Experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments

by

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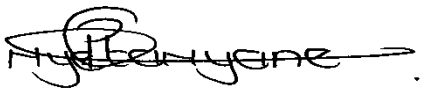
Declaration

I declare that the research study titled “Experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments” is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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Date

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the six best people in my life, who never gave up on me, my Lord and Saviour, Matebello Nyetanyane, Paul Nyetanyane, Dr Freda van der Walt, Nthabiseng Mphore, and Sophie Raputsoane. You have all inspired me to be better, to be more, and to always believe in myself and others always.

Abstract

The promotion and advancement of women in male-dominated environments is a topic and concept that has raised many questions, expectations, public interest, and hope. Even though much has been done to open or create platforms for women to enter and advance in male-dominated environments, there are concerns regarding effective implementation of promotion of women.

This study focused on the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments in a district in South Africa. A feminist study using a qualitative methodology was conducted, and data was gathered through the use of one-on-one personal interviews with women managers who work in male-dominated environments. The women managers that participated in the study revealed that they are still experiencing social and organisational constraints in a country that recently celebrated 21 years of democracy. The findings of the study confirmed that gender inequalities still exist within male-dominated working environments, and this lends substance to the need for a more active and genuine commitment to gender equality and transformation.

Keywords: Male-dominated working environment, gender stereotyping, feminism, women participation, social identity.

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CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Despite increased sensitivity towards gender transformation within South African society, workplaces often do not reflect this sensitivity. According to the Christensen (2014:1), the South African government is leading by example with regard to gender transformation, in that it has more women in leadership positions than most other governments in the world. However, the private sector remains male-dominant in terms of management, and it has made disappointing progress with respect to women advancement in order to ensure women representativeness in management positions. Hence, the aim of this study is to explore the work situations of women managers, and thus their experiences in male-dominated working environments, in order to understand why problems are still experienced with regard to gender equality and women representativeness in managerial positions in a country which recently celebrated 22 years of democracy.

Although women were originally excluded by law from formal work, the situation began to change in the early 1960s, when feminism emerged, which transformed society‟s view regarding women in the workplace (Murray & Peetz, 2009:3). Furthermore, with the adoption of South Africa‟s first democratic constitution in 1996, followed by various labour-legislation directives, visibility of women in the workplace has increased substantially (Barker, 2015:12). Apart from legislative changes, women themselves have decided to move into the workplace, for various reasons, such as the need for financial stability, skills acquisition, and technological advancement (Murray & Peetz, 2009:3). Nevertheless, the issue of under-representation of women remains problematic, particularly at managerial level (Ferrante, 2013:258).

Research has shown that the dynamics that exist in male-dominated working environments differ substantially from those that exist in more mixed-gender environments or women-dominated environments (Damaske, 2011:409). In male-dominated working environments, women are usually more vulnerable than men, and, as such, they experience more gender oppression and discrimination (Damaske, 2011:409). Men often have more resources, privilege, and definitional power in male-dominated industries, which enforces discriminatory practices, policies and ideologies (Damaske, 2011:409). Thus, a male-dominated organisational culture would seem to shape the experiences of women in management.

1.2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH STUDIES

Although previous research studies have investigated managerial women in the context of the workplace, sufficient research investigating the experiences of women, particularly in male-dominated working environments, has not been conducted. Martin (2013:vii) conducted a study into the experiences of women in male-dominated professions in South Africa. The findings of the study suggest that women working in male-dominated professions are experiencing challenges such as discrimination and bias, physical and health-related difficulties, negative emotions, a lack of real transformation, and work-life balance. The current study will also explore, among other things, the challenges that women are experiencing, but in the context of male-dominated working environments, rather than in male-dominated professions, as such.

Singh (2012:1) conducted a study of managerial women in a male-dominated working environment in South Africa (i.e. working with earthmoving equipment), with specific emphasis on stress management through self-awareness and reflection. She found that women face unique challenges and stressors, which act as barriers to women advancement (Singh, 2012:v). She postulates that various leadership tools, such as coaching, can assist women to equip

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themselves with growing self-awareness and self-knowledge, which, in turn, will assist them in dealing with stressors (Singh, 2012:v). Although cognisance is taken of her research findings, the emphasis of the current study is on understanding the experiences of women in managerial positions in male-dominated working environments. Thus, women‟s experiences will be viewed from a broader perspective, rather than focusing on stress management alone in one type of male-dominated industry.

From the above discussion of previous research findings, one may conclude that women working in male-dominated working environments have different experiences from women working in diverse or women-dominated working environments. Furthermore, the experiences that women are exposed to in these working environments are often challenging and stressful, which may prevent them from advancing to managerial and executive levels. These challenges and barriers that women experience may cause them to voluntarily exit organisations, which may exacerbate the current problem of under-representation of women at managerial and executive levels.

There has been much debate regarding women voluntarily leaving workplaces. Although full-time parenting was initially offered as the main reason women leave full-time employment, later research suggests that women often leave their current organisations to seek other career opportunities or self-employment (Dunn-Jensen & Stroh, 2007:17). Valerio (2009:15) concurs, asserting that women voluntarily exit large organisations to start their own businesses, as entrepreneurship allows them the needed flexibility and freedom. Thus, women may potentially leave formal employment or a particular organisation because of the organisational culture, which may result in there being fewer women available to fill managerial positions. This implies that organisations need to proactively plan the careers of women, and to ensure that women are emotionally connected to an organisation, so as to prevent them from voluntarily exiting an organisation. Voluntary exits from organisations can be costly to organisations, and they can hinder gender transformation.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although women have previously been investigated in the work context of South Africa, there seems to be a need to broaden the existing research. The aim of this study is to explore women managers‟ experiences in male-dominated workplaces from a feminist perspective. This study will have theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, the study will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning human resource management, as it will advance current knowledge regarding women participation and advancement in male-dominated working environments. Furthermore, the findings of the study will be valuable to organisations when formulating human resource (HR) strategies and policies regarding women participation, advancement and retention, particularly at managerial level. In addition, it will allow HR professionals to formulate appropriate interventions, in order to ensure that women do not voluntarily exit organisations, but progress to managerial positions, so as to ensure gender equality and transformation, which are reflective of the values of a democratic society.

1.4 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.4.1 Gender

Although the concepts of gender and sex are often used interchangeably, a clear distinction can be drawn between them. Sex is regarded as “a biological distinction determined by primary sex characteristics or the anatomical traits essential to reproduction” (Ferrante, 2013:245), thus men and women. Gender is understood as the socially constructed patterning of masculinity and femininity and of the relationship between men and women, and is thus the product of collective acts of human beings, which are not a natural outgrowth of biological imperatives (Irefin, Ifah & Bwala, 2012:16). Furthermore, gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics and likely behaviours of both men and

women (Irefin et al., 2012:16). Gender is thus culturally conceived and learned ideals about the characteristics of men and women (Ferrante, 2013:247).

1.4.2 Male-dominated working environment

A working environment is a location where a task, activity, or work is carried out (Business Dictionary, 2015). When relating it to a place of occupation, the work environment involves the physical or geographical location and immediate surroundings of the workplace, such as an office building. A male-dominated working environment is regarded as a place where men occupy the majority of occupations in a particular workplace.

1.4.3 Manager

According to Cieślińska (2007:1), a manager can be described as an individual who executes managerial functions in an organisation, such as organising, planning, motivating, and supervising. A manager"s job exclusively involves the functions of management, which are generally referred to as planning, organising, leading, and controlling, which are distinctive from the functions of finance and accounting, and marketing, and other business functions (Hissom, 2009:4). Thus a manager may be regarded as a person who is responsible for the realisation of the management process (Cieślińska, 2007:2).

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study will be conducted within the theoretical framework of feminist theory. This theory attempts to provide a perspective in order to understand human behaviour in the social environment by centring on women and issues that women face in contemporary society (Lay & Daley, 2007:49). Ferrante (2013:262) asserts that feminism advocates equal opportunities for men and women. Thus, in order to understand the experiences of women managers in

male-dominated working environments, it seems appropriate to interpret the results from a feminist perspective.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1.1 represents the conceptual framework of the study, which corresponds with the theoretical framework, which was presented in section 1.5.

