 per cent for men and women tend to face less than favourable income opportunities in comparison to men. In a calculation exercise to determine how much child penalty accounts for the gender wage gap over time, Kleven, Landais, and Søgaard (2017) concluded that child penalty accounted for nearly all of the remaining gender wage gap in Denmark in the early 2010s.

South African women continue to be constrained by cultural, social and economic barriers to economic participation (Accenture, 2019). Although women have a presence in the workplace, the PwC (2021) report states many women still suffer from unfair practices, face a glass ceiling when it comes to climbing the ranks of the business and are forced to overpower weaker candidates, often losing a good promotion. According to the United Association of South Africa (2022), the country has a sluggish average gender pay gap of between 23 and 35 per cent despite various pieces of legislation aimed at preventing gender discrimination in the

workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated the projected timeline of from 99,5 years to 135,6 years in closing the gender pay gap.

The World Economic Forum (2017) reports that men in South Africa earn an average of R6607.25 more per month than women. The report also estimates that the current economic gap between men and women in South Africa will not close until 217 years from now. This reinforces the notion that while progress has been made towards gender equality, it has not yet permeated large portions of South African society. UNU-WIDER (2019) explains that women have made great strides in labour force participation moving from 44 per cent in 1993 to 49 per cent in 2018. Bosch (2012) emphasises that several organisations have embraced rhetoric on liberty and respect, resulting in the creation of a new labour regime intended to make the workplace more equitable for women. An American study in 2003 found that women were paid 22 per cent less than men regardless of education level and work experience. Gender role theory articulates the grounds for gender earnings disparity.

Edley and Wetherell (1995) find that women are allocated roles which are subservient in the workplace as powerful and leadership roles are not necessarily viewed as feminine roles by society and the work environment. Hakim (2000) elucidates that women are generally groomed into choosing fields of study more inclined to cultural than economic capital. According to Moyo (2021), culture has seen women associated with uncompensated household chores while men work for paying jobs.

Several academics acknowledge the limitations of androcentric worldviews in macroeconomics and advocate for the need to account for the complexity of economic activities and the factors that conceal women's disadvantage in exercising economic agency in households and labour markets (Bourdieu, 2001). However, even when women are in the same industry as men, such as the soccer fraternity, the gender pay gap is still prevalent. This was evident recently when South Africa's women's soccer team were crowned the African champions. The football association reported that the players will earn R400,000 each, causing an outcry, with supporters drawing parallels between what the male players were promised – R920,000 in 2019 – for reaching only the quarterfinals.

This is not an isolated incident as stated by Stats SA's (2020) inequality trends in SA report which found that women earned on average 30 per cent less than men in the same jobs. In an examination of the earnings trajectories of male and female graduates of the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, Bertrand, Goldin, & Katz (2010) found that ten years after graduation, employed female graduates earn approximately 50 per cent less than their male counterparts.

History tells us that women were always disadvantaged when it comes to equal pay. According to an American Progress (2020) study women only earned about 61 cents for every dollar that a man took home in 1960 and nothing has changed much as women remain underpaid in comparison to males. In 2018 women earned 82 cents on average to a dollar. National Partnership for Women and Families (2020) affirms that for women of colour the matter is dire as on average black women in the US are paid 62 cents for every dollar paid to a white man. Many of these sceptics argue that gender pay is not caused by discrimination, but by the voluntary choices of men and women, especially the choices they make in the occupation in which they work. It certainly plays a role; occupations and industries account for about half of the total gender pay gap (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

Due to their greater mobility, men and women differ in the elasticity of their labour supply. Men's labour supply is elastic, whereas women's labour supply is constrained by special circumstances such as childcare. Gender-equal partner contracts are more prevalent in metropolitan and urban areas with high female education levels and low rates of preterm births (Haandrikman, Webster, & Duvander, 2021). Employers can use this information to pay women less than men who are equally productive (Barth & Dale-Olsen, 2009).

Hutton (2005) argues that previous studies claiming the existence of salary discrimination are neither exhaustive nor supported by statistical evidence. Hutton's study found that years of experience, not gender, was the most important factor contributing to salary variation, which is consistent with Dozier & Broom's (1995) conclusion that men's prevalence in managerial roles is based more on their experience than their gender.

Advocates of human capital theory credit the decline of the gender wage gap over time in different countries to the continued labour force participation of women. Feng and

Sakellariou (2015) looked at the metaphor of the glass ceiling as the pattern of gender wage differentials in Asian and Latin American countries. In 2020, the World Bank reported that in a year the business industry suffers US$160 trillion in human capital wealth due to gender wage inequality. According to Becker (1991), human capital theory advocates that individuals make decisions regarding investment in their human capital and organisations also decide on human capital investments that may be exposed to gender discrimination. Concerning the economic perspective, Becker's (1991) theory asserts that women's significant role in reproduction reduces their labour market participation and/or productivity and, thus, their human capital investment. Therefore, the status of women in employment is also reflected in their earning capacities. In addition to inequalities in human capital, the burden of procreation is one of the reasons why women are still disadvantaged in the labour market.

According to Pew Research Centre (2021), women earned 84 per cent of what men earned based on an analysis of the average hourly earnings of employees, therefore, it would take an extra 42 days of work for women to be on par with males. In America, women still face a considerable gender wage gap and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2020) estimates that equal pay will only be reached in 2059. Companies need to review their conduct and profession by discontinuing traditional practices and evaluating employees on job qualities such as qualifications, skills and proficiency.

Figure 3.4 clearly shows that in an uncontrolled environment even when women do reach top levels, they are still viewed as unequal and not deserving of the same benefits as their male counterparts.

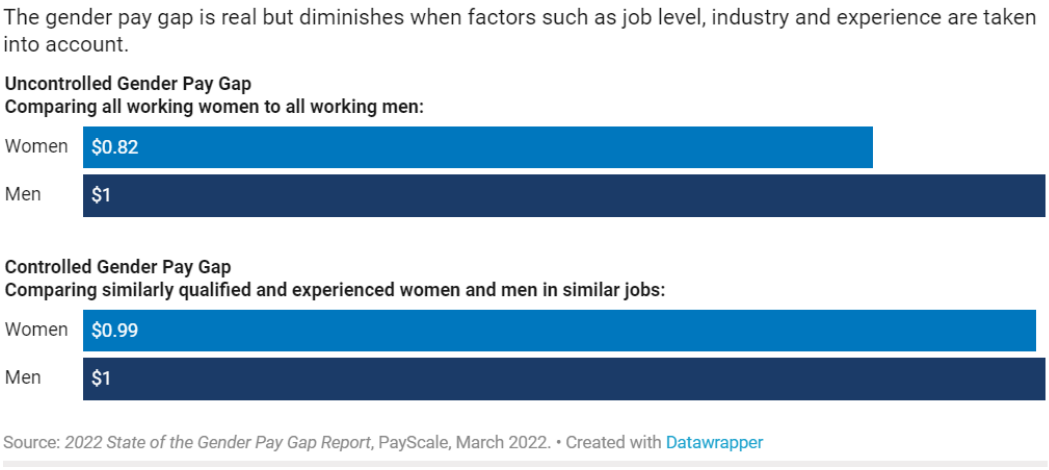


Figure 3.4 Gender pay gap

Source: PayScale (2022)

The PayScale (2022) report found that the gender pay gap analysis shows that women who return to the workforce after having children incur a wage penalty. According to research conducted by Moe and Shandy (2009), women who opt out of the workforce not only forego their independent income but also experience a loss of power and face numerous obstacles when attempting to re-enter the workforce. Women who resume their careers after a hiatus typically experience a wage penalty (Moe & Shandy, 2009). However, according to Fassinger (2008), highlighting the excessive demands placed on working mothers can reinforce the stereotype that women are unreliable employees. The PayScale (2022) report indicates that when women were parents or primary caregivers, there was a clear uncontrolled pay gap of $0.74 for every dollar earned by a male parent with similar employment characteristics.

Globally, women managers appear to pay a steep price for career advancement. They are statistically less likely to be married than their male counterparts and those who are married are significantly less likely to have children. Where they do have children, this fact has a discernible effect on their careers and the infamous 'career-break' are seen in a bad light and makes it less likely for returnees to reach the top (Moore, Meiksins & Root, 2013). Calling for transparency in highlighting gender differences could encourage fair and equal treatment. However, discriminatory reward systems remain part of some organisational culture and,

therefore, cannot be rectified. Government and society, therefore, need to play an active role in rectifying this injustice.

Figure 3.5 displays stats from 40 years ago on the pay gap between the two genders. However, on assessing weekly earnings, it appears that the gap has reduced over time (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2020). The report further states that there has been progress over the years, however, women's weekly earnings are still below men's and in the third quarter of 2020, women's weekly earnings were 81.7 per cent in comparison to men's.

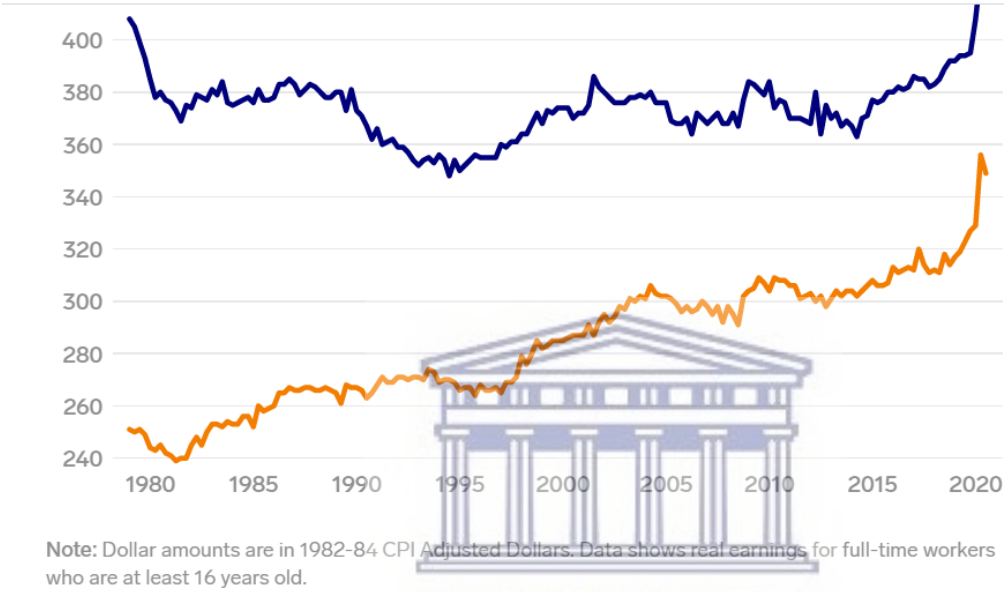


Figure 3.5 Earning through the years

Source: Insider (2020)

Other countries have taken further steps to encourage closing the gap in gender pay. About a decade ago, Norway insisted that listed companies set aside directorships for women or be dissolved. Storvik and Schøne (2008) find that there are no organisational barriers in the Norwegian state bureaucracy that prevent women from attaining managerial positions and female managers have no difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities. The study attributes the sluggish progression of women into positions of higher management to anticipated discrimination rather than a lack of ambition or self-confidence. Storvik and Schøne (2008) further state that in several countries around the world, quota-based gender policy is a key mechanism used to increase women's representation. In several European

nations, such as Norway, the introduction of mandatory quotas led to a substantial increase in the number of women serving on corporate boards following the implementation of quotas.

South Africa has various legislations which are intended to prevent gender discrimination in the workplace. Yet, the country has a stagnant average gender pay gap of between 23 per cent and 35 per cent; the average global gap is about 20 per cent (ILO, 2020). The report further affirms that there is still a gender pay gap in industrialised countries and it is even more visible in developing countries even though there have been resolutions for equal remuneration and non-discriminatory employment practices in the workplace for over 60 years.

A recent study by Mosomi (2019) utilising South Africa's 23 years accumulated labour force panel confirmed that the average gender pay gap was inflexibly stagnant despite women's level of education, skills and other relevant characteristics. There is still a large number of households headed by women in South Africa and they are 40 per cent poorer in comparison to those headed by men.

European countries historically passed laws mandating the equal treatment of women and men in the workplace; despite this, significant gender wage gaps in the labour market of the majority of industrialised countries still exist (Blau & Kahn, 2000). Furthermore, Albrecht, Bjorklund, and Vroman (2003) identified the differences in rewards among the genders as the main contributing factor in the increase of the wage gap instead of bridging it.

According to the National Organisation for Women (2022), in 2004, it was estimated that women earned 77 cents for every dollar earned by men in the United States. Although this was a slight increase from 74 cents in the middle of the 1990s and an increase from 68 cents in the late 1980s, many advocates for equal rights and opportunities find these numbers troubling. Women and minorities are gaining ground in the upper echelons of the business world but their salaries lag behind those of their white counterparts compared to their male counterparts, as reported by HBR (2016).

Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns, and Marshall (2007) state that women represent over half of the workforce, yet men continue to occupy most of the leadership positions in companies and

gender inequality is still prevalent in the workplace. Transformation in the workplace remains a hill to be conquered. Financial times (2022) states research indicating that a minority of women with MBAs compared to most men with MBAs requested more money during salary negotiations. Maliniak, Powers, and Walter (2013) add that support for other women is critical for women to succeed and this can be achieved by women forming networks and lifting each other in the process. Liff and Ward (2001) emphasise the significance of the broader context of organisational culture and the interpretation and response to equality policies for understanding the career decisions of male and female managers. Choices made by women may be related to self-esteem principles for women (Ferris, Lian, Brown, & Morrison, 2015). Women still view results as achievements and money as not being important or a driver in their career choices and salary negotiations.

A US study in 2003 found that women were paid 22 per cent less than men regardless of education level and work experience. Gender role theory articulates the grounds for gender earnings disparity. Edley and Wetherell (1995) find that women are allocated roles which are subservient in the workplace as powerful and leadership roles are not necessarily viewed as feminine roles by society and the work environment. Regardless of their abilities, professional women in the workplace are confronted by a hostile environment that undermines their capabilities and limits their advancement, which contributes to the under-representation of women in the C-suites, (Aman, Yusof, Ismail, & Razali 2018).

Kee (2006) found that the acceleration of a gender gap across wage distribution does not show signs of disappearing among the genders. History tells us that women were always disadvantaged when it comes to equal pay. According to an American Progress (2020) study women only earned about 61 cents for every American dollar that a man took home in 1960 and nothing has changed much as women remain underpaid in comparison to males. In 2018 women earned 82 cents on average to a dollar. National Partnership for Women and Families (2022) affirms that for women of colour the matter is dire as on average black women in the US are paid 64 cents for every dollar paid to a white man.

The gender pay gap has been described as the difference in wages irrespective of seniority, favouring men rather than women. The gender wage gap is influenced by social norms and economic values regarding the perception of roles between women and men. Vempati (2019)

states that even when the required skills and performance levels of males and females are similar, the rates of pay and promotion favour men. In 2020, the World Bank reported that in a year the business industry suffers US$160 trillion in human capital wealth due to gender wage inequality. The status of women in employment is also reflected in their earning capacities.

However, according to UNU-WIDER (2019), South Africa has experienced a growth spurt in bridging the gender wage gap with an average of 16 per cent in 2014 in comparison to 40 per cent in 1993. The gap declined only until 2007 and was stagnant thereafter, oscillating at 16 per cent. Even though South Africa has legislation aimed at preventing gender discrimination in the workplace, the country has a stagnant median gender pay gap of between 23 and 35 per cent. According to the ILO (2020), the average global gap is about 20 per cent.

A PwC (2020) report on JSE-listed companies discovered that in organisations such as Investec and Anglo-American a woman will earn at the very least 15 per cent less in comparison to her male counterparts. This is not only applicable to these companies but the majority of JSE-listed companies as shared by their reports and analyses. The difference in wages between men and women for the same type of work or equal value remains an obstacle to achieving gender equality in South Africa and mostly affects middle and upper pay bands. Gendering practices include culturally available and accepted dress, behaviour, language, actions and interests that are culturally associated with one or the other gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

A 2020 NBI study found that in South Africa the gender pay gap across three firms ranges from 9 to 35 per cent resulting in a quantifiable amount of R72.44 for every R100.00 earned by men. The study also found that black employees regardless of gender earn the least among all the racial groups. A study by Bertrand (2009) found that men were paid more than women from entry levels. Male graduates received 15 000 dollars more than women graduates and on average males worked fewer weekly hours compared to their female counterparts. It clearly shows that even when women do reach the top levels, they are still viewed as unequal and not deserving of the same benefits as their male counterparts. Calling for transparency in highlighting gender differences could encourage fair and equal treatment. However discriminatory reward systems remain part of some organisational culture and therefore

cannot be rectified. Government and society, therefore, need to play an active role in rectifying this injustice.

Morley (2013) adds that women are inherently at a disadvantage to advance in any workplace if they do not sacrifice their identity and go against traditional behaviour demands. As per Figure 3.6, women's earnings drop significantly after giving birth while men's earnings remain constant. This could be attributed to women taking maternity leave or a break following childbirth. Cabeza and Johnson (2011) affirm that women are disadvantaged by maternity leave in terms of lack of career advancement and loss of wages. However, the period taken during this phase should not cause such an amount of inequality when it comes to wages between the genders if the system were just and fair to begin with.

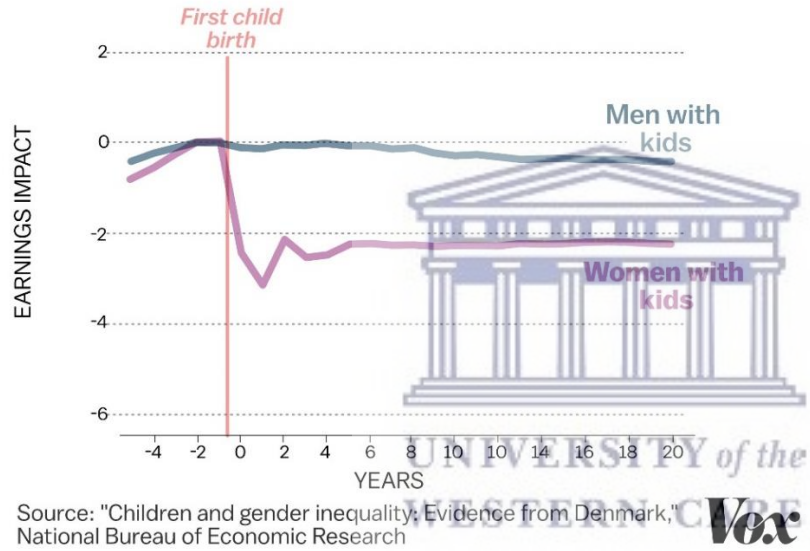


Figure 3.6 Earnings impact

Source: National Bureau of Economic Research (2018)

3.3 Conclusion

The glass ceiling has been articulated as the perceptible and imperceptible hindrance that ruptures the professional and organisational hierarchical level for women, placing them at a disadvantage. The glass ceiling barriers are exposed across the world in how women continue to be blocked from reaching top positions and, in most cases, are compounded by cultural values and traditional gender roles.

The barriers are also used to explain the differences in management and leadership styles between men and women, favouring the men's leadership style while being a hindrance to women's leadership aspirations. Differences in men's and women's confidence and career aspirations have been cited as factors preventing women from advancing to senior and executive positions. A study by the Institute of Leadership and Management (2011) found that women managers' careers are hindered by lower ambitions and expectations.

The literature reviewed indicates that while progress has been made concerning women's movement into senior-level positions, the progress has been slow (Careres-Rodriguez, 2011). The glass ceiling impact is not necessarily a new construct, however, there is much more that is not known about how glass ceiling beliefs in the workplace influence a woman's career advancement aspirations. Previous studies, (Careres-Rodriguez, 2011), show that understanding the impact and the existence of the glass ceiling may provide valuable insight into how women as affected and impacted individuals are likely to react under specific circumstances and that gender discrimination, reflected through the gender pay gap, still affects women 28 years after democracy in South Africa.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 presented the glass ceiling phenomenon and identified the factors and barriers that are associated with its impact. The literature also highlighted the invisible barriers that create a hostile working environment for women. This qualitative study aimed to describe the lived experiences of South African women leaders in the corporate sector relative to the glass ceiling effect. The study focused on women's journeys and articulated the barriers, incorporating the societal perceptions of women and leadership, that may have hindered their advancement to top levels. This chapter focused on the research methodology selected to address the study's objectives.