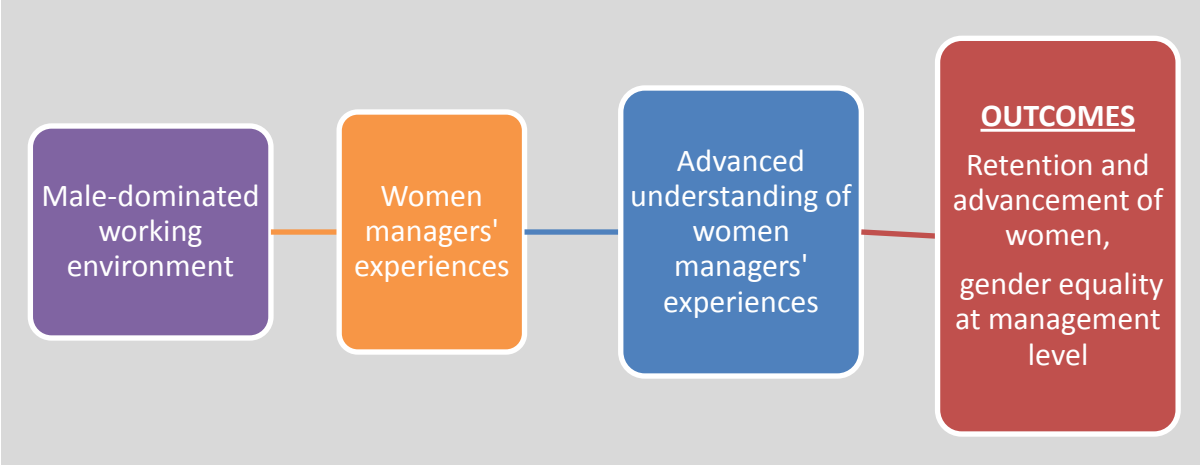

Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of the study

As mentioned in section 1.2, male-dominated working environments differ from women-dominated or mixed-gender working environments. The aim of this study is to explore the work experiences of women managers working within male-dominated working environments. Understanding the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments will assist organisations when formulating HR strategies and policies regarding women participation, advancement and retention, particularly at management level. In addition, understanding the work experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments will assist organisations to promote gender equality at

managerial levels, and to empower women, which is still problematic, but which is necessary in a democratic society such as that of South Africa.

1.7 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Most sectors in South Africa remain male-dominated. Despite various national and international interventions, women remain grossly under-represented at managerial levels, particularly in male-dominated working environments. Previous studies investigating women managers in male-dominated working environments have confirmed that the experiences of women managers are different from those of their male counterparts. Furthermore, women managers and executives continue to feel isolated, mostly because they do not fit into male-dominated working environments, or because they "lack social networking and relationships that are critical to thriving in a leadership capacity" (Cormier, 2007:264).

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.8.1 Main research question

How do women managers experience working in male-dominated working environments, and how can these experiences be interpreted from a feminist perspective?

1.8.2 Secondary research questions

The main research question can be divided into the following secondary research questions:

1. How do women managers experience social dynamics in male-dominated working environments?

2. How do women managers experience organisational dynamics in male-dominated working environments?
3. How do women managers experience advancement opportunities in male-dominated working environments?
4. What are the challenges that women managers experience in male-dominated working environments?
5. What recommendations can be made to change the male-dominated working environment with the view to create a conducive environment for gender equality and transformation?

1.9 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.9.1 Main research objective

The main research objective of this study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of women managers" experiences in male-dominated working environments.

1.9.2 Secondary research objectives

In order to achieve the main objective stated above, the secondary objectives of the study will be:

1. To understand how social dynamics shape women managers" experiences in male-dominated working environments;
2. To understand how organisational dynamics shape women managers" experiences in male-dominated working environments;
3. To explore how women managers experience advancement opportunities in male-dominated working environments;
4. To gain insight into the challenges that women managers are facing in male-dominated working environments; and

5. To provide recommendations on how to change male-dominated working environments, so as to develop an environment that will be supportive of gender equality and transformation.

1.10 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

In chapter 1, the research problem and objectives were discussed. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study were also presented. In chapter 2, a literature review of feminist theory will be presented, the legislative framework applicable to women in the workplace will be discussed, and a literature review of women in the workplace will be presented. Chapter 3 consists of a description and explanation of the research methodology which was employed in the research project. In this chapter, various topics are discussed, including the research design employed in the study, as well as the data-collection methods and procedures and the statistical methods used to analyse the data. In chapter 4, the findings of the study are presented. Chapter 5 consists of a discussion and interpretation of the findings. In addition, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made based on the findings of the research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 1, an overview of the research study was presented. From the information presented in chapter 1, it is evident that the study investigates the work experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments from a feminist perspective. Therefore, chapter 2 will commence with an exposition of feminism and feminist theory, after which the legislative framework applicable to women in the workplace will be discussed. Both international and national directives guiding gender equality will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of women participation in the workplace, women career development, and women managers.

2.2 FEMINISM AND FEMINIST THEORY

Feminism is defined as “(a) the principle that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men, and (b) the movement to win such rights for women” (Webster's New World Dictionary of the English Language, 1978:514). Inglis and Thorpe (2012:235) define feminism as a movement “which takes as its objectives the challenging of what it sees as the oppression of women by men, and widespread sexual and gender inequalities”. Irefin et al. (2012:7) explain that “feminism” is an umbrella term for a range of views about injustices against women.

One of the most important works on feminism ever written is a book by Simone de Beauvoir titled *The Second Sex* (cited in Garvey & Stangroom, 2012:328). In her book, she asserts that woman is the "Other" in relation to man, and she argues that woman "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (De Beauvoir, cited in Garvey & Stangroom, 2012:329).

Feminist theory, although highly diverse, is used as a lens through which to explore the complexities of women"s (and men"s) lives (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008:84). The theory made significant strides in the nineteenth century, with the elimination of gender discrimination and the promotion of equal rights in the workplace (Mack-Canty, 2004:159). In this "first wave" of feminism, pioneers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) protested against conditions of unequal and unfair treatment of women by men (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012:235). In the mid-1800s, the term "feminism" was commonly used to refer to "the qualities of females" (Irefin et al., 2012:7). It was not until after the First International Women"s Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term was used regularly in English to refer to a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women (Irefin et al., 2012:7).

Mack-Canty (2004:158) explains that "first-wave feminism" was followed by "second-wave feminism" (1960s–1970s), during which women of colour, lesbians, and women from various countries claimed that their "social locations provided them with different vantage points and different conceptions of themselves other than those being articulated by white, middle-class feminists". During this "second wave" of feminism, matters that were previously considered private were now promoted as matters of public concern, such as the matter of women doing unpaid labour for men, under the guise of "homework" (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012:236).

Third-wave feminism emerged in the late 1980s, and contested dualistic thinking (Mark-Canty, 2004:159). Inglis and Thorpe (2012:236) assert that the third wave of feminism has "not found a clear identity yet", since younger feminists were brought up in a time when society was influenced by feminism, for example in the form of gender equality labour legislation. Fourth-wave feminism developed in the twenty-first century, where the focus has been female spirituality (Wrye, 2009:185). Within feminist theory, there are various sub-theories, such as "liberal feminism", "socialist feminism", "radical feminism", "postmodern feminism", "poststructuralist feminism", and "ecofeminism" (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008:84).

Liberal feminism originated during the first wave of feminism, and is rooted in nineteenth-century liberal political theory, "which envisions a good or just society as one allowing *all people* to exercise autonomy and fulfill themselves through a system of individual rights, based on a conception of abstract individualism independent of social context" (Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2007:81). Liberal feminists believe that females have restricted social roles and limited opportunities (Peacock, 2013:27). Furthermore, all people are created equal and deserve equal rights. The focus of liberal feminism is issues such as women's political and economic rights, the pursuit of equality in the workplace, and the promotion of certain cultural changes (e.g. legislation to enhance a culture of mutual respect in the workplace) (Cornell, cited in Inglis & Thorpe, 2012:239).

Radical feminism emerged in the 1960s, when women became increasingly dissatisfied with the conservative trends in liberal feminism (Calás et al., 2007:83). Radical feminism envisions "a new social order where women are not subordinated to men, proposing alternative and often separatist, social, political, economic, and cultural arrangements that challenge the structural conditions of a male dominated society" (Calás et al., 2007:84). Thus, radical feminists believe that society must be changed at its core in order to dissolve patriarchy, and that mere passing of legislation is not sufficient (Daly, 2013:1). Furthermore, the domination of women is the oldest and worst kind of oppression in the world, because of male dominance or patriarchy (Calás et al., 2007:84). Thus, radical

feminists want to free both men and women from the rigid gender roles that society has imposed upon them (Daly, 2013:1).

Socialist feminism focuses specifically on gender, race, and class, which all contribute to the creation of inequality and exploitation of females (Gordon, 2013:2). Socialist feminists expand on Marx"s idea of exploitation, asserting that some have benefited from the labour of others (Gordon, 2013:2). They believe that there is a direct link between class structure and the oppression of women (Gordon, 2013:2). Thus, women are vulnerable in a capitalist society, because of the capitalist system, existing inequalities, and division of labour in terms of the class system (Peacock, 2013:27).

Postmodern feminists question concepts of positive knowledge and identity (Irefin et al., 2012:14). They engage in intersections of complex social relations, arguing that knowledge forms power relations in organisations, and that this naturalises the exclusion of certain groups from organisations, such as women, minority groups, and the elderly (Irefin et al., 2012:14). According to St. Pierre (2000: 483), in order to question the taken-for-granted ways in which we “word the world”, post-structuralist analysis relies in part on the tenets of competing discourses, the non-transparency of language, Foucault (1977) notions of social constructed power relations, and the nature of knowledge, which is always partial and in flux. Postmodern feminists emphasise the construction of human meaning through experiences.

According to Shiva (2013:2), ecofeminists believe that patriarchy and male domination are harmful to women as well as the environment, and that there is a link between a male"s desire to dominate unruly women and wilderness (Shiva, 2013:2). Ecofeminists believe that women have a central role to play in preserving nature, because women understand nature, and are one with it (Shiva, 2013:2). They believe that there is a deep connection that men cannot understand between the Earth and women, hence terms such as “Mother Nature” and “Mother Earth” (Shiva, 2013:2). According to Hobgood-Oster (2002:1),

ecofeminism asserts that all forms of oppressive behaviours are interconnected, and that the structures of oppression must be addressed in their entirety. Oppression of the environment and women by male-controlled power organisations should be examined as a collective, or they will not be challenged fully (Hobgood-Oster, 2002:1).

2.2.1 Concluding remarks

For the purposes of this study, the concept of feminism will be applied to the experiences of women managers in male-dominated organisational cultures, where gender inequality often exists because women hold less power and influence in such environments, which often expose them to gender discrimination and stereotyping. Various feminist sub-theories will be employed by this study. For example, liberal feminism will be employed, as the study focuses specifically on the absence of women in powerful positions where decisions are made (i.e. managerial positions), such as those which exist in a male-dominated working environment. Within these working environments, power-structured relationships exist, and it is assumed that females are mainly controlled by males. Furthermore, the focus of this study is specifically the experiences of women, and how women create meaning from the power relationships which exist in male-dominated working environments, which draws from post-structural feminism.

2.3 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK APPLICABLE TO WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

The legislative framework with regard to the rights of women in the workplace has a long history of struggle associated with it. Because of the way women have been treated in the past in terms of social perceptions, including their role in the home, in public, and in the workplace, they were often not allowed to form part of the economically active population of South Africa.

One of the first initiatives of the democratic government of South Africa was to develop a legislative framework in order to address and correct all the past injustices against women and other previously disadvantaged individuals. The South African government has made great strides in this regard through the implementation of legislative and policy frameworks for the advancement of gender equality and women empowerment. The following are examples of such frameworks: the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (SA, 1996b), the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Act 4 of 2000 (SA, 2000), the Employment Equity Act, Act 55 of 1998 (SA, 1998), and the South African National Policy Framework for Women"s Empowerment and Gender Equality, Notice 107 of 2012 (SA, 2012:3). These frameworks have been developed in line with international directives regarding gender equality and gender discrimination. In the following section, the most prominent national and international directives addressing and redefining the place of women in South African society and in the workplace will be discussed.

2.3.1 International directives regarding women and work

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN) have been two of the most prominent international organisations to host conventions with all heads of states or their delegates to discuss and develop agreements that seek to empower, promote, and protect women in society and the workplace. The following conventions applicable to women and work will be discussed: the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention 100 of 1951, the ILO Convention 111 of 1958, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, and the Decent Work Agenda of 2009.

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2.3.1.1 The ILO Convention 100 of 1951

The ILO Convention 100 of 1951 was introduced with the intention to address the salary gaps for the same work done by both men and women. Article 2 reads as follows (ILO, 1951:1):

1. Each Member shall, by means appropriate to the methods in operation for determining rates of remuneration, promote and, in so far as is consistent with such methods, ensure the application to all workers of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.

2. This principle may be applied by means of --

(a) national laws or regulations;
(b) legally established or recognised machinery for wage determination;
(c) collective agreements between employers and workers; or
(d) a combination of these various means.

Although South Africa has made great strides in addressing salary gaps between men and women, it seems that women still earn less than men for similar work. In a recent article by Burmeister (2015:1), it is stated that although increased gender equality has been achieved in South African workplaces, the gender pay gap has increased from 33% in 2009 to 38% in 2014. Valerio (2009:15) emphasises the importance of equal pay, by stating that the effects of pay differentials can lead to subtle “psychological put-down”, which contributes to high labour turnover and the exodus of women from large organisations.

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2.3.1.2 The ILO Convention 111 of 1958

The ILO Convention 111 was formulated in 1958, and Article 1 of the convention defines discrimination as including:

(a) any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation;

(b) such other distinction, exclusion or preference which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation as may be determined by the Member concerned after consultation with representative employers" and workers" organisations, where such exist, and with other appropriate bodies (ILO, 1958:2).

Thus, the purpose of Convention 111 was to create a culture within national governments to hold employers accountable for the fair treatment of employees, regardless of gender, in all industries. Although the South African government has made significant strides in ensuring fair treatment of employees, by means of various national initiatives and legislation, implementation thereof seems to remain a challenge. Oliphant (2015) reported that the majority of women in South Africa are not benefiting from advances made with respect to gender equality. She reported that South Africa would fail to achieve the targeted 50/50 gender employment ratio by the end of 2015, and that only 77% of women were paid the same salary as men (Oliphant, 2015). Thus, one may conclude that gender equality in South Africa remains problematic, despite the existence of international directives in this regard, which are nearly 60 years old.

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2.3.1.3 The Decent Work Agenda of 2009

According to the ILO, the overall goal of the Decent Work Agenda is to effect positive change in people‟s lives at national and local levels (International Labour Office, 2009:21). The ILO states that the Decent Work Agenda is best implemented through integrated and coordinated policy and institutional interventions that cover the ILO‟s strategic objectives, which are employment creation, social protection, tripartism and social dialogue, and principles and rights (International Labour Office, 2009:21). An intrinsic part of the Decent Work Agenda is that a holistic approach to gender equality should be followed (International Labour Office, 2009:21).

Decent work is “based on the understanding that work is not only a source of income but more importantly a source of personal dignity, family stability, peace in community, and economic growth that expands opportunities for productive jobs and employment” (ILO, 2010:19). As with the matters covered in the previous sections, the South African government has made significant advances in this regard. Despite the efforts that the government has made, South Africa still has high levels of unemployment and a weakened economy, which have led to a growing informal sector, which is characterised by unacceptable working conditions and exploitation (Cohen & Moodley, 2012:334).