The objectives are:

- To investigate the perceptions of South African women in leadership positions regarding the glass ceiling effect.
- To explore the invisible barriers affecting career advancement for women.
- To ascertain the impact of social hierarchy on women's leadership journey.
- To establish the effects of gender inequality and stereotypes affecting women in business.

This chapter presents the research philosophy and process undertaken in the study, deliberates on the research method and justifies the selected method. This section also covers in detail the various stages of the research including the geographical area where the study was conducted, data collection methods, data analysis and the selection criteria for participants. The chapter ends with the intelligibility of the qualitative research requirements inclusive of the validity and reliability of the selected method.

4.2 Research philosophy

According to Rajasekar (2006), research covers rational, logical and methodical inquiry of new and valuable evidence on a specific subject. It is an investigation through impartial and systematic analysis of sourcing solutions to social and scientific conundrums. Bajpai (2011) explains that a research philosophy is the way data is gathered, analysed and utilised. The

analysis methodology is a philosophy of how an investigation should go (Schwardt, 2007). It is the path that researchers must take to carry out their investigations.

Bajpai (2011) explains that a research philosophy is a methodology for collecting, analysing, and applying data. Al-Ababneh (2020) further posits that the social science research process is guided by a philosophical and theoretical approach that shapes the research design. Research philosophy aims to examine the development of knowledge. Methodological choices in social science research are determined by philosophical debates concerning ontology (reality) and epistemology (knowledge). Ejnavarzala (2019) supports this view by arguing that ontology deals with the fundamental conditions related to physical, social, cultural, and political contexts, while epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge. Therefore, researchers need to consider the philosophical assumptions of ontology and epistemology when selecting a suitable research approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The researcher employed an interpretive research philosophy, which Myers (2008) defines as relying on language, cognition, common practices, and tools as the only means to approach reality. Interpretive approaches employ questioning and observation to deepen understanding. IvyPanda (2021) further explicates that epistemological interpretivism is best suited for qualitative social science research as it allows for data analysis through a rational evaluation of knowledge and its various forms, thereby enhancing research credibility.

4.3 Research approach and design

Historically, research methodologies and approaches are segmented into qualitative and quantitative methods creating a division among researchers, particularly in the social sciences (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Previous research has highlighted the differences between these two methods. Myers (2009) classifies qualitative research as an in-depth study incorporating cultural and social phenomena, while quantitative research investigates general trends and focuses on numbers. Harrison (2020) affirms that quantitative design investigates comprehensive issues and is based on the measurement of quantity. Miles and Huberman (1994) uphold that qualitative research focuses on an in-depth examination of research issues and involves quality. Qualitative research is descriptive and rational and uses words. For this

study, the qualitative method was selected due to its flexibility when pursuing the understanding of thoughts, concepts and experiences.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain that research methodology is determined by the nature of the research question and the subject being investigated. Therefore, the research format used in an investigation should be viewed as a tool to answer the research question/s. Creswell (2003) posits that there are three approaches or methods that can be applied when conducting research, namely, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. During this study, a qualitative research approach was selected as the methodology as the purpose of this study was to explore the views and lived experiences of professional women in corporate South Africa.

Qualitative research as the approach allows the researcher to gain a richly detailed understanding of a topic, matter or meaning based on first-hand experience. Data were collected using in-depth interviews. This was achieved through a rather small but focused sample base as data collection can be labour-intensive. It is important to note that, unlike quantity data, qualitative data are concerned with the depth of findings and would effectively address the research questions. Cresswell (2003) elucidates that the advantage of the qualitative method is that there is the prospect to generate rich descriptions of the participants' thought processes focusing on the reasons why a phenomenon has occurred.

Cresswell (2007) identified the key characteristics of qualitative research:

- Researchers as key instruments – data is collected by observing, documenting, or interviewing persons.
- Holistic account – a full description and understanding of what happened and why is attempted.
- Multi-source data – interviews, documentation, and observations are typically used to gather data.
- Inductive data analysis – categories, patterns, and themes are inductively or deductively created. Observations and understandings are interpreted.

Furthermore, qualitative research studies occur in natural environments and are reinforced by social meaning from the individuals who are living through the occurrence (Denzin &

Lincoln, 1994). This is supported by Holloway and Todres (2003) who state that in the development of qualitative research, the methodologies viewed as foundational are phenomenology, ethnography and grounded theory. Merriam (2002) elucidates that qualitative research seeks to understand how individuals interpret their experiences. Gounder (2012) elucidates that from the beginning of the process when a researcher selects a topic, the research methodology directs the researcher.

In addition, the research methodology constitutes the external environment by providing an in-depth idea for setting the right research objective. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a research design is a strategy for the gathering, measuring and analysing of data to address a specific research issue. The techniques and measurements that define, clarify and anticipate experiences are, in essence, what research methodology is all about. These include the rational and theoretical hypotheses underlying a study.

Furthermore, Burns and Bush (2010) describe research design as a study plan, a summary of the procedure that will be replicated in a study and the efforts to accomplish the study's objective. A qualitative research design is concerned with establishing answers to the reasons and manners of the particular phenomenon – in this instance, the glass ceiling effect. Cleland (2017) concurs that qualitative research addresses the research question concerning why and how, allowing the researcher to understand the context, effect and experience. Maxwell (2012) affirms that qualitative research has several advantages, including flexibility that allows the researcher to revise research plans. A phenomenological research method was most appropriate for this study to capture the lived experiences of the participants and to develop themes that challenge structural or normative assumptions (Lester, 1999).

Phenomenology is a method of qualitative research permitting researchers to observe participants' lived experiences unassumingly and shun presuppositions instead of relying on participant responses (Moustakas, 1994). As the study was about women's leadership journeys in the private sector, it was appropriate to utilise this method. Schutz (1972) suggests that social science concepts are constructed from the socially built nature of reality that is shaped by its members to clarify their everyday life experiences and realities. As such, the study employed a qualitative design, specifically the phenomenological research method, that

examined the lived experiences of 17 women who had obtained leadership positions in corporate South Africa.

The researcher used purposeful sampling for selecting research participants. They were selected based on their ascendency and their lived experiences associated with the topic under investigation were captured. The participants were selected because they were women in leadership positions in corporate South Africa. The criteria included women who had tertiary education and management experience. The women were based in the following provinces: Gauteng, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. One-on-one online interviews were conducted and recorded.

In addition, approval and consent were acquired from each of the participants. Participant responses were recorded but identities remained anonymous and responses were kept confidential. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were applied to protect each participant's identity and any identifying information was obscured. Moreover, the grouped questions covered topics such as the respondents' backgrounds, careers, leadership experiences, identities, intersections and lessons learnt.

Bhattacherjee (2012) believes that employing an interpretive pattern is an effective manner to analyse social order and can be achieved through the subjective interpretation of participants' involvement and reconciling differences among their responses using their own perspectives. As informed by the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) which deliberates on qualitative research providing robust insights from actions that occur in real-life contexts and preserving their intended meanings, qualitative research was selected as the appropriate approach for this study.

4.4 Research methods

Goundar (2012) explains that the various procedures and algorithms employed in research are research methods or techniques. Applied research is aimed at solving a specific problem. To reach an amicable solution, the available data and the unknown features of the questions should be related. Embracing this view, therefore, culminates in various research method groups, such as qualitative research. In conducting qualitative research, interviewing is a set of techniques for generating data from individuals and groups utilising structured, semi-

structured or unstructured questioning formats. According to Fylan (2005), semi-structured interviews are simply conversations in which a researcher knows what they want to learn and, therefore, has a list of questions to ask and a good idea of what topics will be covered but the conversation is open to variation and is likely to vary significantly between participants.

The qualitative research method is constructed in social and cultural contexts of how individuals live and are aimed at understanding them in their natural habitat. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) explain that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from participants' views can be lost when written data are measured. As enlightened by Leedy & Ormrod (1993), qualitative research is based on the belief that personal experience provides the most meaningful data.

For this study, the qualitative method was best suited as the aim of the research was to scrutinise, recognise and describe the glass ceiling phenomenon which is a social science research problem investigating notions, beliefs and human behaviour. Green & Thorogood (2018) clarify that some of the main advantages of qualitative research find a correlation between the processes and outcomes. Leedy, & Ormrod (2005) elucidate that the objective of qualitative research is to respond to questions about the multifaceted nature of a phenomenon through the lens of participants' description and comprehension of the phenomenon.

Madill & Gough (2008) elaborate that interviews and free-form inquiries are examples of the qualitative method of data collection which aims to provide a detailed description of a phenomenon. The selected participants were in an ideal position to describe and give a better understanding of the glass ceiling phenomenon. Creswell (2013) affirms that interviews are conducted with individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or expertise. Patton (2001) states that there is an assumption that samples for qualitative inquiry are selected purposefully to yield cases that are 'information rich'. Participants were selected based on their appropriateness which is derived from their positions within their organisations. The participants were selected deliberately because they were viewed as "information-rich". This sampling procedure employs the use of expert judgement in selecting cases; the researcher can also choose specific cases with a certain purpose in mind.

Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011) find that sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals who are specifically knowledgeable about or experienced in the phenomenon of interest. In this study, purposive sampling was useful as the researcher wanted to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation. Waters (2017) adds that qualitative phenomenological research describes the lived experience of a phenomenon. The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of those types of cases and not to generalise the findings (Neuman, 2009).

4.4.1 Phenomenology

Creswell (2013) describes phenomenology as a method of qualitative investigation that emphasises the shared aspects of a particular set of an individual's experiences. In addition, Creswell (2013) suggests that a basic overview of the nature of the phenomenon itself is the primary objective of the method. According to Maxwell (2012), phenomenology stems from philosophy and psychology and endeavours to extort pristine and purified data. This is implemented to extrapolate the subject's lived experience and to remove any inferences from the research that may influence the process. In phenomenology, a researcher explores meanings and the reported findings are interpreted by the researcher (Heidegger, 1962). Waters (2017) clarifies that phenomenology research aims to tell people's personal stories. In this study, participants shared their experiences through interviews which allowed the researcher to get the participants' descriptions of their knowledge.

As this was a phenomenological study the researcher ensured that individuals had space explain their real experiences without being compelled or guided. This process yields the construction of the essence of human experience through comprehensive discourse with an individual currently living the experience being studied. The objective is to recognise the essence of the lived experience by subjects and meaning can be achieved through a dialogic process. Furthermore, the researcher's perspective is bracketed while using certain strategies to identify personal biases. The sampling in this study was purposive and the researcher sought individuals who were either living or had lived the experience being studied. Phenomenology is employed to identify phenomena and concentrate on subjective experiences and the comprehension of the structure of those lived experiences.

Phenomenology is used to describe, in-depth, the common characteristics of the phenomena that have occurred.

4.5 Procedure for data collection

The participants in the study responded to semi-structured, open-ended questions based on reflections on their lived experiences as women leaders in South African companies. According to Dudovskiy (2017), data collection is a method used to gather information from relevant sources in pursuit of answering the research problem and conducting the hypothesis and results in assessment. Data collection methods include primary and secondary methods. Interviews and observations are part of qualitative research.

Creswell (2013) places the data-collecting procedures into four categories: observations, interviews, documents and audio-visual. According to Walters (2017), qualitative approaches use literary data as their grounding approach when examining relevant information; this is distinct from more conventional or statistical research methods. Klinke and Fernandez (2022) further notes that during phenomenological research the participant's verbal consciousness becomes a critical assessment of their conduct. This research focused on the significant meaning of the experience and behaviour of respondents. Furthermore, in this study, interviews were utilised to acquire the participants' accounts of their experiences and they were encouraged to narrate their lived experiences in a manner that allowed them to express themselves without coaching or direction in any way from the researcher.

Kensit (2000) posits that researchers ought to act cautiously and allow data to surface while conducting phenomenological studies as phenomenology is about grasping rich descriptions in their natural state. In addition, the researcher needs to narrate as close as possible the phenomenon, shying away from the prior framework but remaining steady on facts (Groenewald, 2004). Qualitative observations and interviews offer invaluable data.

Creswell (2013) states that interviews should afford participants the freedom to express opinions without influence or clues from the interviews. Creswell (2013) elaborates by stating that, in most cases, interviews are held with individuals who are knowledgeable and have real experience. The interviews probe for insights into the phenomenon, including what was felt

and where power lies. There should be no holding back from the participants when describing their feelings and reactions to events.

Through semi-structured and in-depth interviews, the researcher captured the crux of each participant's experience with the phenomenon under study. The in-depth interviews were conducted as conversations rather than formal events (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As the participants opened up about their own experiences, the researcher expected the glass ceiling to unravel. All participants had to have held management positions. The purpose of the study was outlined in an email sent with a request for participation. Participants who expressed interest in participating were contacted individually to schedule an interview.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that the most important aspect of the interviewer's approach is conveying the attitude that the participant's view is valuable and useful. Researcher biases were addressed using the process of epoché. Following Creswell's (2013) method, after the interviews, the data were read, reread and picked for phrases and themes that were similar to those found in other data; these were then combined to construct clusters of meaning. By going through this procedure, the researcher can come to a more in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon being studied and establish the universal meaning of the occurrence, circumstance or experience that is being studied (Cresswell, 2013).

4.5.1 Population

Creswell (2013) defines a population as a group of individuals who have the same characteristics in a cluster so that conclusions can be drawn about subjects in a study. A population can be unclear or definite. The target population refers to all the members who meet the criterion specified for a research investigation (Alvi, 2016).

The target population for this study was women leaders in South African corporates working in different fields. The population is working women of all ages across the country and the target population is women in leadership positions with more than 5 years of experience in management in Gauteng, the Free State, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. The business leaders had to have a tertiary qualification. In this study, the qualitative methodology was used to collect primary data through in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 17 female business leaders from different types of and sized companies.

4.5.2 Sample and sampling method

A sample is an unsystematic selection of members of a population and can be drawn from the population's characteristics. According to Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, & Kingstone (2018), a researcher can use sampling to cut down on the amount of data they need to collect by focusing on information from a smaller subset of the population rather than the entire population as a whole. Huysamen (1976) advises that sampling can also be viewed as a decision-making process about which individuals from the population of interest are to be included.

According to Landreneau & Creek (2012), researchers need to determine and choose between two approaches which are probability and non-probability sampling. Each approach has its own procedure and design. The sampling strategy is a plan devised to ensure that the sample utilised is representative of the population from which it is obtained. Therefore, the sampling approach for this study employed the method of purposeful sampling to collect data from women leaders in particular. This strategy is utilised when there are a small number of experts on the research topic (Babbie, 2001). Women in positions of authority were able to offer the necessary information for the research.

Neuman (2000) describes purposive non-probability sampling as employing experts to work with the prospective subjects to source cases that are informative. In this study, a convenience sampling technique of 17 responders was selected as it proved more cost-effective to select those responders as specialists in the studied field. It is a strategy of purposive sampling for researchers to rely on their discretion when selecting a sample population to take part in the study. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), the approach of purposive sampling allows the researcher to select cases that will allow him or her to address research questions and achieve results most effectively.

At times purposive samples are employed when dealing with restricted numbers of participants. Although the benefits of purposive sampling include its widespread use, lower cost and the lack of a requirement for a list of all demographic components, it has certain restrictions, the main ones being that bias and variability cannot be measured or managed.

Furthermore, the sample-based conclusions drawn from the data cannot be extrapolated (Baridalyne, 2012).

If the results are reliable, a study using a convenience sample can have a high level of internal validity. If the study follows a sound methodology and the data are correctly processed, this is plausible. An investigation using a convenience sample, however, will have little external validity. This is due to the difficulty in extrapolating the results to populations with traits distinct from those of the population, which was conveniently accessible and from whom the sample was taken. Furthermore, only if the sample was randomly chosen from the population is a generalisation from a convenience sample conceivable (Andrade, 2018). Scholars concur that instead of making decontextualised abstract assertions, the best method to defend the use of convenience samples in qualitative research is to define the sample universe as demographically and geographically local and so restrict generalisation to that local level. The benefit of this approach was that it enabled the relevant selection to support the study's aims. The researcher regarded this approach as appropriate for this investigation to gain a deeper understanding of these types of cases and not necessarily to generalise the findings (Neuman, 2009).

4.5.3 Sample size

Dworkin (2012) states that the sample size is exclusively the total number of units in a sample. The sample size is critical to the success of a study and has a considerable impact on the accuracy of the outcomes or conclusions, with either too small or too high sample sizes potentially leading to inaccurate findings. The researcher concentrated on a limited number but participant selection was critical to the research breadth and was crucial to the overall effectiveness of the results. A sample of 17 respondents was sourced; it was more efficient to choose these respondents as they were all experts. The study used purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique in which the researcher uses discretion to select samples from a larger population.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) note that the literature rarely discusses the sample size needed for qualitative research. As the study used a qualitative technique, the analyses necessitated a smaller sample size – 17 individuals. The study's qualitative sample size was

large enough or sufficient to garner responses on almost all perspectives, leading to saturation. Saturation occurs when more individuals do not add knowledge or opinions. Scholars such as Morse (2015) elucidate that there are numerous disagreements over the optimal sample size for such studies but note that saturation occurs when more individuals no longer add knowledge or opinions, or the addition of participants does not yield supplementary information of perspective.

Most researchers say that the concept of saturation is the most crucial consideration when determining sample size for qualitative research (Mason, 2009). According to Morse (2000), numerous aspects, such as the quality of data, the breadth of the study, the nature of the issue, the amount of meaningful information received from each participant, the use of shadowing data and the qualitative approach and study design employed, are thought to be significant.

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), in qualitative research, saturation is employed as a broad criterion for stopping data collecting and/or analysis. Since the inability to reach saturation might affect the quality of the analysis, it is typically incorporated as an important component of the methodology. According to Morse (2015), saturation is the 'gold standard' by which purposeful sample sizes are established and it is the most commonly cited assurance of qualitative accuracy supplied by authors.

For Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), in homogenous teams, 12 members are the sweet spot. If researchers want to be positive that no new important concepts will emerge from any further interviews, they need to collect data past the point of saturation. For this investigation, the researcher made certain that the sample was as accurate a reflection of the target population as was feasible. Bock and Sergeant (2002) clarify that it might be a very narrowly defined group or an uncommon population. In this study, purposeful sampling was used to select 17 participants from four provinces. Data saturation was reached when no new information was obtained, in accordance with the criteria outlined by Walker (2012) and supported by Guest et al. (2006), which state that saturation is achieved when there is enough information to reproduce the study, the ability to gather fresh information has been attained, and further coding is no longer practicable.

3.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis applies to logical techniques that define and evaluate. Shamoo and Resnik (2003) state that there are several ways of deducing data and extracting noise from existing data. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define qualitative analysis as shaping, processing and sorting data into useable and practical information. The data are further synthesised through pattern searching and extracting vital information, learning from the data and deciding how to share findings.

Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) state that data analysis in qualitative research commences from the initial engagement of the researcher and throughout the entire study. Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data was used as the method of data analysis for this study. Moustakas (1994) further recommends that a phenomenological inquiry should commence with a period of reflection to produce an initial lived experience account. According to Pope, Ziebland & Mays (2000), the goal of qualitative analysis is to have a comprehensive comprehension of the effect and its significance. Segmentation and coding of data to identify commonalities and differences is a part of both quantitative and qualitative studies.

The researcher employed study questions to organise and analyse the data using a logical technique. The data were transcribed, organised and coded. Coding the research results is the stage before analysis. The final step was to analyse interview material to generate findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.5.4 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the participants of this study to collect their recollections of the events that had taken place. This methodology was selected to capture the lived experiences of women in leadership. Interviews are a type of primary data collection and the researcher chose the method to have direct control over the flow of the process and an opportunity to clarify matters during the interview process if necessary.