2.3.1.4 The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol

Although the ILO has played a significant role in ensuring that women are protected in the workplace, the UN has also played an important part in protecting women from discrimination in the workplace. In 1979, the UN published its Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol. The purpose of the convention (Article 1) was to create a binding agreement that would protect women from being discriminated against on the basis of “any distinction, exclusion or restriction

made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (International Labour Office, 1979:2).

Article 2 of the convention also states that parties "condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women" (International Labour Office, 1979:2). To this end, Article 2 of the convention states that parties undertake:

(a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle;

(b) To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;

(c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;

(d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;

(e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;

(f) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;

(g) To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women (International Labour Office, 1979:2).

One of the aims of international entities such as the UN was and still is the elimination of discrimination against women in the workplace, through conventions such as the one described above. The binding agreements of this convention were created as a guiding tool in protecting women from being discriminated against. The primary objective or principle of the convention is to advocate for equality of both men and women, in national constitutions, as well as in other relevant legislative frameworks that are applicable in the workplace. Secondly, it looks to introduce appropriate legislation that can prohibit any form of discrimination against women, while protecting women‟s rights, to ensure that women are equal to men, and to ensure, through various national tribunals, that women are protected from any act of discrimination. Thirdly, the convention outlines the role in the non-participation in discriminatory behaviour of people against women in societies and in the workplace, and how all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women should be taken. Although this directive was given as long ago as 1979, South Africa only fully embraced this directive with the adoption of its Constitution, in 1996.

2.3.2 National directives regarding women and work

Apart from the international directives given to South Africa, various national directives have been given since the adoption of South Africa‟s Constitution of 1996 (SA, 1996b). Van Niekerk, Christianson, McGregor, Smith and Van Eck (2014:21) assert that the first democratic government of South Africa recognised international law as a foundation for democracy. According to Valerio (2009:13), changes in legislation and technology brought about major changes in the status of women. In the next section, the following national directives relevant to the study will be discussed: the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108

of 1996 (SA, 1996b), the Commission on Gender Equality (SA, 1996a), the Employment Equity Act, Act 55 of 1998 (SA, 1998), the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Act 4 of 2000 (SA, 2000), and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill of 2013 (SA, 2013a).

2.3.2.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (SA, 1996b) has made various provisions for women empowerment in society and the workplace. From the founding provisions of the Constitution (SA, 1996b), reference is made to equality, dignity, and human rights, which are all applicable to women and work. Chapter 1 of the Constitution states that "the Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the following values: (a) Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms" (SA, 1996b:3).

The Bill of Rights, which was given to all South African citizens, is included in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, and it states the following:

1. Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law;
2. Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.
3. The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

4. No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.
5. Discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection (3) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair (SA, 1996b:5).

Section 9(3) of the Constitution (SA, 1996b:5) outlines the right to equality, and lists the prohibited grounds of discrimination, namely race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth. These rights provide the framework within which all labour legislation is interpreted and applied. This section of the Constitution clearly indicates that men and women are regarded as equal before the law, and that it is unfair to discriminate against women in the workplace. However, it also indicates that in order to achieve equality, fair discrimination may be taken to advance the designated previously disadvantaged groups, which include women (SA, 1996b:5).

2.3.2.2 The Commission on Gender Equality Act, Act 39 of 1996

The Commission on Gender Equality was established as an independent Chapter 9 institution by means of the Commission on Gender Equality Act, Act 39 of 1996 (SA, 1996a). The commission was established to “promote gender equality and to advise and make recommendations to Parliament and any other legislature with regard to any laws or proposed legislation which affects gender equality and the status of women” (SA, 1996a:1). Thus, it is a directive to promote gender equality in society and in the private and public sectors.

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2.3.2.3 The Employment Equity Act

Protection against discrimination in the workplace is established in the Employment Equity Act (EEA), Act 55 of 1998 (SA, 1998:1), as amended by the Employment Equity Amendment Act, Act 47 of 2013 (SA, 2013b). The EEA gives effect to the ILO Convention 111 and the South African Constitution (Van Niekerk et al., 2014:119). Initially, the EEA was introduced as a tool to address the past injustices of apartheid in South Africa, such as disparities in employment, occupation, and income within the labour market. The Employment Equity Act (SA, 1998; SA, 2013b:1) aims to correct the demographic imbalance in the nation"s workforce, by compelling employers to remove barriers, so as to advance blacks, coloureds, Indians, women, and the disabled, and to actively engage them in all categories of employment, by means of affirmative action.

Section 2 of the EEA (SA, 2013b:6) states that the purpose of the Act is “(a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and (b) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational levels in the workforce”. Thus, the EEA seeks to protect women, by stating that they should be treated and remunerated fairly, and that they should be equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels. Although the South African government has been committed to creating gender equality and gender neutrality in the workplace, the social situation in which women find themselves often differs from that of men. For example, most women experience pregnancy and motherhood. Thus, equating women with men may, in itself, be discriminatory and to the detriment of women advancement and empowerment.

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2.3.2.4 The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Act 4 of 2000 (SA, 2000) was amended by the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Act 52 of 2002 (SA, 2002). In the preamble to the Act (SA, 2000:1), it is stated that “although significant progress has been made in restructuring and transforming our society and its institutions, systemic inequalities and unfair discrimination remain deeply embedded in social structures, practices and attitudes, undermining the aspirations of our constitutional democracy”. The aim of the Act (SA, 2000) is to prevent and prohibit unfair discrimination, and to fulfil South Africa"s international obligations, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Pityana, 2002:3), which was discussed in section 2.3.1.4.

2.3.2.5 The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill of 2013

Since implementation of the Employment Equity Act (SA, 1998) and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (SA, 2000), great advances have been made to promote gender equality. However, as was mentioned in chapter 1, the progress in terms of women representation at managerial and board levels is currently not sufficient. This is one of the contributing factors which have led to the formulation of South Africa"s Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill, 2013 (SA, 2013a). This bill, which was recently passed by the National Assembly, aims to ensure 50% representation of women in decision-making structures, to improve access to education, training, and skills development, to promote women reproductive health, and to eliminate discrimination and harmful practices (SA, 2013a:5).

2.3.3 Concluding remarks

From the above discussion, one may conclude that the South African government is committed to creating a society, and subsequently workplaces, in which men and women are equal counterparts. Furthermore, one would assume that a country with such empowering legislation, which has recently celebrated 22 years of democracy, would have made great strides in terms of gender equality in the workplace. However, women are still under-represented in the workforce, particularly at managerial level. Under-representation of women is even more disproportionate in male-dominated industries. This shows that in order to correct past discrimination and ensuring gender equality is a mammoth task. Furthermore, legislation is not sufficient to address gender equality in the workplace. In the following section, some of the reasons offered for this occurrence will be discussed.

2.4 WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Worldwide, women are entering the workplace to pursue managerial and professional careers (Davidson & Burke, cited in Burke, Koyuncu & Wolpin, 2012:96). In South Africa, women participation in the workplace has increased rapidly. While women constituted only 23% of the South African economically active population in 1960, this figure had increased to 45% by 2013 (Barker, 2015:12). The explanations offered for this increase are the increase in social grants, the rising wages of women relative to men, rising levels of education, declining birth rates, household changes, changed perceptions regarding the role of women in society, rising productivity in the household, due to advanced technology, and rising divorce rates (Barker, 2015:14). Valerio (2009:24) asserts that women are currently more educated than men, which explains the increase in the number of women entering the workplace. However, this raises the question of why women are not then found in positions of upper management, for which they seem to be qualified.

Over time, various explanations have been offered for the lack of women participation in the workplace, particularly in occupations that have traditionally been associated with men, such as managerial positions. It seems that the explanations that have been offered can be classified into three categories (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). The first reason offered relates to the observable differences between men and women, where the focus is on themes such as the early socialisation processes, and the development of different behaviours or traits in childhood, which result in gendered leadership styles (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). The second explanation offered focuses on similarities between men and women, and it gives sociological and structural explanations for the low participation of women at managerial level, such as positions in organisations, organisational policies, interests, and biases in evaluation (Billing & Alvesson, 2000:145). Thus, the barriers preventing women from entering managerial-level positions are caused by gender bias and/or gendered stereotyping.