Cresswell (2007) states that numerous qualitative methods have been developed; the methods – interviewing is one of the most common types – provide an in-depth and extensive

understanding of matters through interpretation. Oakley (1998) describes qualitative interviews as a type of framework in which the practices and standards are not only recorded but can be challenged and reinforced. Grey (2014) explained that interviews provide in-depth information about participants' experiences and viewpoints on a topic.

The interview method was selected to better understand and explore the research subjects' opinions, behaviour and experiences. Providing critical and crucial pieces of information, qualitative observations and interviews can supply essential data (Cresswell, 2013). Interviews with participants were conducted and the format of the interviews was designed to allow the participants to express their opinions in response to the questions that were posed freely, without receiving any guidance or hints from the researcher who was acting in the capacity of the interviewer (Creswell, 2013).

Potter (1996) argues that interviews are constructive tools for data collection in qualitative research. The online one-on-one interview method allowed the researcher to interact with the participants and be in a position to observe the nonverbal cues during the interview process. To allow for an open and in-depth discussion of the research topic the study applied an unstructured interview method.

Stuckey (2013) identifies three distinct types of interview forms, namely, structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews consist of predetermined questions that are answered in the same order. Unstructured interviews do not include preset questions and the interviews and data collection process are conducted informally. Semi-structured interviews encompass units of both structured and unstructured interviews.

Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina (2006) suggest that unstructured interviews afford the researcher space to understand the complexity of the situation without imposing any preceding classification. Through the selection of interviews as the method of data collection, the researcher hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' constructions through dialogue and the language they use in assembling various discourses. The interview method allows the researcher to pursue lucidity and probe for deeper comprehension. As a result, the reporting and analysis of data are reflective of the views of the participants. Participants were interviewed in a semi-structured manner to collect data. Utilising semi-structured interviews

was beneficial to this study because this protocol guaranteed considerable uniformity during the interviewing process (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

Furthermore, the study's interview guide included both in-depth and probing questions to facilitate the interview sessions. The interviews, on average 55 minutes each, were recorded for transcription purposes. Participants who agreed to participate in the interview procedure were taken through the questions individually and the qualitative interviews enabled the researcher to perceive the world through the participants' eyes.

During this study, semi-structured interviews were selected based on the agility of the method. The semi-structured interview allows a researcher to include key questions on a topic. The researcher can guide the participant on the topic if the conversation digresses to confine the discussion to the topic domain. Semi-structured interviews permit a researcher an opportunity to incorporate crucial questions about the topic. In addition, both the researcher and the participants can diverge and explore further issues or responses (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Conversely, Pica-Smith & Poynton (2014) posits that personal prejudice is just one of several problems that can occur. For instance, based on how the subject responds, the researcher may choose to either encourage or discourage more discussion.

During this study, interviews continued until the topic was exhausted or saturated. Saunders (2009) states that this stage is reached when interviewees no longer have the ability to present novel viewpoints. Each interview was conducted identically, and participants were informed of the goal of the study and the types of questions that would be asked. The interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word file and then altered using analysis and theme classification.

Previous research, Patton (2002), emphasises that interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information about the topic thereby achieving comprehensive and in-depth responses. Establishing good research questions that will allow the researcher to delve more deeply into the experiences and knowledge of the selected participants is a critical feature of the interview design (McNamara, 2009). Seventeen interviews were conducted.

In addition to conducting independent research, the researcher also completed a secondary literature review (Cresswell, 2013). This secondary research analysis took the form of exploring existing studies about the glass ceiling phenomenon. The sampling strategy of the study covered the following items: population, sample, sampling methods, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability.

4.5.4.1 Pilot study

Thabane, Ma, Chu, Cheng, Ismaila, Rios, and Goldsmith (2010) define a pilot study as a preliminary investigation that helps assess the practicability and feasibility of procedures to be used in a subsequent, larger and more exhaustive research. Arnold, Burns, Adhikari, Kho, Meade, and Cook (2009) also support the notion that pilot studies are typically smaller in scale and represent the initial phase of the research methodology. Good research with appropriate experimental design and accurate performance yields high-quality results.

A test interview was conducted to identify any unclear or ambiguous statements in the research procedure. The objective of the pilot study was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the study. In response to comments from the test interview, new questions were added to the list. The pilot study was conducted to ensure that all potential issues were identified.

4.5.5 Data analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), data analysis can be described as the art of giving logical structure to gathered data. Antonius (2003) holds a similar view and explains that data are any content that has been gathered and documented systematically to facilitate the appropriate processing of that same information. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) outline seven commonly employed methods for analysing qualitative data: constant comparison, keywords-in-context, word count, classical content analysis, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis and componential analysis.

According to Schostak & Schostak (2007), data can be reconfigured, allowing for other ways to answer queries. During data analysis, researchers must put aside their predispositions Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2008). Furthermore, Polit and Beck (2010) note that Colaizzi's data

analysis method is the only phenomenological analysis that necessitates returning to study participants to validate conclusions. To ensure the validity and reliability of research findings, it is crucial to triangulate data and analyse it in a competent, unbiased, and thorough manner (Cohen et al., 2011).

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), qualitative data analysis is a method of constructing intelligence from the viewpoints of study participants' by identifying and analysing common threads, concepts and other meaningful differences that exist. The data analysis process begins with bracketing the researcher's subjectivity. This refers to the researcher setting aside their biases about the phenomenon. Bracketing is normally a dependable theme in phenomenological research. To achieve bracketing, Hamill and Sinclair (2010) recommend delaying the literature review until after data collection and analysis, so that researchers do not formulate questions or analyse data based on themes that are known to exist in the literature.

Crotty (1996) argues that qualitative researchers cannot be completely objective. If researchers are unaware of their own prejudices and ideas, it will be impossible for them to set aside these concerns. The researcher listened to each participant's response to the research questions and transcribed the results from the digital recordings. The researcher analysed the transcriptions several times to capture the meanings of the participants' experiences as they related to the phenomenon. The interview transcriptions were used to perform data analysis.

This study used a semi-structured interview method for collecting qualitative data which is characterised by open-ended questions and probes that have been designed in advance (Morse & Richards, 2002). In this study, the interviewer had a list of questions on a schedule but the interview was guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it; the interviewer was free to probe interesting areas that arose from participants' interests or concerns (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The first data analysis step was inclusive of the researcher studying the transcripts. This process ensured that the researcher had an in-depth overall understanding of the essence of the transcribed interviews. Harding (2013, p. 112) proposes four steps for analysing themes:

- Identifying the theme and creating a category
- Compiling codes from various illustrative issues into the category
- Creating sub-categories to reflect different elements of the themes
- Using the themes to explain relationships between various parts of the data and constructing theory.

Themes might originate either in the facts or in the existing theoretical framework of the topic under study (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Braun and Clark (2006) elucidate that thematic analysis can reveal and expose informational patterns that characterise specifics about the data. Through thematic analysis, a researcher can integrate and classify connections or themes or the topic's philosophical context.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six steps: getting familiar with the data, coding, searching for themes with comprehensive patterns of meaning, reviewing themes, defining themes and writing up. Patton (2002) defines interpretation as providing a rationale for the outcomes, addressing why inquiries, attributing relevance to the results and contextualising analytic trends.

According to Bree, Dunne, Brereton, Gallagher, and Dallat (2014), handwritten transcripts were transcribed into Microsoft Word for data analysis. The data was then transferred to Microsoft Excel for further processing. Duplicate entries were removed initially, and the remaining data was categorised thematically by reviewing each cell, which was colour-coded according to its corresponding theme. This data-driven approach enabled the identification of thematic areas, each marked with a different colour, enhancing the analysis's clarity and comprehensibility.

4.5.6 Coding and themes

Creswell (2015) explains that a coding assessment may be a term which sums the purpose and context of the entire statement, term or paragraph. Coding simplifies processing, allows for the quantification of qualitative information and gives original data context. The author further states that the process of directing codes from observed data is known as data coding. Interviews can be used to gather data for a descriptive study, as was the instance in this study.

Seidel and Kelle (1995) define the function of coding as recognising pertinent phenomena, collecting examples of these phenomena and analysing these phenomena to identify similarities, differences, patterns and structures. The purpose of data coding is to bring out the crux of the data that were provided by respondents. The purpose of data coding is not just to eradicate unnecessary data but to meaningfully summarise it, thus, ensuring that valid points are not lost in coding. It was vital for the researcher to adequately encapsulate data through descriptive coding that uses single words or nouns to generate data (Cresswell, 2013).

In addition, final codes also made it easier to spot a more distinct pattern among the data. The pattern was crucial in determining the scope of the last evaluation or analysis step. While observing the respondents' behaviour, some codes were noted. The researcher identified unique concepts and categories in the data at the initial layer of classification to create the fundamental analysis units. Joffe (2011) stresses the importance of assessing the accuracy or dependability of coded data, which often entails the use of a structured codebook.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) explain that themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs". Creswell (2007) clarifies that the clustering of concepts and themes is produced naturally by combining elements of significance. Researchers must pay close attention to the commonalities in the respondents' experiences. The data was dissected into themes that were used to provide a total story of the respondents' experiences and knowledge (Cresswell, 2013).

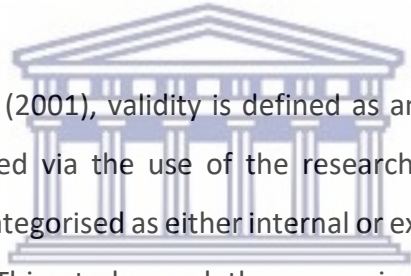
Following that, significant statements were extracted by the researcher from each transcript related to the experience being investigated. According to Beck (2009), significant statements are statements that depict the essence of the experience from the participants' interview responses. The next step was for the researcher to derive and develop themes or meanings from the narratives from the relevant statements. Experiential data processing processes, as stated by Yüksel and Yildirim (2015), construct the experience to create concepts. The themes that were grouped were analysed based on how the phenomenon was perceived.

Themes and classifications were distinguished using coloured accents. The meaning was drawn from the available data to produce narratives. Finally, a data table was created using

the final concept and classifications. Then the researcher listed the major categories to be explained. It was noted that coding should not be exhaustive; rather, it is a procedure for minimising the amount of data. Creswell (2015) describes coding as sorting, but Miles, Huberman, and Saldaa (2014) refer to it as 'data condensation'. Nonetheless, the scholars emphasise that coding is a means of discovery that provides deep, interpretive knowledge of every corpus fact.

The data analysis process involved reading, accumulating and dissembling the written information. The narratives were thematically analysed using the coding phases; the data were analysed word-by-word and later line-by-line to create themes. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2007) agree that qualitative data analysis gathers information from interviewees, thoughts on conditions, trends, themes and recurrent correlations.

4.6 Validity and reliability



According to Burns and Grove (2001), validity is defined as an indicator of the accuracy or falsity of the evidence gathered via the use of the research instruments. The validity of measurement devices can be categorised as either internal or external, depending on the type of accuracy being assessed. This study used the purposive sampling approach for the investigation to ensure that participants had experience with the glass ceiling phenomenon. The phenomenological bracketing process performed by the researcher also guaranteed the validity of data analysis by eliminating the researcher's bias (Neuman, 2003). A reviewer should be able to follow the progression of events and decisions and understand their logic because the methodology and methods are adequately described, explained and justified (Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008).

Gravetter and Forzano (2012) explain that the interview protocol should be screened for its effectiveness through an approach called face validity which is a method that examines the questions to determine if they measure the variables. Linn and Gronlund (2000) state that numerical value cannot sufficiently summarise validity, however, the validity of assessment results can vary in degrees from high to low or range from weak to strong. Lakey & Cohen (2000) expands on this idea, noting that instrument accuracy and precision are related to

reliability. The results of the instrument should be consistent when used on a comparable sample of respondents in the same setting.

However, Davies and Dodd (2002) state that since qualitative researchers do not necessarily use traditional measuring tools perceived to provide credibility and precision, it is pertinent to note the process used by qualitative researchers to establish that the research study's findings are credible, verifiable and reliable. As the study was qualitative, it was important to highlight and observe the validation criteria as classified by Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001). These authors also elucidate that these standards of validity have proven to be important criteria for proving the rigour and legitimacy of qualitative research; the four primary criteria are credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity.

Credibility – do the results represent the precise interpretation of the participants' meaning? The criteria for credibility require demonstrating that the results of qualitative research are trustworthy or believable from the participants' perspectives. Tobin and Begley (2004) state that credibility encompasses correspondence regarding respondents' views and representation by the researcher. As, from this perspective, the objective of qualitative research is to describe or comprehend the phenomenon of interest through the eyes of the participants, only the participants can legitimately evaluate the trustworthiness of the results. To address potential bias, the researcher employed triangulation, which involves utilising multiple sources of evidence to enhance the study's reliability and validity, as described by Cohen et al. (2000). To ensure the study's validity, the researcher conducted respondent validation, in which some of the participants were asked to review the original results for accuracy.

In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that credibility can be achieved through member checking which is a process to test the findings and interpretations with the participants. As such the validity of this study was established by using a technique known as respondent validation which involved testing the initial results with some of the participants to determine whether the results were still accurate. By utilising the member checks method, the researcher's subjectivity could be eliminated (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Authenticity – genuine representation of the different views. Whittemore et al. (2001) explain that authenticity refers to the extent to which researchers capture the diverse viewpoints and values of study participants and promote change among people and systems during analysis. To ensure validation, the researcher used several approaches including a literature review and interviews. Through interviews each participant contributed their own experiences and worldview about the study, adding fresh perspectives and the potential for shared experiences. Furthermore, the researcher incorporated rich and thick verbatim descriptions of the participants' accounts to support results and findings.

Criticality – addressing critical evaluations of the research. According to Maxwell (1996), the evidence in the study must verify the researchers' interpretations to protect against misrepresentation and or inference. The findings were presented within the context of comparable prior research and theories. The researcher also included a summary of the existing literature and how the current study contributed to the field. The researcher's strengths and shortcomings were also acknowledged.

Integrity – self-reflection of the researcher. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the researcher must be truthful and vigilant about their own perspective, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs. During this study, the data analysis process began with bracketing the researcher's subjectivity. This refers to the researcher setting aside their biases of the phenomenon as bracketing is normally a dependable theme in phenomenological research. In this study, the process of epoché addressed researcher biases. The phenomenological bracketing process performed by the researcher, putting aside their beliefs and knowledge about the glass ceiling phenomenon also guaranteed the validity of data analysis by eliminating the researcher's bias (Neuman, 2003). The researcher acknowledged biases in sampling and kept meticulous records while presenting a clear decision-making process and guaranteeing that data interpretations were transparent and consistent. Johnson (1999) explains that uncritical verifications and dogmatism may be avoided if investigators are self-critical and seek integrity at each stage of the investigation.

4.7 Limitations of the study

Utilising online platforms to conduct interviews may have changed the dynamics of live interactions. Taking into consideration that qualitative research is based on participants being tasked with having in-depth and at times personal matters that may not come through with an online medium, certain cues and signals may have been missed by the researcher due to the channel used. However, researchers who have evaluated face-to-face versus online video conferencing interviews report no difference in interview quality (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). These cues were addressed by having videos on for the duration of the interviews to give the researcher the comfort of noting nonverbal communication cues. However, face-to-face interviews may include more visual indications because cameras only catch the head and upper torso (Fielding & Fielding, 2012). Correspondingly, it has been noted that in-person interviews appear to be the 'gold standard' of interviewing (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006).

Furthermore, the platform addressed the geographical perspectives of participants who were scattered across different provinces. In a study by Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey & Lawless (2019) participants and researchers frequently cited Zoom's convenience, particularly in terms of access to geographically remote participants, cost-effectiveness and time-efficiency, as one of its primary benefits, given the significant potential of online communication technologies to support qualitative data collection. Consistent with this viewpoint, participants preferred that their interviewer resided in a different city because it reduced the likelihood of public interactions (Mabragaña, Carballo-Diéguez, & Giguere, 2013). According to Abrams, Wang, Song, and Galindo-Gonzalez (2014), conducting focus groups via digital means yielded more information than in-person methods and the philosophical foundation of the glass ceiling was just as rich.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics permeates the whole research process, from the selection of a research topic to the collection and analysis of data and the publication of study results (Mustajoki and Mustajoki 2017). As such, during research activities, researchers are confronted daily with increasingly multifaceted ethical concerns. Particularly in qualitative research that deals with human

beings, the importance of ethical considerations needs to always be relational, situational and emergent (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015).

The ethical framework of Emanuel, Wendler, and Grady (2008) serves as a guide for analysing the ethical and scientific components of a research protocol and was created to minimise the likelihood of exploitation by ensuring that the research process respects study participants and simultaneously helps society. The role of the researcher to guarantee secrecy and anonymity is a further ethical consideration (McHaffie, 2000). Where anonymity is not possible, such as in a face-to-face interview, every effort should be made to uphold the confidentiality concept (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). This suggests that data will be used and reported in a manner that prevents source identification (Behi & Nolan, 1995).

The measures taken by the researcher to preserve the confidentiality of personal information included the secure storage of data and the implementation of a coding system to protect the identity of the individual during data analysis and the dissemination of the research findings. For this study, participants were advised of their voluntary participation in the study and informed that they had every right to withdraw at any stage of the study if they wished to do so. According to Polit and Hungler (1999), informed consent means that participants have adequate information regarding the research, are capable of comprehending the information and have the power of free choice, enabling them to consent to or decline participation in the research voluntarily.

There was also extensive communication to respondents on their privacy and anonymity being secured and that they were participating based on informed consent which meant that the researcher provided relevant information and assurances regarding participation in the study. This was done to ensure that respondents were fully aware and informed of their rights and were not pressured. This is to ensure that data are used and reported in a manner that prevents source identification (Behi & Nolan, 1995).

The researcher also ensured that there was no discrimination and offensive language usage during interviews and was not biased but objective during discussions and analysis. As stated by Miles and Huberman (1984), for researchers employing qualitative analysis, it is critical to have an ethical, investigative and participant-in-context attitude. As the study was qualitative,

the researcher reported conclusions supported by the data through quotations which were used honestly and clearly to support the researcher's interpretation of the categories and themes (Barrere & Durkin, 2014). The ethical considerations that are measured in a phenomenological research study are important. The researcher adhered to ethical standards and careful deliberation of the potential hazards involved was considered.

4.9 Conclusion

The chapter described the research methodology and design. Additionally, the research problem was reiterated including the description of the philosophical position of the selected qualitative research method. The chapter also described phenomenology – the lived experience of the subjects – and probed the research instruments. In addition, there was an examination of the reliability and validity factors of the data collection procedures. Lastly, the ethical considerations of the study received focus. The next chapter describes the findings of the research.

Chapter 5: Findings and Interpretations

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research methodology of the study, covering the justification of the selected method, population and sampling process. The chapter also entailed data collection methods and measuring instruments. The research findings provided in this chapter touch on the research environment, namely, four South African provinces. The participants also belong to a distinct group of women who hold leadership positions in their respective organisations. Distinctive characteristics such as age, education and industry are revealed by the demographic data.

The data analysis uncovered six themes from the study's collected data; these themes are explained through participant quotations. The section also consists of evidence of reliability, which was used to validate the veracity and transferability of the data. The evidence of reliability also included the dependability of the questions of the study and the techniques used to identify themes. To ensure confirmability, only the researcher interviewed, transcribed and verified the data. Lastly, all information gathered was kept strictly confidential.

Thus, this chapter presents results from the study on the 'glass ceiling effect' in South African-based companies addressing the following research questions:

- What is the meaning of the glass ceiling and is the glass ceiling concept a perception or reality?
- What invisible barriers affect women in their leadership journey?
- Are women aware of the glass ceiling effect and do they experience it?
- How does gender inequality and stereotypes affect women in business?
- What impact do social hierarchy and culture have on women's leadership journeys?