The third explanation offered considers the cultural context, and it concentrates on how identity, or subjectivity, is formed by cultural forces operating in the individual, and how the individual, in turn, is constructing the culture, which means that the individual can change the cultural meanings of gender and leadership (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). According to this perspective, women nowadays have to find ways to fit into the so-called “masculine culture” of organisations. In the following section, these explanations will be discussed in more detail.

2.4.1 The social context of women participation

It is posited that structural constraints (i.e. “the established and customary rules, policies, and day-to-day practices that affect a person‟s life chances”) are one of the main reasons women are often found in jobs that are considered sex-appropriate (Ferrante, 2013:257). Women are mostly found in subordinate roles,

which is a phenomenon that is socially constructed (Irefin et al., 2012:16). Lyly-Yrjänäinen and Fernández-Macías (2009:2) assert that the early socialisation processes and the development of different behaviours or traits of the different sexes during childhood results in gender differences in management and leadership styles.

Schreuder and Coetzee (2011:123) explain that because of the socialisation experienced by women, they tend to have lower expectations of success, which gives rise to internal barriers that prevent them from fully realising their talents and capabilities. Consequently, women are still found in supporting jobs, which they have traditionally been associated with, such as the jobs of secretary, nurse, teacher, and clerk (Ferrante, 2013:258). Thus, social constraints cause women to be disproportionately assigned to positions of lower status and less power than those of men. This is particularly concerning, since women in lower-level positions that desire an upper-level position may see this as untenable, and consequently, many well qualified and experienced women may not apply for managerial positions (Hoobler, Lemmon & Wayne, 2011:151).

2.4.1.1 Gender stereotyping

Structural constraints often lead to gender stereotyping. Stereotypes are held beliefs that people that belong to the same group or social affiliation have certain characteristics (Bergh, 2011:125). For example, the stereotype is held that it is more appropriate to employ women in supporting roles. Weiten, cited in Bergh (2011:136), asserts that most commonly held stereotypes are related to gender and membership of ethnic and occupational groups. Traditional gender stereotypes are, for example, that women are more emotional than men, and that they are submissive, illogical, and passive (Bergh, 2011:126).

Stereotyping in the workplace has led to women often being categorised according to four roles, namely the sex object (seductress), the mother (madonna), the child (pet), or the iron maiden (Kanter, cited in Neal, 2009:4-15). “Sex-object” stereotyping occurs when women are judged, while unaware, based on their appearance and actions, which can contribute to sexual harassment (Neal, 2009:4-19). The “mother” stereotype refers to women being held accountable for the “emotional” labour of everyone (nurturers), thus being the ones who “care and listen to others” (Neal, 2009:4-16). The mother stereotype also refers to women being stereotyped as less serious professionals than their male counterparts when planning a family. The “child” stereotype refers to women being regarded as children, thus their opinions are not respected, which may inhibit women"s opportunities to advance professionally (Heil, 2014:6). The “iron maiden” stereotype refers to women being defined as manly, which reinforces the idea that to be confident, ambitious, and competitive are masculine traits, and are thus unfeminine (Shuler, cited in Heil, 2014:6).

When considering gender stereotyping of managerial positions, two distinct forms can be identified, namely that jobs can be gender-stereotyped as either male or women, either based on job responsibilities that are believed to be gender-linked, or the sex of the usual job-holder (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). The latter is also referred to as sex-characteristic stereotyping, which refers to the idea that one sex has a characteristic that the other sex does not have, which makes the former sex more successful in a certain role (Heil, 2014:8). For example, the stereotype exists that men are more competitive than women, and that they are therefore more likely to be successful in managerial positions. Sex-role stereotyping refers to the idea that a certain role is more appropriate for a certain sex. For example, women are considered to be more suitable for jobs such as those of clerk, teacher, and nurse. Catalyst (2013:1) asserts that gender segregation continues to be pervasive within the labour force, despite positive steps having been taken in recent decades to prevent certain occupations from being dominated by one gender.

It is generally agreed that gender stereotyping is habitual and mostly unconscious in nature, and therefore people are often unaware that they are stereotyping, which influences their perceptions and behaviour towards a certain group of people (Bielby, 2000:122). This has important implications for women managers in a male-dominated working environment, because men may not even be aware of the stereotypes that they hold towards women. Furthermore, traditional socially constructed stereotyped role expectations spill over to organisations (Martin, 2013:1), influencing gender relations in the workplace. Thus, in order to ensure gender equality in the workplace, the logical starting point would be to ensure that social constraints are demolished. However, this is a mammoth task, which may take centuries to achieve.

2.4.1.2 Social identity

It is asserted that gender is a highly salient and visible category of social identity, which triggers gender stereotyping (Beatty, 2007:34). Gender identity as a category of social identity is regarded as the foundation of social norms regarding sex roles and organisational practices, which has led to women being labelled as the “other” (or the out-group) in the context of the workplace (Beatty, 2007:34). Kurylo (2012:142) explains the difference between the in-group and the out-group, stating that the in-group is the social category with which an individual strongly identifies, while the out-group is a social category with which an individual does not identify. She asserts that the unique characteristics of the in-group/out-group dynamic are what a group uses to identify themselves (Kurylo, 2012:142), for example the language that is used to communicate, the codes that the group adopts, such as the dress code, or a gender bias.

When an individual regards their own group (i.e. the in-group) or its members as more favourable than the out-group, it often leads to discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002:576). It is posited that men (the in-group) develop certain perceptions and attitudes regarding women (the out-

group), which leads to differential treatment towards this group. This, in turn, may create an organisational culture where the in-group (i.e. men) assumes unqualified pride at the expense of the out-group. This is particularly problematic if one takes into consideration that organisational values and assumptions which are embedded in the culture of an organisation affect the environment in which women create and maintain their identities (Beatty, 2007:46).

2.4.1.3 Social support

According to Snow, Swan, Raghavan, Connell and Klein (2003:245), social support is an important attribute of a person‟s social environment, and the various levels of support can be perceived to be available to a person in times of need. There are two ways in which the role of social support can be examined. The first is to reconceptualise social support as a form of coping assistance, in which coping methods are used by a person in response to stressors (Snow et al., 2003:245). The second way is to reduce the perception or experience of work stressors, and thus ultimately to reduce the possibility of negative outcomes, such as psychological symptoms (Snow et al., 2003:245). Overall, social support is conceptualised as an important contextual variable that influences a person‟s use of active coping strategies, and their perceptions of work stressors (Snow et al., 2003:246). Citing the findings of research conducted by Johnson and Hall (1988), Brough and Pears (2004:473) state that “in environments characterised by high demands and low control, workers experienced reduced levels of strain when social support was high”. Thus, social support has a positive influence on stress-strained relationships.

Sackey and Sanda (2011:355) conducted a research study to explore social support among women managers in Ghana, and they found that although different definitions for social support have been offered by different scholars, the definitions given do share certain similarities, namely emotional support, social integration, tangible support, information support, and esteem support. The similarities are explained as follows:

- Emotional support: when people feel that they have others to turn to for ease in times of difficulty;
- Social integration: when a person feels that they are part of a larger group, where their interests and concerns are shared;
- Tangible support: where a person‟s request for money, tools, aiding with a particular task, and other activities are met with positivity;
- Informational support: where a person can depend on other people for advice when it comes to a problem they may have; and
- Esteem support: where social relationships serve to aid people to feel better about themselves, their abilities, and their skills (Sackey & Sanda, 2011:356).

Social support can be identified as information from other individuals that a person is loved and cared for, esteemed and valued, part of a network of communication and mutual obligations; social support can be given by one‟s spouse, one‟s immediate family, one‟s relatives, one‟s friends, one‟s co-workers, or community members (Kim, Sherman & Taylor, 2008:518). Social support can successfully reduce psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, and it can be accompanied by various physical health benefits (Kim et al., 2008:518). Conversely, having little or no social support during stressful periods can be troubling, particularly for individuals with a great need for social support.