5.2 Research setting

The principles of a phenomenological study were implemented by way of one-on-one interviews. Due to geographic differences, online Teams interviews were conducted and recorded for transcript purposes. Most interviews were conducted after business hours so participants could concentrate on the questions and their answers without interruptions. The research was conducted in the provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Free State. Guidelines for the research participants included the following criteria: female leaders working for corporates in South Africa. There was no exclusion of industries and the participants worked in the following industries: chemicals, energy, petroleum, mining and financial services. Table 5.1 presents the profiles of the participants.

Table 5.1 Participants' profiles

Participants	Age	Industry	Position	Education Level
P1	46	Chemicals	Head	Masters in Business Administration
P2	55	Mining	Senior Manager	BCom Honours
P3	42	Chemicals	Head	MBA and Social Development Masters
P4	44	Pension Funds	Manager	Degree
P5	40	Mining	Head	Masters in Business Administration
P6	34	Financial Services	Investment Manager	Post Graduate Diploma
P7	42	Mining	Senior Adviser	Honours Degree
P8	56	Mining	Senior Manager	Honours Degree
P9	49	Petro Chemicals	Vice President	Masters in Business Administration
P10	46	Oil and Gas	Senior Manager	Masters and CA
P11	40	Financial Services	Investment Analyst	CFA
P12	38	Financial Services	Team Leader	Diploma
P13	42	Energy	Vice President	Honours Degree
P14	41	Petro Chemicals	Group Manager	Masters in Business Administration

P15	47	Business Services	Managing Director	BA Degree
P16	63	Chemicals	Manager	Post Graduate Diploma
P17	36	Petro Chemicals	Head	Masters

Seventeen interviews were conducted with female business leaders in South African corporations. All the participants were women in positions of leadership, including vice presidents, departmental heads, managing directors and middle managers. The ages of the participants ranged from 34 to 63 with a mean of 44.7 years. Additionally, 24 per cent of the participants in the study were employed in the mining industry, while 47 per cent were in the petro/chemicals sector; the remaining 29 per cent were in financial services. All participants had over five years of management experience. Seven (41 per cent) of the 17 participants held a master's degree, five had MBAs, 29 per cent held Honours/Postgraduate Diplomas, and the remaining 30 per cent held a bachelor's degree or lower.

Data were collected over three months. The duration was extended based on the schedules of the participants and the significance of the topic to those invited to participate. The interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams and also recorded through a mobile phone. Electronic consent forms and releases were obtained and stored.

The data were analysed word-by-word and afterwards line-by-line to produce themes for the tales using the coding steps. Cohen et al. (2007) affirm that qualitative data analysis is a technique for generating intelligence from research participants' perceptions of events, patterns, themes, groupings and recurring similarities. As stated by Davies and Dodd (2002), it is important to take note of the process qualitative researchers use to determine whether the findings of the research study can be trusted as accurate. This is because scholars have noted that qualitative researchers do not use instruments with established metrics to test validity and reliability.

It was crucial to emphasise and adhere to the validation criteria of the qualitative study as categorised by Whittemore et al. (2001). The translated standards of validity have proven to be useful criteria for proving the rigour and legitimacy of qualitative research, according to the same authors. The four main criteria are as follows:

- Credibility: Do the results accurately reflect what the participants meant?
- Authenticity: Genuine portrayal of the various points of view.
- Criticality: Critical response to criticism of the research.
- Integrity: Self-reflection on the part of the researcher.

For the data analysis process to be accurate, the process began by eliminating researcher bias through a process called bracketing. Bracketing demonstrates how researchers cast aside any preconceived notions about a phenomenon, as parentheses are typically a legitimate focus in qualitative studies. For this study, the epoché process addressed researcher bias. Setting aside beliefs and knowledge about the gender wage gap, the phenomenological bracketing process performed by researchers also ensures the validity of data analysis by removing the researchers' biases (Neuman & Dickinson 2003).

5.3 Data analysis

This section presents the steps used to analyse data from the face-to-face interviews. It is worth noting that a descriptive phenomenology design was used to describe how the participants experienced the glass ceiling phenomenon. Sutton & Austin (2015) explains that the process of deriving meaning from the perspectives and judgements of research participants towards various events, as well as associated patterns, themes, categories and recurring similarities, is an example of qualitative data analysis.

According to Dudovskiy (2018), qualitative data refers to non-numeric information such as interview transcripts, notes, video and audio recordings, images and text documents. For this study, which is a qualitative research study, interviews were used and data analysis involved identifying common patterns within the responses and critically analysing them to achieve the research aims and objectives. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) recommend that qualitative data analysis is critical and one of the key steps in the qualitative research process as it institutes and guides researchers in making sense of the qualitative data.

Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit (2004) concur that the true test of a competent qualitative researcher comes in the analysis of the data. Essentially qualitative data analysis is about transforming raw data through searching, evaluating, recognising, coding, mapping, exploring and describing patterns, trends and themes. It includes the categorisation of raw data through

interpretation and providing underlying meanings. Patton (2002) specifies the process as inductive analysis and creative synthesis and Baxter and Eyles (1997) suggest that showing how meanings and interpretations are articulated verbatim by respondents instead of the researcher's words remains critical. This is supported by Flick (2002) who states that the interpretation of data is the core of qualitative research.

According to Cresswell (2013), the first step in data analysis is to remove the researcher's bias, implying that the researcher can put aside their own preconceived notions which is critical and central to the concept of bracketing in phenomenological analysis. The research was conducted by analysing the interview transcripts. In doing so, the researcher had a firm grasp of the core ideas expressed in the transcribed interviews.

The extraction of significant statements from each transcript that related to the experience being investigated followed. The researcher implemented qualitative coding which is a process of systematically categorising excerpts from qualitative data to find themes and patterns. From the relevant statements, the researcher derived themes or meanings. Experiential data processing processes, as stated by Yüksel and Yildirim (2015), construct the experience to create concepts. The themes that were grouped were analysed based on how the phenomenon was perceived. The evaluation of the interviews took place in multiple phases and pseudonyms were attached to individual participants to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The researcher started by reading each transcript to look for patterns, themes and recurrence before moving on to the analysis phase (Creswell, 2014).

To analyse the interviews, the researcher read each transcript to identify emerging themes, repetitions and patterns (Cresswell, 2014). According to Möller, Fuger, and Kasper (1994) the penultimate phase of the analysis was connecting the themes to the study's conceptual perspective using established correlations between codes.

5.3.1 Face-to-face interviews

The researcher commenced by familiarising herself with the data which included transcribing all the data from the 17 recorded face-to-face interviews into written text and reading the data repeatedly. Table 5.2 presents the recorded interview timeframes.

Table 5.2 Recorded interview data timeframes (minutes)

Interview	Duration	How the interview was conducted
Participant 1	66	Microsoft Teams
Participant 2	54	Microsoft Teams
Participant 3	56	Microsoft Teams
Participant 4	51	Microsoft Teams
Participant 5	55	Microsoft Teams
Participant 6	56	Microsoft Teams
Participant 7	55	Microsoft Teams
Participant 8	55	Microsoft Teams
Participant 9	67	Microsoft Teams
Participant 10	54	Microsoft Teams
Participant 11	50	Microsoft Teams
Participant 12	28	Microsoft Teams
Participant 13	59	Microsoft Teams
Participant 14	60	Microsoft Teams
Participant 15	70	Microsoft Teams
Participant 16	55	Microsoft Teams
Participant 17	56	Microsoft Teams

Average: 56 minutes

The research consisted of qualitative interviews; hence, the approach chosen to analyse the data was thematic content analysis. This method seeks to identify similar patterns across data collections. The first step in the research was to become acquainted with the data. Similar words or phrases, for example, allowed the researcher to spot previously unsuspected patterns in the collected textual data. After completing this step, the next step was to generate initial codes that provided a summary of the fundamental aspects of the data that could be evaluated.

To analyse the data, coding of the information was combined with content analysis. The process of coding began with an initial reading of the text and was followed by the division of the text into sections, the identification of codes and, finally, the reduction or combination of codes into themes. Before organising the data into patterns, the process of coding required first dividing the data into smaller and smaller components (codes). According to Gibbs (2007),

the process of defining and analysing data in qualitative research is accomplished through the use of coding. The researcher used coding to look for conceivably attainable topics. The researcher then proceeded to generate initial codes and the data extracts that shared a code were afterwards grouped for ease of analysis during the process of building themes. This process involved reviewing and defining themes and was then followed by the write-up.

5.3.2 Results – glass ceiling conceptualisation

In the first part of this section, an analysis of the participants' responses was performed to determine how well they understood the glass ceiling effect. To provide a comprehensive view of the influence that the glass ceiling has on women working in businesses in South Africa, the researcher conducted an analysis of the participants' experiences as well as their conceptualisations of the issue. Despite the reality that most women held the idea that it did exist, there were a variety of perspectives on the presence of the glass ceiling and the factors that contribute to its pervasiveness in the business world. Some of the participants claimed that they did not necessarily believe that the phenomenon existed and that their restrictions were dependent on who they were as individuals rather than on the effect itself.

In addition to this, it was essential to take note of the participants' ages, managerial positions and the provinces in which they were based. The vast majority of the women, 92 per cent, had jobs in what they perceived to be male-dominated fields, such as mining, energy, finance, and petrochemical industries. It was abundantly obvious that even though participants' thoughts and perspectives on the effect may have been influenced by several separate individual factors, the participants' experiences and traits impacted how they responded to the issue.

The participants' encounters with the glass ceiling were presented to shed light on the factors that contribute to the occurrence of the phenomenon as well as the degree to which it is pervasive in corporate South Africa. The prevalent and widely held belief that the glass ceiling prevents women from ascending and achieving senior management was one of the perspectives expressed by respondents regarding the meaning of the term 'glass ceiling'. When asked to explain the glass ceiling, several of the participants used the familiar phrase 'an unseen barrier', which is very common. The participants were positive that the glass ceiling

had not been broken in any way. When it came to the conceptualisation of the effect, prevalent topics included the gender role of women and the existence of the glass ceiling. This was true regardless of the industry.

Participant 7 states:

> The glass ceiling effect is that layer that in so many corporates has become transparent. It is invisible; it is the nuances, that grey area. Because a lot of corporates are obviously trying to ensure that they are not deemed as not being progressive, they have managed to create those invisible layers that only you when you are trying to get into those places will feel it. For me, that is literally one of those nuances and then also not having enough people that look like you as a female leader. That also can become a glass ceiling because you do not have people that can be your benchmarks. You do not have a lot of people that look like you. When you eventually make it, in most instances, you will find that you are the only one in the room.

Johns (2013) describes the phenomenon known as the 'glass ceiling effect' as an 'invisible barrier' thwarting women's career advancement in organisations. Individual obstacles, cultural obstacles and organisational structures are some of the most common types of barriers that are mentioned in the research conducted on the glass ceiling effect. Because of these obstacles, it is difficult for women to break into the workforce and be accepted on equal footing with men. The participants concur with the description of the phenomenon with Participant 10 stating:

> The glass ceiling effect is that women reach a certain level where there are perceived barriers to go further. I am quite comfortable with where I am. I'll be honest, I'm afraid to go a level higher. Because if you go up to that level of responsibility, it is now enormous. Whether you want to have that level of responsibility is however a personal choice.

Similar sentiments are expressed by Participant 15 who states:

> The glass ceiling is where you personally have reached your limit. But when you look at it from an organisation's point of view, different people have different glass ceilings. I've seen it with certain organisations where I know for a fact that black women can only become senior management and nothing else. You know, the odds are very static. They have put black women in but there's no support structure so things fall apart and if a person leaves, they can say they gave one an opportunity because in our country with our history with BEE for opportunities for the previously disadvantaged. I've seen it in certain organisations where they have a female leader but she does not get the support that a male leader whether black or white would get. So, in a sense, it looks like the glass was broken but in reality, not. Women don't last in those positions.

However, Participant 5 declares that theoretically, the glass ceiling does not exist because there have been a few people who were able to infiltrate leadership positions, yet for the masses, it may not translate. She continues:

> It still seems like a place for only a few selected people. So, it's a perception. It's not necessarily true. I think it's a perception because of the limited amount of opportunities that exist and the number of women aiming for those positions.

5.4 Major themes found

According to Braun and Clarke (2012), the word 'theme' is one of the most common words in the lexicon of a researcher working in the field of human sciences. Without this term, it would be quite difficult for researchers to explain what it is that people do in the field of human sciences. When working with the data, they look for recurring patterns and, when they find them, they either extract, recognise or identify such patterns. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), the stage of identifying themes consists of formulating semantic relationships between categories and then grouping them into themes that describe more general aspects of the contents through an analytical process. This stage of the process took place after the initial stage of identifying categories. The creation of themes in the form of hypotheses can contribute to the advancement of knowledge by linking methodological strategies for exploration and verification in an iterative manner (McAdams, 2012).

The following themes were found, described and analysed to facilitate the discussion:

- Theme 1 – Gender and Culture
- Theme 2 – Organisational Culture
- Theme 3 – Woman's dual roles
- Theme 4 – Leadership
- Theme 5 – Mentorship
- Theme 6 – Gender wage gap

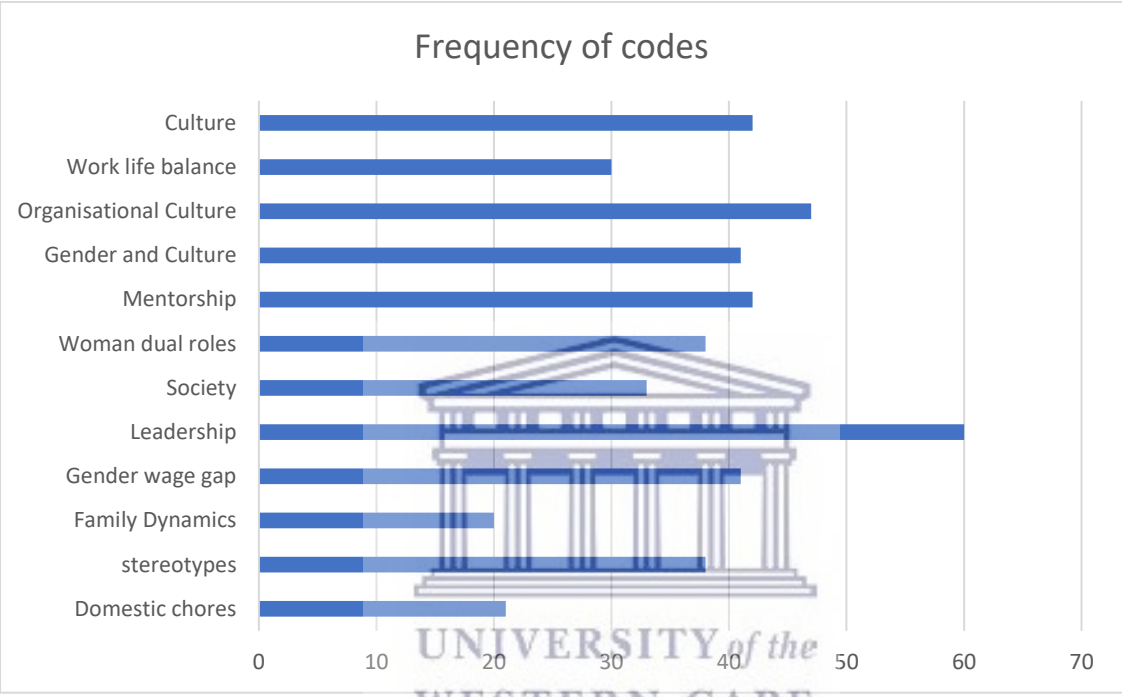


Figure 5.1 Sample of codes and themes from interview data

5.4.1 Theme 1 – Gender and culture

Gender discrimination remains a reality. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) note that gender can be conceptualised as a social system allocating resources and roles according to whether an individual is perceived as male or female, thus highlighting their differences and society's view of their roles and capabilities. Connell and Pearse (2009) emphasise that gender is notably embedded within relations of power, ideologies and institutions, consequently remaining infused in organisational class and/or hierarchy.

In numerous studies, the contents of masculine and feminine cultural characteristics have been investigated (Hofstede, 1998). The most obvious manifestation of this is the widespread

perception that senior leadership positions are reserved exclusively for men. Participant 7 stated that her journey in the workplace had not been an easy one and she had realised over the years that it was better when you were a female at entry level because there were no expectations; in most cases, a woman is not perceived as a threat by the predominantly male-led establishment. “As a black female coming into an industry that has been dominated by white males, it was difficult to make inroads and prove yourself,” she says.

Women were obliged to participate in the corporate world as a direct result of social change brought on by the economy and expansion. According to Greyvenstein (2000), the long-standing inequality that exists between men and women may be traced back to androcentric beliefs that have been prevalent throughout history. Despite the significant progress that has been made for women in the workplace, some women may still have difficulty adjusting to the newfound freedoms and identities that have been granted to them. There are a lot of people who believe that women’s status in the workplace is progressively improving but the change is happening at a very slow rate.

Even women will occasionally conclude that they lack the qualifications necessary to hold positions of leadership and management. This is a natural phenomenon. According to Participant 4, even though you and your work speak for themselves, it is not enough; you will need to exert additional effort because even with all the boxes checked, there will always be an additional hidden box whose contents are not always clear. She further states:

> There’s always politics along the way; there are always individuals, their opinions, their attitudes. As much as you know you work hard and you put in all you need to do, you know there’s always bureaucracies on the way that you may need to manoeuvre your way around.

Eagly (1987) observes that there may be concerns about women’s capabilities, which may lead to resentment at the toppling of the traditional hierarchies between men and women. This is because cultural stereotypes continue to regard men as being more successful in high-level positions than women. The emancipation of women is still a battle in the majority of countries and cultural and societal conceptions continue to be obstacles in the way of women’s advancement.

Participant 1 claims that there were occasions when she remained in the same capacity even though alternative chances presented themselves to her because her boss did not agree to release her from the role. She says, “a sad thing for women is that sometimes you don’t get compliments until there’s a counteroffer on the table”. Participant 17 states that African culture is progressive and that individuals must be able to have the freedom to drop a cultural practice that is not working for them: “Don’t accept practices that do not make sense to you in a meaningful way. Participate in those that make sense, however, they must not be a hindrance.”

According to Eagly’s (1987) social role theory, commonly held gender stereotypes originate from the gender division of labour that defines a society. This theory addresses both the differences and the similarities between men and women in terms of how they behave in social settings. Black women may experience what can be termed a double impact where both their race and gender put them at a disadvantage. Participant 15 explains:

> One thing I’ve realised that hinders us as black women and this thing you carry into your career. You can be a graduate right now. Your reality is that that character is going to last until you retire, you’ll still be acting the same, you know, you’ll just be quietly working at your desk, not really raising your hand.

She further states that she encourages women to speak up and have a voice.

According to an analysis of the relevant literature, patriarchal societies are characterised by the regulation of women’s limited involvement in executive positions and the acceptance of these standards. In these types of communities, it is widely accepted and even expected that men should have a dominant position in relation to women and should also exercise dominance over females. As a normative and institutional pillar, patriarchy is embodied in the social values, beliefs and assumptions that consciously establish the ground rules that people in an organisation follow and to which they conform. These social values, beliefs, and assumptions can be broken down into several categories.

Participant 1 claims that when women advance further than what society expects of them or better than their husbands, their decision-making abilities are always highlighted. Additionally, when they are at home, they are reminded that this is not the office where they

make decisions, which may affect how they conduct themselves even when they are at work and they may doubt their own abilities.