2.4.2 Organisational culture and women participation

Another explanation offered to explain the lack of women participation at managerial level is the cultural context of organisations. The term “organisational culture” has always been difficult to define, because such a culture is made up of shared values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviours, which guide individual and collective decisions and actions at an unconscious level (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008:4). Watson, cited in Boyle (2008:4), asserts that the concept of organisational culture was initially derived from a metaphor of the organisation as “something cultivated”. It seems that the term “organisational culture” has become widely used, but it remains highly ambiguous (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008:4).

In recent years, most scholars studying organisations have suggested that the concept of organisational culture refers to the climate and practices which an organisation develops around their handling of people, or to the promoted values and statements of belief of an organisation (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008:4). Desson and Clouthier (2010:1) assert that the concept of organisational culture applies to all forms of organisations because it includes a pattern of shared assumptions. Therefore, in male-dominated organisational cultures men decide what shared assumptions are to be part of the organisational culture.

2.4.2.1 Male-dominated working environments

In male-dominated cultures, where there is a perceived lack of women in upper-management positions, ideas about the values and culture of the organisation are formed by men; this phenomenon has been referred to as the “old-boys club” (Hoobler et al., 2011:151). Newcombe (2013:1) posits that male-dominated corporate cultures are the greatest barrier for women progression, and that they substantially reduce the length of time that women are prepared to stay with and develop their careers with a particular employer. Furthermore, it seems that the dynamics that exist in male-dominated environments are substantially different

from those that exist in more mixed-gender or female-dominated environments (Damaske, 2011:411). The reason for this is that in male-dominated working environments, males have more resources and definitional power, which enforces discriminatory practices, policies and ideologies (Damaske, 2011:411).

Damaske (2011:411) found that women often shifted from male-dominated working environments to female-dominated working environments, because of their negative psychological experiences in male occupations, such as sex discrimination, sex role ideology, and a lack of self-efficacy. Caprino (2013:1) asserts that one of the main reasons for the lack of women at managerial level is that the differences between men and women are not fully understood and valued. She further states that organisations that are male-dominated at leadership level don‟t value women‟s style, approach, communication, decision making, leadership values, focus, and “energy”, which causes organisations to view women as being “wrong” (consciously or subconsciously) for their priorities and styles, because they clash with the dominant culture (Caprino, 2013:1).

It seems that an organisational culture that embraces diversity will be more beneficial to organisational members, regardless of gender, than a male-dominated organisational culture. Thus, it seems that embracing organisational diversity becomes a necessity, if competitive advantage is to be gained in an ever-changing external environment. This assertion is confirmed by Hitt, Miller and Colella (2008:8), who maintain that organisational diversity is of strategic importance, because it enhances an organisation‟s competitive advantage.

2.4.2.2 Organisational diversity

Over the years, many interpretations, definitions, and mechanisms have been developed by authors and researchers in order to either understand, implement, or criticise the use and effectiveness of organisational diversity and its principles. McLauren (2009:2) claims that when an organisation manages its organisational

diversity by implementing diversity strategies, it holds many advantages. It is claimed that organisations are poised to compete in the global economy through attracting the best available talent from around the world, along with forming strategic partnerships among the best organisations (McLauren, 2009:2).

Hitt et al. (2008:8) maintain that organisational diversity is important for the following reasons: it improves corporate culture, recruitment, and relationships with clients and customers, it builds competitive advantage, and it helps one to understand and serve a diverse customer base; in addition, heterogeneous teams deal better with complex problems and challenging tasks, and having such diversity fosters more commitment to the mission of the organisation. McLauren (2009:2) argues that the top innovators of technology have operated with diverse workforces since the 1980s, and that virtually all top corporations now see organisational diversity as a basic feature of their hiring policies; organisational diversity encompasses race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, education level, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, life stage, career responsibilities, personality, and marital status.

When organisations acknowledge the differences that exist within their workforce, they are able to manage their employees in such a way that they create harmony in work practices and higher standards of cooperation (McLauren, 2009:2). The first step is to acknowledge the differences which exist within an organisation, and, secondly, to understand these differences (McLauren, 2009:2). The last step is to develop work practices that can create an inclusive environment. The success of a diverse workforce can lead to an innovative culture, where not only ideas flourish and creativity has no boundaries, but employees also flourish, and the organisation becomes successful and competitive (McLauren, 2009:2).

In today"s world, it is imperative for any organisation to learn how to tap into the rich and varied skills of its workforce, by simply embracing the idea of organisational diversity. If male-dominated organisations can embrace the idea of organisational diversity, it could lead to advanced profit-making ideas, innovation, and creativity (Grant, 2007:1). Melissa Steyn of Intercultural and Diversity Studies of Southern Africa (iNCUDISA) asked Terri Grant how diverse the South African workplace is (Grant, 2007:1). Grant"s answer started with a recollection of 1994, stating that “since 1994, new laws around employment equity, affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) have been enacted to accelerate redress and transformation but more than 10 years down the line, there is still much to be done. Demographic changes are more visible in those echelons of organisations where there is less power” (Grant, 2007:1).

2.4.2.3 Gender diversity

Hitt et al. (2008:4) define diversity as a characteristic of a group of people where differences exist on one or more relevant dimensions, such as gender. Diversity is a group characteristic, not an individual characteristic. Hitt et al. (2008:5) argue that common dimensions of diversity include gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, social class, sexual orientation, personality, functional experience, and geographical background. Geldenhuys (2011:13) indicates that work plays a major role in the empowerment of women, especially since women have become earners in the workplace, resulting in them becoming integrated into economically active societies, as well as their own self-worth being boosted. When a woman has a high-quality job, this can lead to enhanced well-being for the woman, as well as improved family welfare (Geldenhuys, 2011:13).

However, women have been facing barriers to enjoyment of good jobs, particularly in developing countries, and, as such, they have not benefited from formal work opportunities the way men have (Geldenhuys, 2011:13). Historically, women all over the world have often found themselves subjected to several kinds

of discriminatory behaviour, attitudes and policies (Geldenhuys, 2011:13). Whether or not this was intended, discrimination has still hampered the full integration of women into the work environment, and male-dominated working environments are likely to reflect this phenomenon. Although numerous policies, campaigns, and attempts have been implemented to ensure equal and fair access for women to the workplace, their access to quality jobs remains limited (Geldenhuys, 2011:13).

Shore, Chung-Herrera, Dean, Ehrhart, Jung, Randel and Singh (2012:119) explain that research on gender diversity prior to the 1990s focused largely on discrimination and bias resulting from being different from the majority, or from being part of a different group. Shore et al. (2009:119) reviewed research on gender diversity, and found that most of the published research includes theoretical perspectives that hold negative predictions; many of the studies build on theories that are traditionally associated with diversity, such as similarity-attraction (Byrne, 1971), social identity (Tajfel, 1981), or discrimination (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Research conducted since 2005 has included other theoretical perspectives with negative predictions, such as theory on status hierarchy (Chattopadhyay, 2003; Graves & Elsass, 2005), gender reproduction theory (which seeks to explain why masculine and feminine behaviours occur in different contexts) (Young & Hurlic, 2007), and theories of stereotypes and social roles (Duehr & Bono, 2006) (Shore et al., 2009:119).

According to Kersley (2012:6), gender diversity within senior-management teams has become an interesting issue, for three related reasons. The first reason is that although the proportion of women at board level generally remains very low, it is changing (Kersley, 2012:6). The second reason is that many government interventions in the area of promoting gender diversity in the workplace have increased, and the third reason is that the debate around the topic has shifted from an issue of fairness and equality to a question of superior performance (Kersley, 2012:6). Relating these three key reasons to male-dominated industries, it is clear that even though there has been progress in promoting

gender diversity, which may ultimately lead to gender equality and equity, more still needs to be done in order to achieve this.