In addition to suffering from low self-esteem, women who experience feeling excluded by their contemporaries may also struggle professionally and have a bad opinion of themselves. Ferris, Chen & Lim (2017). clarify that the extent to which women are subjected to negativity can have a significant bearing on the number of applications they submit for executive jobs. Participant 4 adds:

> Obviously, you work with people. It's also about the stereotypes that you still need to deal with, especially, as a black woman in the corporate world. The corporate sector is still very masculine. And I do not want to bring race to it. But the reality is, we also still have a long way to go, especially in my sector. It seems that the business world is overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Even though there have been efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment, the conventional structure is still patriarchal, with traditionally powerful males in positions of authority. Simply because they are men and not women, men believe that they are more deserving of specific leadership jobs and are more fit for them. These men are custodians of the patriarchal system. Participant 12 agrees with the statement that she frequently interacts with African men who are resistant to being led by women.

The idea that women, by their gender, are not suited to be in leadership roles can be given credence by the fact that there are fewer women in positions of power. In contexts in which gendered social learning serves to reinforce the idea that women are less talented than men, cultural contexts and patterns of behaviour take on an increasingly important role. In her study, Halder, Hansen, Kangas & Laukkanen (2020) demonstrates the negative impact that sociocultural factors, such as bias and stereotypes, have on the employment of women. Specifically, she highlights how when a female employee prioritises her family over her work, this can lead to the employee being perceived as a less committed worker.

The term 'gender stereotype' refers to a preconceived notion about the characteristics and appearances that are associated with members of each gender or the roles that they play. Because of this, it can be challenging for women to advance into leadership roles and achieve

success in those capacities. According to Ridgeway (2001), the relative disadvantages that women face in securing jobs and promotions in the upper levels of managerial hierarchies, regardless of the exact mechanism, are still portrayed in the work environment. This is the case even though there have been significant strides made in this area. Participant 6 explains:

> A very senior individual asked me during my baby shower celebration how many times do you and your husband have sex because pregnant women are beautiful. When I confronted the individual, I was told that you know he likes to make jokes and that you should not take it seriously. I mean, you are kind of conflicted because you don't want to seem like a prude or to be seen as difficult. But at the same time, I'm afraid to lose my job.

Studies conducted by Eagly and Karau (2002) conclude that women may be subjected to stereotypes, which may contribute to their under-representation in leadership positions. This may further exacerbate how female gender roles are perceived as being different from the requirements needed for success in leadership roles. It is more common for people to criticise women based on preconceived notions about what it means to be a woman than on the characteristics they possess as individuals. 'Backlash effects' is what Phelan, Moss-Racusin, and Rudman (2008) refer to as the social and economic ramifications experienced by women who are ambitious and successful. According to the findings of the experiment that they carried out, it is likely that women who demonstrate aggressive tendencies during job interviews will be at a disadvantage. Participant 5 says:

> I just think the gender bias is still very strong. It manifests itself in the interviews and in the expectations in how we measure performance. So, I would usually feel like I'm measured differently than my male colleagues and I actually think probably if I were male, I would have been very far.

Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) note a deficiency theory that describes women's lack of leadership qualities, however, Powell (1994) notes that performance criteria are built on masculine ideas and managerial systems, implying women cannot meet or exceed them. Archbold and Schulz's (2008) study on the barriers to the promotion of female officers found

that women refused to participate in the promotion process. After all, they believed they would be promoted purely because they were women.

Participant 14 asserts that how women are raised may give rise to legitimate worries; for instance, when she worked as a journalist, there was a genuine concern regarding whether or not she was capable of covering strike action. When she reflects on the experience, it may have been a matter of safety for her and whether or not she was capable of defending herself against a mob and so on. Participant 14 further adds that this may be because of how women are socialised. “But the intention was not to discriminate. Safety is a huge part of discrimination I think for women in the workplace. The operations environment is itself discriminatory to women,” she says.

5.4.2 Theme 2 – Organisational culture

Wyche (2008) states that the culture of an organisation as well as its reputation is extremely important in the world of business and has the potential to either build or break the company. The majority of employees in any given company’s culture are focused on advancing their careers as a top priority. However, navigating the corporate culture can always be a concern for minorities and women, which can be a barrier to their career advancement.

Participant 5 explains that in her experience, transitioning into a new role can be difficult because people are unfamiliar with who you are and because, as a woman, you are not part of the inner circle. This is a problem as corporate culture can be a barrier to career advancement. She adds:

> People don’t trust you as they don’t know what you are about. I don’t want to bring up race but as a black woman people don’t necessarily always associate us with competence. When you’re a woman, people don’t really believe you know something until you’ve actually proven yourself over and over.

Goy and Johnes (2012) agree that there is evidence of institutional impediments that accelerate occupational segregation based on gender discrimination, which is counterproductive for women and works against their interests. These academics believe that

the discrimination could have originated from either horizontal or vertical dimensions. According to Goy and Johnes (2012), horizontal discrimination refers to a situation where both genders are given distinct responsibilities within different professions, whereas vertical segregation insinuates how men and women work in different statuses of occupations.

Participant 4 explains that in her role she has to break barriers as she was thrust into an environment that was probably not ready for her kind. She adds:

> … now you're breaking barriers, especially in my case when I came in as the first woman in the team of my colour, surrounded by these chauvinistic males and you know you have to come in and break certain stereotypes outside, as much as historically there has not been somebody like me in this role. You have to prove yourself when compared to other peers who might not need to first prove themselves.

There are still many obstacles that women must overcome in the workplace, particularly in settings that have traditionally been dominated by men. This may be the result of centuries-old gender inequalities and patriarchal behaviours that are still prevalent not only in the workplace but also in other spheres of life, such as the home and society. Because of these traditions, it may be challenging for women to break into male-dominated fields and have their qualifications recognised on an equal level.

According to Van Vianen and Fischer (2002), top managerial roles are frequently held by men, and these men tend to promote other men who are similar to themselves. Participant 6 describes an incident in which male managers were conversing on an off-the-cuff topic and a female manager joined in to add to the conversation; however, she was quickly reminded that this was men's business and she was required to remain silent. "If this can happen informally, I'm not sure how much it will infuse into professional decision-making. I think there might be a cultural undertone though," she says.

Koenig., Eagly, Mitchell and Ristikari (2011) found that the preponderance of male culture is the most significant obstacle that stands in the way of women advancing their careers. In settings like this, where there is a dearth of female representation at the highest levels of leadership, women may have the experience of being undesired and marginalised. According

to Gibelman's (2000) research, men are disproportionately represented in positions of upper-level management and receive higher compensation than their female colleagues at all levels of the firm. Previous research has shown that men exert a disproportionate amount of influence on organisational cultures, which Bajdo and Dickson (2001) argue is one factor that contributes to the gender gap that exists in the workplace, thus, inadvertently boosting the impact and influence of males in the organisational environment.

Participant 15 believes that the character of the person defines their leadership as opposed to gender. She explains:

> I think the reality is that certain sectors are still, I believe, very much one of the boy clubs. And the old boy club I think still exists. You will find these guys who probably went to the same school, you know, monastic schoolboys and they hire each other's sons. I mean, I've seen it. I've seen some of our clients and I find it sad because, you know, the dynamisms are not there.

According to Moeketsane (2014), stereotyped thinking can cause anyone, including employees and employers, to feel that male employees are more qualified than other individuals for a certain occupation. As a consequence of this, those who are in a position to make decisions about the organisation can consider higher-level management jobs to be the ones that are best suited for members of a particular group.

According to the findings of a previous study by Ragins & Cotton (1999) women in middle management encounter a glass ceiling in their workplace, which inhibits the advancement of females and, as a result, creates a barrier to the professional development prospects available to women. Participant 7 states:

> When you are dealing with an organisation that has a healthy culture, you will find a lot of people from diverse backgrounds. No matter who you are, they will be able to watch your progress. When you have an authentic leader that is not fearful and encouraged by a culture because when you get a leader like that but they come into an organisation that does not facilitate that kind of leadership, they will fail or be frustrated by the organisational culture which plays a big role in facilitating and growing the cadre of leaders. However, when you have a healthy culture, where

people are encouraged to be who they are, it is a reflection on the leadership as well. A good culture attracts talent.

Research like the Leadership and Management (ILM) study (2011) has shown that the glass ceiling still exists and a male-dominated corporate culture is the biggest barrier to women reaching board-level positions. Retaining senior female executives is a major battleground for organisations and this research has also revealed that the glass ceiling is still intact. According to Zhuge, Kaufman, Simeone, Chen, and Velazguez (2011), the glass ceiling is caused by primary restrictions such as traditional gender roles, displays of discrimination in the workplace and sponsorship opportunities inaccessible to women. When a protégé's high potential is recognised and there is active support provided in the form of nominations for leadership positions and crucial professional networks, sponsorship can also take place over a longer length of time (Ayyala et al., 2019).

A review of the relevant literature revealed that although there has been some improvement regarding the advancement of women in senior-level jobs, such advancement has been slow (Caceres-Rodriguez, 2013). Participant 7 states that the women who were already in leadership positions were trying to survive at the top and were not unnecessarily unwilling to assist upcoming females but they did not have time because they were fighting their own battles and also trying to push for their career progression. She elucidates:

> They were fighting their own battles. But I would have loved to get a mentor and a coach very early, which I think would have helped to fast track and give me the tools that will help me to not only to chip away because I feel and believe that I spent a lot of years chipping away, instead of having the right tools that will come in and literally break that ceiling. The impact of the glass ceiling is not necessarily a new concept; nonetheless, there is a great deal more that is not known about how the principles of the glass ceiling in the workplace influence a woman's ability to develop in her profession.

4.4.2.1 Gender and the workplace

It has been suggested that the term 'glass ceiling' refers to the visible and invisible factors prohibiting women from rising to higher role categories in professional and organisational

hierarchies, putting them at a competitive disadvantage. The glass ceiling is exposed all over the world in the way that women continue to be prevented from attaining top positions and, in the majority of instances, this problem is made worse by cultural norms and traditional gender roles. The obstacles are also used to explain the disparities in management and leadership styles between men and women, with the argument being that the barriers favour the leadership style of men while acting as a barrier to women who aspire to positions of authority.

One of the obstacles that the participants in the study described as being one of the problems they confronted on their path to leadership was the glass ceiling effect. The majority of the participants said that their gender plays a role in determining their responsibilities in society as well as in the workplace. They felt that there were a variety of obstacles that stood in the way of them achieving their goals and that these obstacles extended over a wide geographic area.

Participant 1 remarked that, in her view, the effect of the glass ceiling is that, on a global scale, men have had the luxury of getting a head start and that the concept is not exclusive to either Africa or South Africa but rather applies on a global scale. She believes that there have been responsibilities that, due to the influence of culture and religion, have not been intended or developed for women. She states:

> There were these rules that a woman's place is in the kitchen. So somehow when women started breaking ground and getting into areas that were not expected of them, they had to start from the backseat and had to still confront expectations based on gender stereotypes such as you cannot be a leader as a woman; you've got a family, you've got kids, you cannot expect to perform at the same level as men.

These stereotypes have been projected onto women. The journeys that women have taken have been impacted by these prejudices and, at times, those stereotypes have been their reality. Marshall (1994) conducted a series of interviews with women who had attained positions at middle and senior management levels and then either left their jobs or were considering leaving their jobs. These women's primary concerns, as expressed in their reports,

were their feelings of alienation and considerable evidence of men banding together in reacting to individual women in a generally male-dominated environment. Participant 1 further notes:

> These biases create a ceiling that women are not viewed at the same level as their male counterparts. The challenging part is that I'm a bit of an anomaly, as I've never had kids. I have never had to choose between family and my career but as a woman, I've been impacted.

Women continue to be marginalised based on gender stereotypes, culture and traditions. Participant 8 elucidates: "The fact that the workplace also has rules that are forcing women leaders to make a certain decision somehow also doesn't work for us." According to Hartman & Hartman (2008), women who are interested in pursuing jobs face special hurdles, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields, as a result of the unique work experiences that women have, as well as outmoded work-life role structures that are based on gender.

Williams & Westfall, (2006) uses the phrase 'the maternal wall' to describe the barrier that is erected in front of many women's professional aspirations as a result of the time off work that is required for childrearing. Participant 2 states that the reality of motherhood is a challenge for women in business. She mentioned that on more than one occasion she missed out on career growth opportunities, including an international prospect, because she could not uproot her family to a different location. "I had to forfeit massive career opportunities as my family needed me to be in the same location as them; I also could not ask my husband to leave his workplace," says Participant 2. It is socially acceptable, if not expected, for women to sacrifice their careers for the advancement of their husbands. This statement is supported by Heikkinen (2014) and Sayers (2012) who note that the requirement to travel, work overseas, or move to a new location can have a significant impact on the family. This is especially true for women as it is more common for women to be the primary breadwinners in the family.

According to Khuzwayo (2016), all communities, regardless of their physical locations, have some kind of hierarchical structure and authority that is deeply established in the community. These hierarchies can also be found in companies, which can perpetuate discriminatory norms and conventions because of the way they are structured. At the very top of the organisation's

structure, where all of the most critical decisions are made, men hold the majority of the positions of power.

In South Africa, even though the rights of women are protected and enshrined in the constitution, which is believed to be one of the best in the world, women's advancement still lacks. Stats SA (2018) revealed that the labour market is more favourable to men than it is to women. The participant's statements are supported by literature which revealed that the labour market is more favourable to men than it is to women. Participant 7 explains:

> I feel that there's still a long way to go. There's a lot of harassment; there's a lot of racism in mining. Sexual harassment is rife in mining and so women have to deal with those things, where men, they find it in them, they think when they see you then they still perceive you as a female. Clarifying that males do not comprehend that there is a distinction between the woman you see on the street, who you may want to socialise with, and her as their leader and how they will treat a female that they bumped into when they are socialising. But now that they fail to understand that there is a separation there is a difference from the lady that you see on the street, maybe that you are going to want to socialise with but with me, as your leader, you cannot talk to me anyhow, and you do not have the right to touch me. It is very frightening and saddening that you still have to spell these things out.

Thus, the participant thought about her experience as well as past research, some of which raised concerns about discrimination. According to the findings of Auster and Prasad (2016), certain company promotion techniques are more favourable to men and a substantial gap exists in how companies treat male and female employees in terms of how they approach the matter. Participant 6 commented that she has worked in male-dominated industries almost all her life and it has been both exciting and challenging.

Participant 3 cites how she has seen the mining industry evolve and get better at treating women, however, warns that it is not where the industry needs to be though. "Women in leadership positions in mining are still very rare and there were times where I would find myself being the only female and black in the corner of management," adds Participant 3. South Africa with its discrimination history was coerced to end its societal belief of

discrimination and sexism, yet in reality, women still face discriminatory practices in the workplace (Kornegay, 2000).

Leadership has been constructed in masculine terms explains Due Billing and Alvesson (2000). Participant 1 assents that corporates can also be about the boys' club and race discrimination:

> Women cannot play the game as much as men can. It's an unwritten rule that affects women's progression. People interpret our behaviours as women differently from how they do men. For example, if I come across as strong it's not described as confidence like how it's done with men i.e., competence and aesthetics. It's described differently for women, should I lose my temper and lash out at a meeting, it gets interpreted completely differently to when a male colleague does exactly the same thing.

Women frequently lack self-confidence and self-belief, which causes them to take fewer risks and make more cautious career decisions. In comparison to men, who have higher career expectations and greater self-confidence, women are three years behind in assuming management positions (Institute of Leadership and Management, 2011).

According to Kanter (1977), the characteristics and actions of women can frequently be overgeneralised and interpreted in a manner that is considered to be stereotypical. Women are seen as friendly and this stereotype can affect how women are evaluated as leaders. It can also impede women's advancement to top management, with the argument being made that they are not combat-ready or do not possess the necessary skills and characteristics for combat or completion. Participant 1 adds:

> We forever must be careful how we come across, especially as black women. There's something about our strength that I feel intimidates our counterparts in the corporate world; that we always need to temper our strength and be careful of how we come across.

Traditional masculinity typically involves the belief of respect or admiration for one's abilities, yet respect should be equal and mutual among colleagues. According to Goldin and Rouse

(2000), male-dominated environments may impede women´s career motivations and contribute to low retention and promotion rates for women. Participant 8 states:

> As women, we are not treated in the same manner as men. For instance, a male subordinate once physically assaulted me at work due to a disagreement. I doubt he would have been brave to do the same act to a male boss.

Previous studies have alluded that to survive and succeed in male-dominated environments women may reject their traditional feminine characteristics and adopt masculine traits which may seem needed for successful leadership. Participants alluded that as women they needed to portray characteristics of strength based on manly attributes and that they had to avoid mentioning their household responsibility in fear of being perceived as weak and not committed to the 'mission'.

Muhr (2011) uses the metaphor of a cyborg to describe women in the workplace who adopt male traits and who sacrifice their identity as females to outdo themselves to outperform their male counterparts. Participant 3 explains:

> As a woman you have to subtly claim your space and place at the table but have to certainly claim it with respect and dignity, still respecting men so that they can accept you. Because if you don't respect them, they will just push you away and you will lose.

The participants expressed their sadness at the fact that the majority of businesses are still run by men, which grants men the ability to exercise power and influence over decisions that may have significant repercussions for women. There has been progress over the past few decades towards having more women in leadership roles; nonetheless, women may still encounter several hurdles in roles that are dominated by men.

The perspectives of women who write about their experiences can vary widely. For example, Quartz (2013) writes that businesswoman Brown has been successful at navigating male-dominated environments and has discovered new approaches to dealing with day-to-day matters. On the other hand, Quartz (2013) further writes that Fu believes she is very concerned about the equality of women in the workplace and that the glass ceiling does not

exist if women do not believe that it does. SHR (2022) argues that if organisations do not act to establish fair opportunities and more inclusive leadership settings, this disillusionment can have substantial ramifications for organisations aiming to develop and retain top female talent.

5.4.3 Theme 3 – Women's dual roles

According to research conducted by Pillai, Prasad, and Thomas (2011), the term 'glass ceiling' implies that there is a hidden barrier placed on the career progression of women. This limitation may have its origin in the cultural idea that women cannot be trusted with power. According to HR Digest (2017), women who juggle professional and parental responsibilities face an uphill battle in their quest for advancement at their place of employment. Participant 4 clarifies:

> When you're a woman, you're still a mother and depending on the dynamics of your household it means when the child is sick, you are the one that must take the child to the doctor, not the husband, even though you might both be having similar jobs. It's the dynamics of your family that actually will manifest at work. So, if certain responsibilities are still yours, for instance, cooking it remains your responsibility at home and your family expects that of you.

The phenomenon that McKinsey (2007) referred to as the 'double burden' was based on the finding that women in Europe devoted more than twice as much time to home responsibilities as males did in that region. This exemplifies how women start the race from a position of disadvantage already because the expectations of society are skewed towards favouring men.

Participant 3 adds that women talk about multitasking and that even though both partners are employed full-time the woman is still expected to perform cooking duties after work. She continues:

> I'm expected to ensure the house is clean. I'm expected to ensure that the washing is done. The only way that we can improve the situation is for us as women to realise that we need support because once you don't get the time to relax and reflect, you're always going to be exhausted and it's not good for health care.

The participants further touched on the role of culture and traditional and societal beliefs. Participant 4 states that one cannot separate culture and tradition from the workplace, as the society at work is the same society outside of the workplace. She further states:

> The person who believes that women must not work or believe women are only good at or are supposed to do certain things is the same person you must lead at work. Irrespective of whether their views are influenced by religion or tradition, that person in society is the person you meet at work.

The participants explained that people do not change their beliefs depending on where they are; the very same view held at their homes will translate to their workplace. The participants also cited that the challenge women leaders at work face is society's struggle to have women leaders or see women as equals. It is equally noted that both males and females who do not view women as leaders create an uphill battle for female leaders. Participant 5 adds:

> It's just our upbringing and what you grew up experiencing around you. If in your close circles, women don't work, your view will be skewed to women not belonging in the workplace. Your view could slant on women being caregivers and that's the primary role you'd expect of them, such as cleaning. Because that's what you are exposed to as your lived experience.

Participant 1 agrees that the workplace is not structured to be inclusive for women and that it is an 'either-or' situation, which means that women have to choose between being successful in their careers and being family oriented. She is also of the opinion that women are the ones who are responsible for the upbringing of children and other domestic responsibilities and that the current structures of corporations are not designed in a way that makes it simple for women to achieve success in comparison to men who have fewer responsibilities outside of the workplace. "Women are expected to do much more to prove themselves, work twice as hard to be at the same level as men," says Participant 1.

Behl (2020) asserts that the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new challenges for feminists and worsened existing social inequalities and injustices. Several contemporary theorists argue that the pandemic has been a setback for feminism because it has reinstated caregiving responsibilities on women, akin to those in the 19th and 20th centuries. Women are now

more likely to be restricted to caregiving duties at home, where they are often combining paid "work-from-home" with unpaid household work, thus facing a double burden.

In some contexts, most notably patriarchal countries, there are mechanisms in place that regulate the roles that women play and, as a result, the low number of women who hold executive positions is seen to be an acceptable standard (Kulkarni, 2002). Participant 6 reveals that her father was resistant to the idea of her pursuing a college degree since, in his mind, she was meant to get married, have children, and not be a 'working' woman. She also says that her mother was supportive of her decision to continue her education. Participant 6 adds:

> I also found that male bosses would expect one to still do extra work at home not taking into consideration the household duties that waited for the female employees, while he could still manage to put in the extra hours because of the support he enjoyed from his wife. This creates tension and self-doubt on both fronts for us as women.

Self-doubt leads to women doubting their capabilities and excessively questioning their decisions and their place in the work environment.

Respondents also highlighted that society has played a key role in the perception that women are the inferior sex and that they are unable to carry out particular responsibilities, which is followed by the aversion and scorn that sometimes follows women. Participant 4 adds that when women are not viewed on the same level as their male counterparts, it can lead to one being offended when they see a woman taking up a leadership position or a woman expressing themselves objectively being viewed as aggressive. This can also lead to one being offended when they see a woman expressing themselves as aggressive. Participant 1 states:

> I would say maybe it's not a culture per se but the interpretation of culture because when you dig deep to the original intent, you can just see how things were twisted around to fit a male perspective. That was not the original intent of the culture. So how we interpret and practice our culture has really contributed directly and significantly to women's voices not being heard at times. This has actually indirectly contributed to human experience being abusive at times in the name of culture.

When women work in environments that are controlled by men, they have a greater risk of encountering a hostile environment, suffering from imposter syndrome and having their chances of promotion obstructed, (Crawford 2021). Participant 5 asserts that the roles that women play in the workplace are called into question and that sentiments such as 'women cannot stand the boardroom' and 'women are emotional and do not belong here' are proclaimed. Further supporting the idea that a woman's place is in the home is the expectation that she will bear children and form a family. These expectations help perpetuate the stereotype that women belong in the kitchen. Participant 5 adds:

> It's challenging when you constantly find yourself in situations where you are always the only test; it really makes you feel alone. If you check in most companies and most boardrooms, you may literally be the only ones who have made it in leadership; women remain cheerleaders.

According to the findings of a study that was carried out by Heilman et al. (1995), even though it was said that female leaders were effective, they were perceived to be more combative and less reasonable than their male manager counterparts who were also successful.

Participant 5 adds that there are unconscious prejudices at play and it is possible that some of the males are not even aware of what they are doing because the way they treat women is so normal to them. Rosette et al. (2016) discovered that race and ethnicity affected the prejudices that people have about women in leadership positions. It's a burden that women have to bear and it actually slows them down on their path to becoming leaders when they have to contend with such prejudices.

In addition, women tend to feel the weight of the entire female species on their shoulders and to believe that they speak for all other women, which adds to the pressures under which they may already be languishing. Participant 4 adds:

> I'm able to stand in my own power and not seek approval on how I must behave. I find it offensive when I'm called strong. I find it very offensive when I'm told by a woman, I am doing better than they expect because it means they don't expect much from a woman. It is the same thing as you are telling me that I'm beautiful for a duck. Is that a compliment? Is that a competency?

According to Cotter et al. (2001), the glass ceiling effect is founded on particular forms of discrimination and inequality. As a result, the effect is the prejudice that is inflicted against women in top leadership positions. This prejudice can affect women regardless of their level of education, experience or skills. Participant 5 asserts that women are at a disadvantage in networking events because of societal expectations, given that networking opportunities typically take place outside of normal working hours. She adds:

> Due to our societal responsibilities – we've got husbands and children to feed, you can't just go golfing over the weekend; we have other responsibilities. Again, if you look at work functions, you can also count the women there – very few.

When it comes to juggling work and family responsibilities, one of the most crucial things for women to have in their careers is flexibility. The ability to work outside of usual business hours is typically out of reach for working mothers who are also responsible for the care of their children.

According to the findings of Meyerson (2001), in the past, males were seen to be the suppliers of financial support, while women were seen as the primary caregivers and homemakers. Participant 2 agrees that having a child made it more difficult for her to perform her job duties. She explains:

> If there was a function at night, I mean I could have stayed, but I had other responsibilities to also take care of. Then on a Monday morning, you would hear that the guys played golf over the weekend. And on the golf course, they discussed this and they resolved this issue. So, it's a very subtle sort of thing. It's not that we are excluded but, in a way, we are. It does have that implication I don't think it was necessarily intended to but if you're not part of it, then you look on; your voice can't be heard.

The phenomenon provides evidence that gender disparities are widening to an alarming degree as individuals advance in their respective industries. Simmonds (2009) discusses the topic of the curse of good girls, which refers to girls who are brought up to be polite and modest. According to Simmonds, the curse can erect a psychological glass ceiling that begins its destructive sprawl in girlhood and extends across the female lifespan. This ceiling stunts

the growth of skills and habits that are essential to becoming a powerful woman. “Males at times struggle to report to women; they find it unnatural and I’ve been expected to know my place as a woman, keep quiet and be grateful for the opportunity to sit at the table,” adds Participant 7. Sultana (2010) posits that due to patriarchy men get superior treatment in all circumstances even if there are a few of them. On the other hand, women are always disfavoured, whether they are in the minority or majority.

Participant 2 states that there must be caution in attributing women’s challenges to only the glass ceiling effect:

> If you’re a woman, or if you’re white, or if you’re black, or whatever, it shouldn’t be an excuse that one cannot progress because there are examples of people who have made progress, despite the odds. So, I think a lot of things are on yourself.

Participant 5 contends, on the other hand, that women are pushed to advance and, through experience, learn that authenticity, diversity and originality are important in adjusting to the conditions in which they find themselves. This participant believes that this is the case. She adds:

> I’m now comfortable in being different and not worrying about what being different would mean for my career, challenging conservative people who have a certain way of how things have always been done and what a leader must look like and we accept this.

There are a lot of women who have found success in corporate roles who believe that being feminine and having a professional demeanour are mutually exclusive. Women in positions of authority frequently have the misconception that they need to suppress their femininity and avoid behaving in a too-feminine way, (Wood, 2003).

5.4.3.1 Work-life balance

Gender roles and the ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance are elements that possibly contribute to the glass ceiling in the workplace. Research has demonstrated that women must fulfil two distinct tasks. Kirkton and Greene (2000) agree that working women are required to handle both their professional and domestic responsibilities, which demonstrates an

important and interconnected societal shift. Rosenfeld, Van Buren & Kalleberg (1998) contends that it is commonly believed that women are more accountable than males. Based on the stereotype of the 'ideal housewife', co-workers – both male and female – may regard women who accept promotions as neglecting their maternal responsibilities.

This perception may come from the fact that the 'perfect housewife' does not exist. The maternal wall, on the other hand, may drive men to disregard family leave since they may be regarded as not being totally committed to their dual responsibilities as breadwinners and 'ideal workers', according to Barnett's (2004) research. There appears to be a tension between work and family, which causes practical challenges for women who have small children specifically Ginn.

Despite the existence of a well-developed system for childcare, there is a conflict between work and family. Work-life balance is achieved when an individual's professional and personal lives are in sync, translating to no tension between their work and personal responsibilities and when they can be fully present in both their professional and personal lives (Clark, 2000).

Work-life balance is essential for the development of a successful career (Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, as a result of increased duties in the office, the line that separates one's private life from one's professional life requires a greater degree of self-awareness (Fapohunda, 2014). When working women leave their jobs for the day, their responsibilities do not end there because they return home to a new kind of labour. As a result, the difficulties associated with striking a balance between work and family life are especially difficult for women and will continue to be a primary source of worry for both individuals and organisations (Valcour, 2007).

Participant 14 explains that it is difficult for women since they play a variety of roles and that it can be difficult to explain their extended roles to male counterparts who are not familiar with the issues that they face. Participant 14 says that this makes the situation more complicated. She adds:

> You are a mom and a wife; you must fetch your kids from school and still cook as your husband does not want the maid to cook for him. Men thrive because other people are worried about the kids, about school fees, so they have less on their

> plate and because we are all working now, they are no longer responsible for just bringing in money. Whereas for women, the other responsibilities have not lessened, included that you're expected to give birth.

Remarkably, difficulties in maintaining a healthy work-life balance can have an impact on a woman's ability to grow in her career and, if they are not effectively addressed, can contribute to the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. Women are the primary family caregivers for children and/or the elderly, which further hinders many women's ability to make moves that would boost their chances of moving up the corporate ladder. The participants point out that a woman's duties as a wife require her to care for her partner's parents in any circumstance, including when those parents are ill.

According to Blanch and Pérez (2013), companies that take steps to encourage employees to maintain a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives provide favourable results not only for the individuals but also for the organisations themselves. The implementation of this kind of policy makes it feasible for both men and women to balance the demands of their professional and domestic responsibilities, such as looking after children and maintaining the household.

In a similar vein, men frequently have a leg up on women when it comes to prospects for promotion as a result of evolving privilege, which arises from mentoring and networking. Forret and Dougherty (2004) noted that their female counterparts may not have the benefit to build these skills, which contributes to gender barriers at work. Participant 10 says that she is happy with the decision she made, even though she has seen several of her other co-workers stay in the office until late in the evening because of their positions; "I think I'm quite comfortable with progression. I know a lot of women who have progressed much faster and are younger than me. I've never had to sacrifice family." However, she does believe that she should have been more vocal about time spent at work when her children were much younger. She continues, "I now appreciate and understand the importance of work-life balance and family." According to Elkin (2006), mentoring would be a crucial enabler for the professional success of women and even the expansion of businesses

5.4.4 Theme 4 – Leadership

It has been difficult for women to attain equality in the workplace and they continue to confront obstacles when trying to be recognised for their leadership. Social closure theory, which Murphy (1988) describes as a manner in which social groups create boundaries by employing influence and power to benefit a select few through opportunities and privilege, may be a factor in this hindrance. This theory is described as a way in which power is derived from processes of exclusion.

Theories that support the idea that men are better suited to hold leadership roles make this view more apparent. The research conducted by Schein (1996) highlights the widespread belief that attitudes of the 'think manager – think male" variety continue to be popular in a variety of countries, particularly among male individuals. Participant 1 believes that society plays a role in producing subconscious limiting beliefs for women; she says:

> We are fed a narrative. In most leadership books, leadership is about men. Our role models globally and locally are representative of male and white females. Even when you see women in leadership positions there will always be white women and men. Even when you then sit and talk to black women leaders that have made it, you'll always hear of a struggle.

In addition, the fact that academics have ignored the gender effect may have contributed to the existence of gaps in leadership theory. The socialisation of both females and males is influenced by culture and this influence manifests itself in the form of distinct role expectations and patterns of behaviour that are deemed appropriate for each gender (Bittner, 2011). On the other hand, when women fail to exhibit attributes typically associated with men, they are viewed as not being able to live up to the standards of the management post (Mavin, 2006).

Maccoby (1988) concluded that gender-specific play patterns and ways of exercising peer influence are culturally taught behaviours. As a result, they have an impact on social relationships beginning in preschool and continuing into adolescence. According to Hoyt and Blascovich (2007), positions in top management necessitate both a strong focus on achievement and an ability to remain emotionally stable. Participant 4 points out that if a

woman is trying to climb the corporate ladder or obtain a leadership position, she will run into rules that were designed for men and she will also be told that she does not belong in a position of authority because of her gender. Participant 15 confirms that in her journey as a leader she encountered a female leader's characteristics that she admired. She says:

> I also think at that time, in the late 90s, it was very important for me to see someone of colour who took up space. It's almost like she just demanded her space which I hadn't seen any of that. I admired that because I came from an all-girls school where you were taught to be demure and ladylike and not loud, to just hold it in. Yet, she told it like it was; she was straightforward about what she expected and very clear on her goals.

It is still difficult to achieve gender parity in senior leadership positions around the world. A report published by the World Bank in 2021 found that women only accounted for 38 per cent of human capital wealth on a worldwide scale, while males accounted for 62 per cent of the wealth. The report also emphasised the substantial cost of gender inequality on incomes. In light of this, it is important to highlight the persistent lack of female representation at leadership levels.

Previous studies like McKinsey and Company's women in the workplace report (2022) have uncovered a worrying tendency in which women, as they advance in their careers, tend to grow progressively disillusioned about equal access. This tendency was found to be more prevalent in higher-level positions. Participant 15 opines that the essence of leadership is the ability to effect positive change in one's perception of the world around one and how tasks are carried out. "We need to be transformed in the sense that we need to be seen to be empowering and giving back genuinely. Being able to move things from point A to B," she says.

According to the findings of a study conducted by SHRM (2022), it was discovered that while men are more likely to feel included and feel taken seriously as leaders, women, particularly women of colour, do not experience the same boost when entering leadership roles. Participant 7 posits, "as women who want to change the world at times, we have also missed the point. The women who came before us tried to mimic males by coming in as strong,

arrogant and tough." The participants also noted that gender equality is a societal imperative and not a women's issue as it affects how women are treated as leaders. Participant 7 further states that there is a difference in how men and women lead; women are nurturers and have empathy.

> Women have a broader vision in comparison to men. Women are flexible and easily adaptable. When I started, I would have loved to have a leader who encouraged me on my journey. By nature, we are nurturers and we have the so-called soft skills. For many years now the world is waking up to the fact that so-called soft skills are needed. I feel that a lot of women possess these skills naturally.

Eagly & Carli (2003) found that women are evaluated less favourably compared to males in male-dominated environments. Participant 13 states, "being part of a system that makes you second guess yourself is challenging if you are not strong enough. What I've learnt about that is that women end up leaving a company."

According to Eagly and Karau's (2002) research, the characteristics of women leaders that are still seen as being distinct from those of men are not related to effective leadership. There is a proliferation of gender-specific leadership designations, with the common perception being that female leadership styles are transformational, while male leadership styles are more likely to be transactional (Weyer, 2007). Eagly and Johnson (1990) cite several pieces of research that have concluded that there is a clear divide between how men and women approach leadership.

On the other hand, women are making strides in leadership roles and inspiring others to make an influence through their example. Participant 4 says:

> In my company, I've seen a woman in action, growing and really moving up in the organisation, doing things that one would have thought are not possible within the organisation, in a very short space of time. She actually convinced me that it's possible; it's possible to really own your journey and look at things differently. She literally changed my entire outlook.

According to research conducted by HBR (2013), the refined gender prejudice that exists in corporates and society breaks the learning cycle for women as they progress along their path towards becoming leaders. There is no denying the existence of gender stereotypes, which in turn contribute to the formation of expectations regarding how members of each gender should act while in a position of authority. Previous research such as Wood & Eagly, 2009 also illustrate how in actuality, people of both sexes model their leuadership styles after this behaviour. Women in leadership roles tend to utilise a more transformational style of leadership in contrast to the transactional approach used by males in leadership positions. Men in leadership positions tend to have instrumental features.

Mandell and Pherwani (2003) report that women score higher on the transformational leadership scale. Avolio (2010) suggests that previous research has uncovered a genderless style of leadership – a transformational style – which is highly effective and grasps several interrelated types of behaviours. Participant 9 elucidates that leaders need to "understand they are leading human beings; you have to understand that it's not your way all the time". She further adds that people will use their own talents and experiences in their explorations to deliver so it is important to be quite clear about what are the right principles. "And be grateful when people use their own talents and also be inviting because there is no way that one can't evolve," she says.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that the population has just experienced, Participant 3 argues that the type of leadership required during a pandemic is radically different from that in the past. "We need more relatable leaders, leaders who are empathetic and protective, not just drive people for results without taking into context everything else they are going through," she says. Participant 5 affirms that "to be a leader you need to be able to get buy-in; people must want to follow. And people don't follow a title; they follow the leader. So, when you are authentic, then you can build trust easily."

Furthermore, female leaders are seen to adopt a more democratic and participative style than their male counterparts (Merchant, 2012). Participant 7 states:

> I am realising there's a new breed of female leaders – female leaders who are serious in saying that I will uplift as I move forward. And who doesn't feel the need

to explain themselves or validate themselves in promoting or wanting to promote other females? As long as they are aware that the person, they are supporting has the skills and qualifications to succeed.

According to Omar and Davidson (2001), women in management roles may exhibit feminine leadership behaviours, which suggests that women have a unique style of leadership. This suggests that women have a distinct type of leadership. Participant 5 adds:

> I made a conscious decision that I'm going to be myself and I made a conscious decision that I do not have to be like men. Then I do not have to fit some leadership book of this is what I need to carry myself, I need to behave. So, I believe in that sense that some, by watching, would actually see me as a woman and that I have a different leadership style from men but, in essence, it is me as a person, as an individual and my personality.

When it comes to management or leadership positions, Kanter (1977) says that organisational duties take precedence over gender roles and this is true regardless of the gender of the person serving in the same leadership post. In theory, there is no difference in leadership techniques because leaders are more focused on effectively managing than in social gender roles; there is no difference in leadership approaches. Participant 7 states:

> A lot of women who first came in thought for them to make it, they needed to add his name, they needed to adapt their mannerism, they needed to assimilate themselves so that they survive because the survival of the fittest and then obviously there are those that wanted to be the only ones.

Participant 5 agrees and continues by explaining that one of the most fascinating things she discovered on her path since beginning employment with the organisation in which she is currently employed is that people value talkers. She says:

> Therefore, if you are an introvert, people will assume you are ignorant of the information. People are not going to go out of their way to get your viewpoint if you cannot express yourself, don't talk about it and don't have an opinion on the

matter. Because of this, you would be considered a poor performer purely because you are invisible. If you have a seat at the table, make sure your voice is heard.

Powell (1990) asserts that differences in leadership styles between men and women do not exist and that these differences are nullified when looking at studies as a whole because people of both sexes engage in an equal number of behaviours that are task-oriented and relationship-oriented. However, Participant 7 argues:

> You walk in and you are carrying that kind of expectation and sometimes it can become a burden for a lot of female leaders that not only now you have to prove your capabilities as an individual, you also now carrying an expectation of a whole gender. Because when you are not making it, people will automatically say that's why you don't give women an opportunity because they cannot find the balance. And for me, that's one of one of the key things, actually, that you progress but then there's not enough support to help you to build you up to for us to crack that glass ceiling. Certain tools require certain capabilities and abilities for you to be able to crack that glass ceiling. And I always find that they are not readily available for female leaders. And it becomes even worse if ever you are a black female in South Africa. Let's be real about it.

Participant 11 agrees that as a female leader, one would want to create a cloud of perfection where no failures or negatives come during one's tenure. Meanwhile, males would be comfortable explaining the failures as a part of the natural course. However, for a woman leader, the narrative would be different and perceived as if the woman was not competent enough to prevent failures.

Participant 1 states that when women progress more than their male counterparts, society does not support their journey. "When a woman has progressed and makes a decision, they would be reminded that this is not the office where you make decisions," she says. Participant 11 suggests:

> Our first line of education says that males are the ones who will lead and women will just follow, so it's natural for you to expect that males would be at the helm of leadership. Then the disadvantage for women when they get into senior

leadership roles is that they feel the pressure to work twice or three times as hard to prove their worthiness of being there because the natural disposition is to expect a man to be there. So, you want to make sure that you almost prove your competence in your discipline like that you deserve to be there.