2.4.3 Concluding remarks

From the above discussion, one may conclude that women participation in the workplace has increased over the years, with more women entering the workplace now than was the case before. However, women continue to occupy only supporting positions (Irefin et al., 2012:16). It is estimated that women occupy 23% of senior roles and 26% of leadership positions (Pitso, 2016:1). Gender stereotyping also continues to exist, not only in the workplace, but also in managerial positions, with social identity triggering gender stereotyping. The contributing factors are, for example, a male-dominated organisational culture, and a lack of women representativeness at all occupational levels. It seems that if diverse organisational cultures are created, it could minimise gender bias and stereotyping, which will promote gender equality at all organisational levels.

2.5 WOMEN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Although more women are entering the workplace, women usually advance only as far as middle-management level, and only a few women progress to senior- and top-management levels (Powell, cited in Burke et al., 2012:96). This phenomenon has been termed “the glass ceiling effect”, “a glass cliff”, “a concrete wall”, or “sticky floors” (Burke et al., 2012:96). However, some women have moved up in organisational hierarchies, despite the existence of obstacles, and this is referred to as “the labyrinth” (Valerio, 2009:16).

Valerio (2009:16) explains this metaphor as follows: “The labyrinth metaphor is another depiction of the situation facing today"s women as they make their way through the twists and turns and hurdles of the organizational maze to achieve power, authority, wealth, and prestige.” The labyrinth metaphor expresses the

complexities and varied challenges that appear along the way as women progress within an organisation (Eagly and Carli, 2007:1). The metaphor of the concrete wall mainly pertains to an earlier era, when men and women had separate and distinct gender roles; this challenge started to fade in the 1970s, when women started to enter middle-management positions (Valerio, 2009:16). Thus, although many women have managed to progress to managerial positions, it seems that many have faced severe hardships in their endeavours to experience career development.

2.5.1 Contributors to women career development

Knörr (2005:40) identified eight themes that act as contributors to women career development in the organisation, namely:

- Organisational and governmental policies, which are important for accomplishing gender equity within the workplace, and for contributing to the development and advancement of women;
- A supportive work environment, which can contribute to the retention and development of women within the organisation, through programmes such as work-family programmes;
- Top-management support, which can contribute to women career development and success;
- A system that includes assessment criteria that can track the achievements of women in terms of how they are advancing in the organisation, in order to evaluate the progress of organisations; such a system would monitor things such as salaries and advancement opportunities;
- Mentoring, which plays an important role in women career development;
- Networking, since this will assist women to become more visible; and
- Access to education, training and development programmes, which will contribute to women career development and participation in managerial positions.

Morrison, White and Van Velsor, cited in Burke et al. (2012:96), identified the following factors which contribute to the success of women executives: help from above, a track record of achievement, a desire to succeed, an ability to manage subordinates, a willingness to take career risks, and an ability to be tough, decisive, and demanding. Thus, much can be done by the organisation to contribute to the career development of women. However, although many organisations have developed initiatives to develop women managers, women are still faced with numerous barriers, which hamper their career progression.

2.5.2 Barriers to women career development

Lyly-Yrjänäinen and Fernández-Macías (2009:3) maintain that existing barriers to women career development reflect the interactions between men and women in upper-organisational levels, where gender ratios are particularly skewed. Valerio (2009:5) asserts that women seeking managerial-level positions are continually facing barriers to their success, such as gender bias in leadership opportunities, gender inequalities in family responsibilities, inflexibility in workplace structures, and inadequacies in social policies. Other barriers identified are the inability of women to **adapt to managerial positions**, wanting too much for themselves and for other women, and performance problems (Burke et al., 2012:96).

Helmer, Hjälmner and Stener (2009:6) assert that there are a number of barriers to women career development that exist, namely the following: (a) social resistance that women in managerial positions face, which, it has been asserted, leads to stress and demotivation, (b) discrimination, which is seen as a barrier to career progress, despite the fact that discrimination within the workplace is against the law, (c) personal life commitments, which tend to clash with the organisational structure, (d) the standard of the perfect employee as a person who can dedicate all their time to their work, where this does not necessarily fit in with the actual lives of women, and (e) women with children are argued to be less work-oriented than men with children (Helmer et al., 2009:6).

Cherry (2011:9) identified the following barriers which hinder advancement or development of women in the workplace: (a) work-life balance, (b) the perception that women are less committed to work because they often have family commitments, (c) a lack of senior or visibly successful women role models, (d) stereotyping and preconceptions of women‟s roles and abilities, (e) personal style differences, (f) stereotyping and preconceptions of women‟s aspirations for promotion, (g) a lack of mentoring, (h) the absence of opportunities to work in high-risk/high-reward areas, (i) exclusion from informal networks of communication and influence, and (j) failure of line mangers to see women‟s advancement as their responsibility.

One of the barriers identified by Cherry (2011:9) which is often written about is that of mentoring. The absence of women managers in male-dominated cultures implies that fewer women mentors with experience are available to assist and guide women in lower-level management (Hoobler et al., 2011:151). Hoobler et al. (2001:151) state that the absence of women mentors is troublesome, because without women mentors to guide women through their career development, women may feel unprepared for upper-management positions, and they may thus not apply for them (Hoobler et al., 2001:151). Ozkan and Beckton (2012:6) concur with this assertion, and state that there are insufficient formal mentorship and networking policies and programmes that aim to increase advancement of women (Ozkan & Beckton, 2012:6). Thus it seems that currently there are many barriers that exist that hamper women advancement in the workplace. Although some organisations have been proactive in reducing the identified barriers, these barriers are still present in many organisations, particularly in male-dominated working environments.

2.5.3 Concluding remarks

From the above discussion, one may conclude that women career development is essential in advancing and promoting women managers in male-dominated working environments. Governmental and organisational support is key in

advancing women in the workplace. However, women still face a number of barriers which can hinder women career development. Work-life balance, perceptions of women capability in the workplace, stereotyping, and a lack of role models are just some of the barriers that women face when it comes to career development.

2.6 WOMEN MANAGERS

The identified barriers to women career development create a gender gap in high-level positions in many parts of the world. Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías (2009:2) maintain that women are still under-represented in managerial jobs in relation to their share of overall employment. Furthermore, when women do move up in the organisational hierarchy, the proportion of women managers diminishes sharply when compared to male managers (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). This implies that women are outnumbered by men in positions of formal power and authority, status, and high income (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías (2009:2). Furthermore, men have a near monopoly on the most senior positions, and worldwide they are over-represented in middle-level managerial jobs (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2).

2.6.1 Gender differences in leadership styles

According to Brown (2003:7), some scholars (e.g. Kristeva, 1981) argue that because of the symbolic and ambiguous nature of gender, gender cannot be defined; even though some scholars believe and conclude that gender cannot be defined, there is still substantial information regarding differences in the managerial styles of men and women. In contrast, others (e.g. the Foundation for Women Business Owners, 2003) do acknowledge that the differences between men and women should not be used to categorise individuals, or to classify any one style as either male or women, but rather to support and integrate as many different kinds of management and leadership styles as possible, in order to

compete in the current fast-paced world, by using our human resources as effectively as possible (Brown, 2003:7).

Over time, leadership behaviour has been described as being more characteristic of men than of women (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). As a result of this, women are experiencing a double bind, as they are not respected as managers if they do not adapt to “male leadership behaviour” (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). There are also concrete consequences for “out-of-role behaviour”. Lyly-Yrjänäinen and Fernández-Macías (2009:2) argue that negative perceptions of women who prove to be competent in areas that have traditionally been “off limits” to them can lead to discrimination, because their performance is often devalued, they are denied credit when they are successful, and they are penalised for proven competence (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2).

Some of the gender differences which have been reported are, for example, that women are less hierarchical, they need more time to make decisions, they tend to seek more information to better understand a situation and what decision to make, and they are more likely to draw upon input from others (Brown, 2003:7). In addition, women managers tend to show greater concern for others, consider how others feel about their influencing tactics, and are more likely than men to act with the organisation"s broad interest in mind (Hughes et al., cited in Brown, 2003:7). Male managers, on the other hand, are more likely to show concern for self, act out of self-interest, show less consideration for the feelings of others regarding their influence, work alone in developing strategies, and focus primarily on the task at hand (Brown, 2003:7). However, individual differences are acknowledged and one should guard against generalising gender behaviour.