Participant 7 states:

I will talk specifically about where I am currently in, the mining industry, which has been perceived for a long time as a male industry because it's dominated by guys. Even where rows have been made, especially from where we are, you find that the women that have been put in those leadership roles, they still they are not getting the support that, like they deserve. So, you are expected to first prove yourself as a female. They don't care that you have strictly technical expertise; it is an ongoing journey.

These assertions are in line with the findings of Haupt and Fester (2012) who discovered that female co-workers frequently experience behaviour that is both unpleasant and unprofessional from male co-workers.

5.4.5 Theme 5 – Mentorship

It is essential for women who want to climb their company's corporate ladder to have a mentor if they want to reach the highest levels of leadership in their organisation. Mentorship is often referred to as the 'backbone' of professional advancement and is another strategy or avenue that can assist women in breaking the glass ceiling in their fields. According to Wright (2004), mentoring is a connection that is both purposeful and voluntary, and it provides two people with the opportunity to teach and learn from each other. Phillips-Jones (2003) agrees with the statement that a mentoring relationship consists of an experienced individual assisting a less experienced individual in the development of necessary abilities for success.

Participant 16 indicates that she would have benefited from having a mentor because the workplace in which she works is predominately male. She clarifies:

I think, for women, we need to have both genders. A male mentor could probably help you navigate how to work with men in a way that they can easily identify the

> value, the benefits and contributions you can make. At the same time, you need a woman who is going to help you understand who you are, why you see things the way you do and bring context and acceptance of who you truly are. I don't believe you can change that.

Mentorships are essential in organisations because they improve employees' skills and make possibilities available that would not otherwise be available. A female mentee can achieve success when she is guided by an authoritative mentor who possesses credibility and networks. When a male mentor who is a member of 'the boys' club' is involved in the connection, it is more helpful since the mentor has access to networks that have already been created. Without support, many women have difficulty navigating the political landscape of the organisation. According to Kram (1985), the mentee has an unconditionally favourable respect for themselves as a result of the mentor's acceptance and validation. The respondents discussed their experiences working in exclusive corporate environments and agreed that having a mentor was beneficial to their path to becoming a leader.

Participant 2 agrees that having the right mentor can have a great impact on a woman's leadership journey. She explains:

> I had a few managers who were really very supportive in my life and mentors that believed in me and gave me opportunities where maybe I myself have not realised I could do something, and they allowed me to do that. And I think a lot also depends on yourself – if you're willing to learn, if you're willing to work hard and willing to take a challenge. You know, I took some, some challenges that other people would have said, no, that's too difficult. I made a few sacrifices that helped.

Coleman (2010) agrees that having access to a mentor can help mentees benefit and achieve success in both their educational and professional lives and that the advantage and impact can encourage other women and assist them in challenging the status quo and destroying the glass ceiling effect. Participant 7 adds that women continue to have challenges in the workplace and that males have higher access to mentorship in contrast to females. She also notes that mentorship opportunities are more readily available to men. She states:

> The treatment is not spelt out but you will feel it because a male colleague will be coached easily. They can get mentors who will help them to get to the next level. And whereas a female leader or someone who aspires to get to those same levels, wants to take a similar route, wants to get mentors, you want to establish yourself, those opportunities are not coming easily.

Unfortunately, female mentees' career development stagnates more than that of their male counterparts, preventing them from attaining higher leadership and managerial roles (Hatipkarasulu & Roff, 2011).

Conversely, Participant 5 states that she had multiple mentors that were appointed by her company. "I was fortunate that I was part of different mentoring programmes. However, I have not had the opportunity to have a woman mentor, only recently on an informal basis." She also states that she has noticed the value of networking both inside and outside of work. she says:

> I've come to realise the higher you go, networking is what it's about. It does not come naturally to all of us. It's still something I'm learning every day. I have to constantly remind myself to get out of my shell, to mingle, to be available, to be accessible and to be visible. And to talk to people. The value is you learn a lot not only from yourself but the industry. Opening yourself to different avenues.

There is no question regarding the importance of mentorship; nonetheless, Platz & Hyman (2013) emphasises that for the idea of mentorship to be successful, it must possess perceived value, which is about developing and guiding mentees. Participant 3 adds the importance of "having good mentors helps a lot; reporting to someone interested in your development goes a long way. Reporting to somebody who's not threatened by you, who's happy to actually speak about you at the right tables".

Participants agree on the importance and value of mentorship. "It's good to have informal mentors too that I touch base with. When it comes to mentoring race or gender does not matter," states Participant 9. Similar sentiments are echoed by Participant 2:

> I had a few managers that were really supportive in my life and mentors that believed in me and gave me opportunities where maybe I myself may have not realised I could do something and they allowed me to do that.

Ragins and Cotton (1999) reviewed the research that had been carried out on men and women who participated in formal and informal mentoring relationships. According to the findings of their study, mentees receive greater benefits from informal mentors than they do from formal mentors.

Participant 11 concurs:

> Theoretically, one would imagine that as a female having a female mentor would be the thing that assists you on your journey because you guys have probably felt similar challenges when you will be a wife, a mother and in a male-dominated society. How do you do it? What are the tricks and the traits? But at the same time, perhaps having a male mentor would then be of use as well because it gives you a different perspective than what you've lived in. And it gives one insight into how men approach things. So, if one had to choose or had to have a roadmap for their mentorship, perhaps it would be useful to have them both at different times of your life. And then I think once those two journeys have come to an end, you can then have a proper reflective, proper opportunity to reflect as to which one would have served you better.

According to Dickey (1996), it is tough for women to participate in mentoring relationships but it is even more challenging for women of colour. Participant 2 clarifies:

> I think maybe at the beginning of my career, it would have been nice if I could have had a female mentor, maybe somebody that also was young, upcoming, married with children. That could give me some tips on what to do now but right now in my career, it wouldn't matter to me.

Conversely, there are times when the concept does not yield desired results. Participant 6 says:

> I had a mentor maybe 12 years ago and I think I stopped that relationship because I felt that she was too pushy. Looking back at it now, she did not have empathy. It was simply more like go, go, go, go and next.

However, the participant continues to state that she would still consider a mentor, preferably a female mentor. Participant 6 states:

> It is important, especially as a mom, if I want to have a mentor now I would want to have a female mentor who is a mother and unfortunately also black because I think our context and culture is so much different.

The lack of mentorship opportunities has been cited in the scarcity of women and racial minorities in the elite inner circle of C-suites (Boyd, Cintron, & Alexander-Snow, 2010). Participant 15 agrees:

> In all the other places I've been to, I think I was struck by the realisation that there is a huge need for women but it's very rare to find women in senior leadership positions. Especially women who are then able to mentor. Some of us missed out on the mentorship, instead had to go the long roundabout way of getting to where we were. I believe a lot of it had to do with the fact that there was a lack of mentorship.

According to Dipboye (1987), the value of mentoring cannot be overstated, particularly for women who are entering male-dominated environments. Without mentorship, these women would be isolated tokens who would face gender-related impediments to job advancement. Mentoring is of utmost significance for women who pursue professions that are predominately held by males because these women are often relegated to the role of tokens and suffer advancement difficulties that are directly tied to their gender. According to Ragins (1989), it may be more difficult for women in male-dominated occupations to form good mentoring relationships, even though they require a mentor at least as much as their male counterparts and possibly even more.

Participant 1 adds that "most of the time if you get male mentors, they end up being a sponsor". Eby, McManus, Simon, and Russell (2000) and Blake-Beard (2001) find that

mentoring-hindering factors that frustrate female mentees include the perception of sexual innuendo, rumours, overprotection, paternalism, involvement of the direct supervisor, resentment of non-participating peers, perception of formal mentoring programmes as remedial and the prevalence of negative stereotypes of women. Other factors that contribute to this frustration include the perception of formal mentoring.

5.4.6 Theme 6 – Gender wage gap

Connections and similarities between gender equality in society and the workplace exist. As such, the gender wage gap is affected by societal conventions and economic ideals associated with women's differing ideas of the roles that they should play in society. According to Participant 5, maternity leave is one of the costs that women are expected to bear as a result of having children. This is because a pregnant woman is unable to perform the duties associated with her position in a setting that requires her to be operational. She goes on to say that when a woman is pregnant, it is viewed as a problem since it requires her replacement. Because a woman who is pregnant would be absent from work for six months, she would not be considered for promotions or significant projects. Furthermore, by the time she returned to work, she would have likely missed a lot of vital information.

Because they are disproportionately pushed out of the workforce to meet caregiving and other unpaid responsibilities, women often have less job experience than men do. This contributes to the gender gap in the labour force. Participant 10 says that "in our culture, which is comparable to black culture, despite being a top professional person, you are still accountable for the kitchen and you are still responsible for the homework". She argues that even in this day and age, women still shoulder a greater burden than men do. For instance, she states that in her household school administration remains her responsibility.

Techniques were established in postmodernism to deal with instances of sexism. These strategies included preferential recruitment of males over females and lower compensation offers for women who were similarly qualified. Richardson (2003) illustrates that the majority of companies do not recruit, promote, support or help women get the same rights as men and when eventually women reach the top, they encounter prejudice and sexism. This is a problem because females are most likely bound to procreate and need to take time off work.

There are several challenges that women confront when trying to advance their careers. Participant 5 further insists that most companies would disadvantage women on maternity leave in their annual increases since the rise would not be the same for someone who was not working and the increase would be different for someone who was on maternity leave. After giving birth, a woman is required to take a leave of absence, known as maternity leave, from her place of employment. This results in a wage disparity between the sexes since, in most situations, women started at a lower base in terms of their earnings and they just never catch up to the proportions of their male counterparts. She further states that "companies need to allow themselves to level the playing field and make sure that for the same job, women should get the same reward".

Participant 7 states that many companies are currently trying to address the gender wage gap. She adds, "but still you find that now a lot of us are finding ourselves on a bad foot, where we now need to catch up. In catching up, you'll find that you need to then justify why you deserve equality". Apart from explicit decisions to pay women less than men, employers may discriminate in wages when making hiring and salary decisions based on past salary history. This can lead to wage decisions that may have been impacted by the discrimination that follows women from job to job. Consequently, this might be problematic.

Research done in the past has demonstrated that women are less likely to negotiate their salaries than males are. For instance, in research on MBA students that was conducted by Small, Gelfand, Babcock, and Gettman (2007), it was found that 50 per cent of the male students had negotiated a job offer, whereas only one-eighth of the female students had done so. Research investigations conducted on working adults have shown consistent evidence of this overarching tendency. Participant 7 adds that a lot of women do not know their worth when it comes to remuneration or do not know how to articulate their worth. She adds,

> We are so scared when it comes to interviews and you are asked how much, what is your expectation? We will always pitch ourselves lower. Even when we are articulating what we want, it is always followed by a justification. A guy comes in with confidence, sits down and says, listen, I believe that I deserve this.

According to research that was published in 2020 by PwC (2020) on companies that are listed on the JSE, female employees at companies such as Investec and Anglo-American earn at least 15 per cent less than their male counterparts. This is the case with the vast majority of businesses, as can be seen from the reports and analyses of not only these businesses, but also of businesses that are traded on the JSE.

In South Africa, achieving gender equality continues to be hampered by a persistent problem: the pay gap that exists between men and women for the same kinds of work and value. This problem is most prevalent in the medium and top salary groups. Participant 15, a senior leader, commented that bridging the gender wage gap was one of the changes she made in her organisation:

> I believe I've corrected it. There was a massive disparity and also, the reality was a bit of a boys' club. Old white men sort of sitting there paying themselves very well kind of thing. Then you look at some of the very senior females and it was strange to me that they were not compensated adequately.

Participant 3 explains that "men are shockingly amazing negotiators. And they know their worth. And they don't doubt their worth. And they always punch above their weight". She further reveals that she remembers how she and a male colleague were on the same level and she was shocked to learn that when they were hired, the male colleague had negotiated a sign-on bonus and he was still overall earning more than her. She continues, "I just accepted the offer. I never thought it was even possible; it never crossed my mind that I was worth more than this and that I could negotiate. It was a foreign concept."

Equally, Participant 4 believes that the gender wage gap is definitely a reality. Many times throughout her career as she recalls, even when she joined the organisation, she noticed salary disparity based on gender. "But not only in terms of gender but also in terms of race. It is not like it's hidden or subtle that the salary discrepancy is based on gender," she says.

However, companies are doing more to address pay equity. According to a PayScale (2022) report, 66 per cent of surveyed organisations plan to conduct a pay equity analysis based on gender or race as one of their planned initiatives. Participant 8 states that the gender pay gap

exists, especially at the senior level in many companies. “Although companies, including the company that I work for, try to address it, it does still exist,” she says.

5.5 Conclusion

This study provided a comprehensive account of women’s experiences in corporate South Africa. The findings indicate that women continue to face obstacles in the workplace on account of culture, gender and stereotypes. These factors affect how women are perceived by others as well as how they carry themselves in leadership roles. A closer examination of the tiers of the hierarchy demonstrates that women continue to be placed in significantly lower positions than men at senior levels, indicating that the glass ceiling has not been broken.

Patriarchy and sexism are still prevalent in the way business is carried out and they exist in a variety of different ways. When men and women are compared, it is obvious that there is still a significant salary discrepancy. Gender should not be a factor in determining compensation levels, however, the evidence suggests that this is not the case. It appears that women are still unable to advance in their careers due to hurdles that were created by humans. Even after 28 years of democracy, women in South Africa continue to be negatively impacted by sexism which is evident in the gender pay gap.

Chapter 6: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The penultimate chapter discussed a summary of findings of the study concerning the primary research aim and questions including the contribution to the theoretical knowledge. This final chapter provides the limitations of the study and proposes recommendations and considerations for future research to provide better insight and references that would assist in closing the literature gap on the glass ceiling phenomenon.

6.2 Summary

The study sought to answer the question, "What are the lived experiences of women leaders in corporate South Africa regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling phenomenon. During this study, a qualitative research approach was selected as the methodology as the purpose of the study was to explore the views and lived experiences of professional women in corporate South Africa. This study investigated the impact of the glass ceiling on the experiences of female leaders in corporate South Africa through in-depth interviews. It aimed to explore the perspectives of the participants on breaking the glass ceiling and the advantages and disadvantages of doing so, as well as their leadership journeys and lessons learnt. The study focused on the glass ceiling and its impact on senior female managers and executives in South Africa, examining the most significant professional barriers that they encounter. Based on the findings that revealed the persistence of the glass ceiling, the study also shed light on the challenges and biases that women face and acquire through their upbringing.

6.3 Research problem

On paper, South Africa has some of the most stringent laws on gender empowerment, including affirmative action introduced through the Employment Equality Act (1998). Yet, one of the most enduring weak points of corporate SA is the lack of female CEOs in prominent companies. According to a PwC (2020) report, only six per cent of CEOs in JSE-listed companies are women. Invisible barriers still prevent females from reaching high leadership status and stereotypes still exist within the domain once females are involved. This emphasises the need

for women to participate in all spheres of the economy. However, women still find it difficult to climb the corporate ladder due to discrimination and the glass ceiling effect.

Research conducted by Bain (2017) found that women based in South Africa aspire to senior positions even more than men when entering the workforce. However, although women begin their careers motivated to be leaders, they still do not necessarily reach senior positions. Women can be treated and perceived inversely in the working sector in comparison to their male counterparts. A set of barriers that are rooted in societal interpretations such as patriarchy and culture prohibit women from advancing to leadership roles. This emphasises the need for women to participate in all economic sectors.

Discrimination and the glass ceiling effect continue to make it challenging for women to climb the corporate ladder. According to a study by UNU-WIDER (2019), South Africa has exhibited a growing glass ceiling effect since 2007, as evidenced by the significant increase in the gender wage gap at the 90th percentile. This translates to a ceiling that prevents capable and qualified women from obtaining highly compensated top management positions, despite their being more qualified than men.

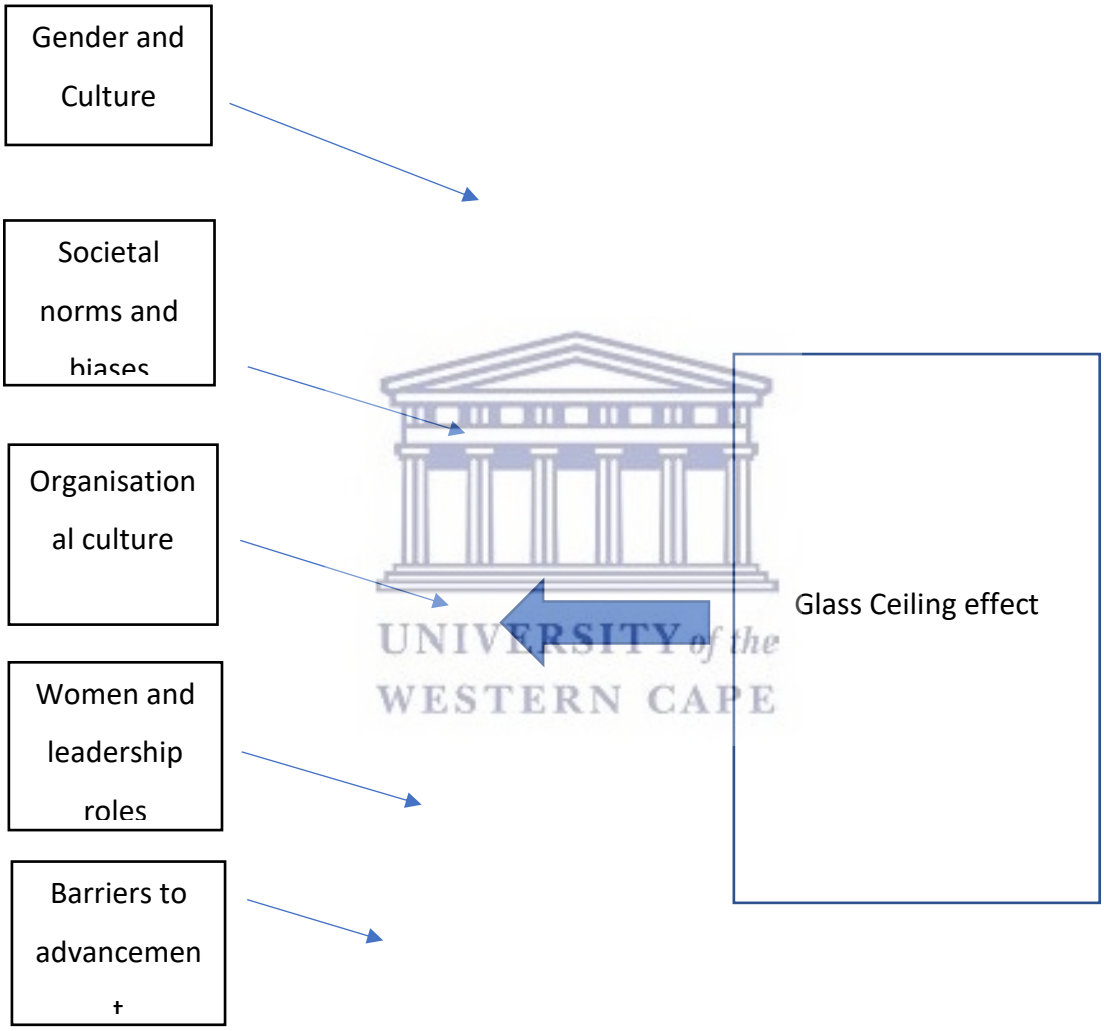
6.4 Conceptual framework

Research has shown that gender disparities exist in the workplace for women. Baxter and Wright (2000) explain that the glass ceiling hypothesis asserts that women face more significant obstacles in obtaining promotion opportunities in workplace hierarchies than their male counterparts.

This study focuses on the impact of the glass ceiling effect on women leaders in corporate South Africa, using in-depth interviews to evaluate their experiences, perspectives on cracking the glass ceiling, and leadership journeys. The topic was chosen due to gaps identified in the literature, such as the lack of scholarly research on gender issues and societal expectations of women leaders. Moreover, most previous studies have relied on quantitative methods, such as the questionnaire-based study by Channar, Abbassi, and Uja (2011) on gender discrimination in the workforce.

By examining the most significant career barriers faced by female senior managers and executives in South Africa, this study sheds light on the challenges they face and the biases they develop and acquire from upbringing. Understanding the glass ceiling effect can aid in determining how to circumvent it, and the study's impact on women's experiences in leadership positions and career progression will enable corporations to formulate inclusive and transformational policies that address gender disparities in the workplace.

Agents of Glass ceiling



6.5 Summary of the conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify barriers that prevent women from achieving leadership positions in the workplace and the effects of these obstacles on their leadership journey. In addition, the study investigated the reasons why relatively few women attain leadership positions due to the biases rooted in patriarchy and culture that are created and

learnt during childhood. The desired outcome was a multifaceted comprehension of the fundamental theories underlying the glass ceiling effect.

It is therefore important to determine whether the study addressed the research questions posed in Chapter 1. This discussion is presented in the following sub-sections:

- Research question 1: What is the meaning of the glass ceiling and is the glass ceiling concept a perception or reality?
- Research question 2: Are women aware of the glass ceiling effect and do they experience it?
- Research question 3: How does gender inequality and stereotypes affect women in business?
- Research question 4: What invisible barriers affect women in their leadership journey?
- Research question 5: What impact do social hierarchy and culture have on women's leadership journeys?

6.6 Implications

Based on the findings of the study and the literature reviewed, hurdles impede women from obtaining leadership roles in the workplace. It would appear that culture and patriarchy are the sources of the obstacles that keep women from rising the ranks to positions of authority. The objective of presenting and analysing the experiences that participants had with the glass ceiling was to bring attention to the phenomenon's causes and the extent of its prevalence in corporate South Africa.

The participants' responses indicated that they typically and largely shared the notion that the effect of the glass ceiling precludes women from ascending to high management positions. The participants used the expression 'an invisible barrier' to describe the glass ceiling and they were certain that it continues to exist. When conceiving the effects, the gender roles of women and the existence of the glass ceiling were key considerations regardless of the industry.

According to the findings of the study, the majority of nations are not yet successful in the process of emancipating women and cultural and societal conceptions continue to be

obstacles to women's growth. One of the obstacles that the participants in the study had to confront on their path to leadership was the glass ceiling effect. The majority of the participants said that their gender played a role in determining their responsibilities in society as well as in the workplace. They felt that there were a variety of obstacles that stood in the way of their achieving their goals and that these obstacles extended over a wide geographic area.

According to the findings of the study, gender stereotypes originate from the gender-based division of labour that is characteristic of a society. This division of labour is related to differences and similarities between the sexes in social behaviour. The participants' justifications were based on their own experiences with stereotypical behaviour in the workplace as well as their approaches to leadership. The data also brought to light a favoured gendered social order, one in which males create jobs specifically for other men. In terms of gender, further supported roles are characterised by patriarchy, which results in stereotypes and gender discrimination. A further observation made by the participants was how females were constantly reminded that this is a man's world and that they needed to be quiet and blend in.

The findings Illustrated the significance of the role that culture, traditional values and social attitudes play in leadership, as well as the fact that these factors cannot be separated from the working environment. It was revealed that the views of society have a big impact on the workplace. Additionally, individuals do not necessarily immediately stop adhering to their conventional ideas when they enter the workforce.

The participants also noted signs of cultural shifts in society, such as the perception that it is becoming increasingly acceptable for women to return to the workforce and make use of external support such as childcare. There was also evidence of cultural change in terms of family obligations, as younger women appeared to anticipate greater equality from their spouses or partners during times of family crises. This is one of the indicators that younger women are driving this expectation.

Organisational culture, which consists of the beliefs and assumptions that are held in common by the members or employees of an organisation, has been identified as a factor that may

function as a barrier to the advancement of women. Industries that are dominated by men have the potential to isolate women, which in turn creates gender-related impediments to the advancement of their careers. A dearth of female role models, mentoring and networking opportunities were recognised as problematic internal connection difficulties within firms. The goal of mentoring relationships is to raise the mentee's knowledge and productivity as well as to boost the mentee's performance in the organisation. Mentoring programmes are considered an important performance intervention by organisations (Kahle-Piasecki, 2011). Even though the majority of participants admitted that they did not have access to formal mentoring, they were aware of the importance of having mentors and the benefits they provided for career advancement.

Regardless of their ages or the fields in which they worked, the vast majority of the female leaders who participated in this study reported feeling excluded from possibilities for social networking at their places of employment. There was also a general agreement that males are more likely to make use of informal networks than females, who very infrequently make use of informal female networks. Women face significant obstacles on their path to becoming credible leaders and they often feel driven to replicate masculine behaviours to express their space and presence in leadership roles in organisations where the boys' network continues to dominate organisational discourse and culture.

The findings suggested that there are unconscious biases and that stereotypes become a burden that women must carry, slowing them down on their quest to become leaders. Additionally, the findings indicated that unconscious biases regarding race and ethnicity exist.

According to the findings of the study, women who juggle the responsibilities of being working professionals and mothers have an uphill battle when it comes to advancing their careers. The findings highlighted the career concessions that women are required to make as a result of the expectations of their households. The findings also indicated that the workplace is not structured to be inclusive for women. Instead, it is an 'either-or' situation, which means that women are forced to choose between being family oriented or being successful in their careers.

When working women leave their jobs for the day, their responsibilities do not end there because they return home to a new kind of labour. As a result, the difficulties associated with striking a balance between work and family responsibilities are especially difficult for women and will continue to be a primary concern for both individuals and businesses. Expectedly, difficulties in maintaining a healthy work-life balance can have an impact on a woman's ability to grow in her career and, if they are not effectively addressed, can contribute to the phenomenon of the glass ceiling.

Generally, women are the primary family caretakers for children and/or the elderly, which makes it even more difficult for many of them to make that shift that would boost their chances of climbing the corporate hierarchy. In a similar vein, men frequently have a leg up on women when it comes to prospects for promotion as a result of evolving privilege, which arises from benefits such as having a mentor or networking. However, female employees are not necessarily afforded the same opportunities to build similar privileges, thus, contributing to the disparity in the workplace.

The findings highlighted that participants found themselves as the only woman in the boardroom and their capabilities were questioned due to their gender. The findings implicated that in male-dominated settings women are more likely to experience a hostile environment, imposter syndrome and have their promotion prospects blocked.

According to the findings of the study, women tend to believe that the weight of the entire female species rests on their shoulders and that they speak for all other women, which adds to the difficulties under which they may already be languishing.

Participants highlighted the opinion that society plays a role in the production of subconscious limiting beliefs for women, that women are fed a narrative about who and what they should be and that society does not support women's journeys when they progress more than their male counterparts do. The idea that men should take charge and women should follow is consistently upheld by society. The socialisation of both females and males is influenced by culture and this influence manifests itself in the form of distinct role assignments and patterns of behaviour that are deemed appropriate for each gender.

The study also revealed that women in leadership positions believe they have to prove their worthiness by working twice or even three times as hard as their male counterparts do to keep up appearances. Women experience pressure to prove that they are capable in their chosen sector because it is more typical to presume that men will occupy leadership roles.

According to the findings of the study, men dominate the workplace and are supported by the patterns of their social networks. This is something that cannot be claimed about women who hold leadership positions because they do not profit from these systems.

It was established that mentorships were essential to address the historical decline of women in leadership positions. It was mentioned that the relationship is more helpful when a male has access to pre-established networks. According to the findings of the study, women who have access to a mentor enjoy a constructive impact on their path to leadership and are better able to navigate potentially hostile corporate environments. The study highlighted the challenges that make it difficult for women to build effective mentoring relationships by revealing the importance of mentoring women in business as well as the lack of support and sponsors for women. The study also indicated the value of mentoring women in business.

According to the findings of the study, women are at a disadvantage on their path to leadership since they have less job experience as a result of time off and other duties for which they are not compensated.

The findings also demonstrated that women are less likely than men to negotiate their salaries. This was partly because women did not want to upset the status quo and instead accepted offers at face value. This contributed to the gender wage gap because men are more likely to negotiate their compensation.

6.7 Recommendations for further research

Regarding the influence of the glass ceiling on the South African corporate sector, several recommendations have been suggested.

The research was only done in the private sector and it was carried out in four different provinces across the country. In addition to this, participants were chosen from a specific subset of the population. The results of the study might apply to the entirety of the nation if

they are interpreted in the right way. Because of the constraints that the location of this study imposed, it may be beneficial to investigate other places in South Africa that are making headway in expanding their particular industries.

Additional research might end up providing a better understanding of the impact known as the glass ceiling. This is because different parts of the country may have varying cultures and points of view on the appropriate roles for women in the workplace.

Because this was a phenomenological study, the answers of the individuals who took part in the research provided a step towards appreciating the significance of societal change and the circumstances in which it might be necessary. Change on a social level is necessary for there to be change and the participants agreed that while progress is being made, it is being made at a pace slower than a snail's. According to the participants, achieving equality in terms of chances is still a difficulty in South Africa, even though equality laws were launched in the early 1990s in the country. However, it appears that these laws have had little effect.

Women need to stop undervaluing their education and experience in the workplace and become more proactive in their professional pursuits. Those who have been successful in their endeavours have a responsibility to contribute to the movement towards social change by assisting other women. According to the findings of this study, all women should 'pay it forward' to motivate the generations who come after them and bring about social change.

All of the participants believed that there had been a discernible but gradual rise in the number of women who achieve executive-level jobs. It is possible that doing a comparable investigation in other places will prove to be both prudent and useful. The findings of the study can serve as a basis for further investigation into the reasons behind the continued under-representation of women in positions of authority and the pervasiveness of the glass ceiling.

The method in which society raises its boys and girls is an issue that needs to be addressed as unconscious biases have a significant influence on the obstacles that women face in their career paths. The findings also demonstrated that society has a long way to go before it can perceive women in leadership roles in the same way that it views males in those positions.

The majority of women were allowed to demonstrate their worth as a result of a random incident rather than a calculated and carefully planned advancement. Some women were able to further their careers by switching from working for one employer to another that was more open to giving women opportunities. There is a chance to collect new data through studies that are comparable to the ones that have already been done. The information that was acquired might be utilised to better identify the factors, such as the obvious salary disparity between men and women, that inhibit career growth.

Metrics should be monitored and analysed by organisations to discover gaps in their leadership pipeline and assess their progress towards goals. Women could acquire the skills necessary for negotiation which would put them in a position to negotiate for better compensation and help close the wage gap between men and women.

Further study in both the commercial and public sectors of South Africa could offer a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of women's leadership journeys in the region if it were conducted there.

Given the importance of mentoring in assisting women to ascend to higher levels of an organisation, formal mentoring programmes should be implemented for the career development of all employees. Through providing access to a mentor, organisations can be of assistance to women to achieve success in both their educational and professional lives. This can help women circumvent the influence of the glass ceiling and can have positive benefits and impacts for women.

To achieve more parity, organisations need to cultivate a culture that supports and promotes women taking on leadership roles. Because of this, it may be necessary for businesses to provide all of their workers with opportunities for mentorship, professional networking and professional growth. Changing cultural features could help break the glass ceiling in the workplace and in society.

To accommodate the growing need for employees of all genders to achieve a healthy work-life balance and to ensure that traditional working arrangements are not viewed as the only path to career advancement, organisations should think about making greater efforts to change the male-dominated internal culture. To promote greater gender equality in the

workplace, these organisations should recognise that traditional working arrangements, which may disadvantage women, should not be the sole path to career advancement. The implementation of flexible working hour policies may help to mitigate this issue.

Organisations should consider implementing sensitivity training to foster a culture of gender-blindness and promote unity in the workplace. Such training can help combat biases and prejudices, resulting in long-term benefits for the organisation.

The gaps in leadership theory that may have been caused by researchers' ignorance of the gender effect can be addressed and it is possible that these gaps can be bridged in the women's leadership discipline if the learnings from that ignorance were taken and applied.

It would be helpful to perform a quantitative study, utilising questionnaires with themes that are comparable to this study, to acquire a higher level of participation. A more substantial response and a more comprehensive demographic analysis might be obtained through the conduct of quantitative research.

Organisations are urged to examine their transformation policies to guarantee inclusivity. In order to promote an accepting workplace for female employees, interventions are required. As part of the company's transformation effort, policies and practices that perpetuate or support unequal outcomes should be eliminated. To accommodate women who may have multiple responsibilities, measures such as remote work or flexible policies should be developed as they promote a balance between family and professional life.

Succession planning strategies should be implemented by organisations, which actively counter gender stereotypes and promote gender parity when assessing individual competencies and determining professional goals.

6.8 Limitations of the study

This study had limitations. The research investigated the phenomenon of the glass ceiling in South African corporations located in four different provinces. Because of this, it is impossible to extrapolate the conclusions of the study beyond the scope of the four provinces. Due to the limited size of the study's sample, its findings cannot be extrapolated to apply to the rest of the population or any other specific companies in South Africa because they do not

accurately reflect the population as a whole. The researcher chose to utilise the convenience sample approach, which enabled her to select individuals who were readily available to supply the necessary information quickly and effectively but who did not necessarily reflect all women leaders in South Africa.

Utilising online platforms to conduct interviews may have changed the dynamics of live interactions. Taking into consideration that qualitative research is based on participants being tasked with having in-depth and at times personal matters that may not come through with an online medium, certain cues and signals may have been missed by the researcher due to the channel used. However, researchers who have evaluated face-to-face versus online video conferencing interviews report no difference in interview quality (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013).

6.9 Concluding remarks

Several recommendations on the glass ceiling effect in the South African corporate sector are made. The research was limited to the private sector and was conducted in four of the country's provinces. Additionally, the participants were selected from a narrow demographic group. As a result of the limitations imposed by geography on this study, it could be useful to investigate other provinces in South Africa that are making progress in expanding their respective sectors. The additional research may provide a better understanding of the glass ceiling effect. This is because different regions of the country may have varying cultures and perspectives on the roles that women should play in business. Because this was a phenomenological study, the responses of the people who participated in the research provided a step towards comprehending the importance of social change and the contexts in which change was necessary.

This study on challenges faced by women in their efforts to become leaders in the South African corporate sector has made important contributions to knowledge. The study revealed that despite advanced employment equity legislation, women are still under-represented in top leadership positions due to societal, cultural, and organisational factors. The study further identified culture and patriarchy as the sources of the obstacles that limit women's advancement. The study's findings contribute to future research on women's leadership and gender transformation within organisations. The study's recommendations on mentoring and

networking initiatives for aspiring female leaders can also inform policy and practice. However, the study was limited to a narrow demographic group and only covered four provinces in South Africa. Further research in different regions of the country can provide a better understanding of the glass ceiling effect and the importance of social change. The study confirmed that the glass ceiling is reality and not illusion and there is some critical work that must still be implemented at both personal and organisational level.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participation Invitation

The glass ceiling effect in South African companies: an illusion or reality

Dear Prospective Participant

"You are being invited to take part in a research project titled "The glass ceiling effect in South African companies: an illusion or reality.

The researcher will need about an hour of your time for an interview to collect information on your leadership journey and barriers that may have impacted your journey in reaching top management.

Currently no recognisable risks are associated with participation beyond those of regular everyday life. Regardless of how you choose to respond, your information will be kept private and anonymously. Answers are confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of the study team.

You are welcome to discuss this project with others if you wish before you make your decision. Please contact thulimbuli612@gmail.com if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like additional information about the study.

I am doing a PhD in Management and would like to invite you to take part in a research project titled "The glass ceiling effect in South African companies: an illusion or reality.

Purpose of the research

A Bain and Company (2017) research found that women face challenges on the pursuit of leadership in South African business environment. The findings also highlighted that women have more obstacles to becoming senior managers than men even though

women tend to be aspirational and confident about making it to the executive level, only a minority actually make it.

The study aims to examine the body of literature through deciphering the concept of glass ceiling in South African companies by evaluating the experiences of women leaders and the impact of the phenomenon.

The goal of this study is to analyse the impact of glass ceiling on South African females. According to the US Department of Labour's definition (1991) the ceiling encompasses artificial barriers supported by organisational prejudices that stand in the way of capable individuals reach organisational apex.

The objectives are:

- To investigate the experiences of South African women in leadership position with the glass ceiling concept
- To determine the tools that aspiring females can utilise to break through the ceiling
- To explore generic barriers to career advancement for women
- To determine South African women's leadership journey and their experience within corporate sector

The project will be conducted in 2022 and will need an hour of your time during this research period.

Selection Criteria

You have been selected because you are a woman in business in a management role and your insights and experience will be valuable in this project. The project focuses on women in leadership positions for companies that are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE).

According to Stats SA (2020), women only account for 29 per cent of management roles in corporate South Africa, and as a woman in a leadership position you are ideal to providing personal/ lived experience of whether the phenomenon of glass ceiling really exists or whether it is an illusion.

This study will utilise the qualitative methodology to collect primary data through in-depth open-ended semi-structured interviews with 17 female business leaders from different industries and sizes. The only prerequisite is that you have a tertiary qualification and management experience. The project will be conducted in the year 2022 and will require one hour of your time during this period.

Participating in this research is completely voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time. You will be provided with an information sheet with a request to sign a consent form granting permission for participation. Also note that you do not have to give a reason for withdrawing.

Participation Process

You will be required to attend a semi-structured interview online for an hour. While there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will assist corporates in formulating inclusive and transformational policies that will address gender disparity at the workplace.

Confidentiality

All information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. As an individual you will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. You will be given a copy of the information sheet and, if appropriate, a signed consent form to keep.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Date: February 2022

This is an interview on the glass ceiling phenomenon, and we would like to elicit your opinions on whether the effect exists, or it is an illusion. The results of the interviews will be collated anonymously.

Section 1:

Personal Information

Name and Surname	
Age	
Qualifications	
Province	

Background Information

1. What is your level of education and your present role in the organisation?
2. How long have you been in this role and what management level is your position?
3. Please share your leadership journey thus far.
4. What is your understanding of the glass ceiling effect and how has it affected you or others in their careers?
5. What factors have assisted/hindered you to climb the career ladder?
6. What challenges have you faced in your journey to become a leader? Were these specific to you being a woman leader, if so how?
7. What are the qualities and personality traits needed to be a leader?
8. What advice do you have for aspiring women business leaders?

9. What is the one thing you would change in your career journey as a woman?
10. How would you compare your journey to your male counterparts?

Section 2: Leadership

1. How would you define successful leadership?
2. In your opinion what qualities does your organisation look for in leaders?
3. How does the organisational culture facilitate/hinder your leadership journey?
4. Is there a particular leader that you admire and why?
5. Have you ever had a mentor? Did/ Would it matter whether they were males or females?
6. How do you network and what is the value of networking?
7. What skills would you say aids in gaining influence at your organisation? Are they similar for males and females?
8. Is leadership gender neutral or is there a difference between male/female leadership styles?
9. What characteristics do you possess as a woman that make you an effective leader?
10. Does being a woman influence how you lead?
11. Have you ever experienced or witness gender wage gap? Please elaborate.
12. Why are women in minority in senior management roles? How could this be improved?
13. Are there any additional pressures on women in the workplace e.g. household expectations?
14. What biases or stereotypes have you encountered in your position? Has anyone questioned your authority based on your gender?
15. What are your opinions on women leaders being given labels such as Queen Bees, Token Women, Ice Queens etc.?
16. What advice would you give to your younger self as you were starting out on your leadership journey?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences that has not already been covered?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

The glass ceiling effect in South African companies: an illusion or reality

I _____ agree to participate in the research project titled 'the glass ceiling effect in South Africa project with me'.

I have received, read and kept a copy of the information letter. I had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and I have received satisfactory answers. I understand the general purposes, risks and methods of this research.

☐ I consent to participate in the research project.

☐ I consent to the publication of results from this study on the condition that my identity will not be revealed.

☐ I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

☐ I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained for 5 years.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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