2.6.2 Women at executive level

Research has found that gender inequality in top-management and executive positions is a global phenomenon (Lyly-Yrjänäinen & Fernández-Macías, 2009:2). Smith, Smith and Verner (2005:3) assert that in the decade 1995–2005, there was increased focus on the gender composition of top executives and boards of directors of firms. However, they maintain that the proportion of women reaching top positions is still very low in most countries, although it has been increasing in countries such as the USA and some European countries (Smith et al., 2005:3). Some governments, such as the Swedish government and the Norwegian government, have even introduced national regulations enforcing gender representativeness at executive level (Smith et al., 2005:3). However, South Africa has only recently started to introduce national legislation and to adopt international legislation that enforces gender representativeness at top- and executive-management levels, but more research still needs to be done.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a literature review was presented on women in the context of the workplace. The chapter commenced with an exposition of feminist theory, since the aim of the study is to present a feminist perspective of the experiences of women managers. From the exposition, one may conclude that it remains appropriate to use feminist theory to understand the experiences of women managers. A discussion was also presented of the legal framework which guides women participation in the workplace. Over time, many national and international directives have been formulated in order to ensure women representativeness and gender equality in the workplace. However, women are not yet equitably represented in all occupational categories and at all levels, particularly not at managerial level.

Various reasons have been offered over time for the lack of women representativeness, particularly in positions that have previously been regarded as male-appropriate. Furthermore, many working environments remain male-dominated, and barriers to women development still exist, which seem to have a negative impact on women advancement. However, many organisations, particularly those that embrace diversity, have instituted organisational initiatives to promote gender equality and transformation. Against this background, the research methodology used in this study will be discussed in chapter 3. Taking the above into consideration, it seems necessary to understand the experiences of contemporary women managers, in order to establish whether progress has been made at societal level and at organisational level in terms of gender equality and transformation.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 2, a literature review was presented regarding women in the workplace. From the literature review, it is evident that women remain under-represented at certain organisational levels and in certain occupational categories, despite the existence of various international and national directives to promote gender equality. Although previous studies have focused on the barriers and challenges that women are facing, not much information is available regarding the experiences of women managers, particularly those that work in male-dominated working environments. Thus, it seems appropriate to conduct a research study investigating the experiences of women in male-dominated workplaces.

In this chapter, the research methodology employed in this study will be explained. Research is regarded as a coherent and organised examination for the purposes of collecting fresh and beneficial data on a particular topic (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi, 2013:2). It is a search to discover solutions to scientific and social difficulties, through objective and systematic analysis; it is also regarded as a search for information, i.e. finding concealed truths (Rajasekar et al., 2013:2). Research should lead to fresh contributions to existing data; only through research is it conceivable that growth can be created in a particular field of study (Rajasekar et al., 2013:2). For the purposes of this study, feminist research will be conducted in order to extend the current body of knowledge regarding the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments.

3.2 FEMINIST RESEARCH

Feminist research is “connected in principle to feminist struggle”, and is seen to challenge the basic structures and principles that oppress women (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2006:4). It documents women‟s lives, their experiences, and concerns, shedding light on gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women‟s “subjugated knowledge” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2006:4). According to Letherby (2003:73), “research from a feminist methodological standpoint should provide understandings of women‟s experience as they understand it, interpreted in the light of feminist conceptions of gender relations”. Gelling (2013:1) points out that feminist research essentially focuses on the experiences of women in social settings, since the purpose of feminist research is to make women visible, raise their awareness, and empower them.

The goal of feminist research is to foster empowerment and liberation of women and other disadvantaged minority groups, and the findings of feminist researchers are applied with the intention of promoting social change and social justice for women (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2006:4). Thus, feminist research should not be viewed as mere research *about* women, but as research *for* women, in order to transform sexist societies (Letherby, 2003:72). Hesse-Biber (2012:5) asserts that “feminist thinking and practice requires taking steps from the margins to the centre”, while eliminating boundaries that privilege dominant forms of knowledge building, boundaries that mark who can be a knower and what can be known. For Virginia Woolf, feminist thinking and practice is the demarcation between the “turf” and the “path”; for Simone de Beauvoir, it is the line between the “inessential” and the “essential”; and for Dorothy Smith, it is the path that encircles dominant knowledge, where women‟s lived experiences lie outside its circumference, or are huddled at the margins (Hesse-Biber, 2012:5).

From the above exposition of feminist research, it is clear that feminist research was appropriate to use in this particular study, since the aim of the study was to understand the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments. The information obtained from women will lead to an advanced understanding of their experiences as they understand them. Furthermore, the research will be conducted within a social setting (i.e. a working environment). Through the research study, women are likely to become more aware of their experiences through their reflections, and they will possibly become more empowered. Furthermore, the findings of the study can be used by organisations to promote gender transformation and equality.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is defined as a plan or procedure used for a research project, covering the decisions ranging from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2008:3). It furthermore involves the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and particular methods (Creswell, 2008:5). Wisker (2009:20) asserts that when choosing a research design, it must be founded on the researcher"s assumptions, research expertise and practices, which impacts on the way the data is collected.

The research design of this study can be described as a qualitative research design. Creswell (2008:4) explains that qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Denzin and Lincoln (2011:3) state that qualitative research "consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible". They explain that these practices "turn the world into a series of representations, including field-notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:3).

Snape and Spencer (2003:4) highlight the key elements which give qualitative research its distinctive character, namely the following:

- It is aimed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of the research participants through learning about their social circumstances, experiences, and perspectives;
- It consists of small samples, and usually uses purposive sampling on the basis of salient criteria;
- Data-collection methods involve close contact between the researcher and the research participants, and they are interactive and developmental and allow for emergent issues to be explored;
- Data is very detailed and information-rich, and extensive as well;
- Analysis in qualitative research is open to emergent concepts and ideas, and it may produce detailed description and classification and identify patterns of association; and
- The outputs tend to focus on the interpretation of social meaning through mapping and “re-presenting” the social world of the participants.

The qualitative research method involves developing questions and procedures, the gathering of data in the participant‟s setting, analysis of the data collected, and forming interpretations of the meaning of the data gathered (Creswell, 2008:4). Thus, using a qualitative research design allowed me to achieve the aim of the study, which was to obtain an in-depth understanding of women managers‟ experiences in a male-dominated working environment.

3.3.1 Justification for using a qualitative research design

The aim of qualitative research is to understand some aspect of social life, where its methods generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis (Brikci, 2007:2). Thus, the qualitative research design allows me to understand the experiences and attitudes of people by asking questions and receiving responses. A qualitative research design is appropriate if one wants to understand the perspectives of participants, or explore the meaning they give to phenomena, or observe a particular process in-depth (Patton, 2002:9). Thus, for this study, a qualitative research design was deemed appropriate, as it provides the information needed to answer the research questions stated in section 1.8.

3.3.2 Pilot study

A pilot study is used as a small-scale trial run in preparation for a major research study, and even though it may not guarantee success in the major research study, it can significantly increase the probability of success (Simon, 2011a:1). This statement is supported by Hazzi and Maldaon (2015:1) who assert that using a pilot study represents a vital step for conducting a sound research study.

In this particular study, I conducted a pilot study prior to the full-scale research, in order to check for any ambiguous, biased and/or leading questions, and to determine the minimum time it would take to complete the semi-structured interview. In addition, two psychologists were requested to provide insight into the content of the interview schedule items. Thereafter, comments were considered, and the final semi-structured interview schedule was compiled (see Annexure C). Thus, face validity was determined. This interview schedule was used to interview one women manager who was not considered for inclusion in the final sample.

3.3.3 Trustworthiness

3.3.3.1 Credibility

According to Shenton (2004:64), credibility is a key criterion in ensuring that a study measures what it is actually intended to measure, and it deals with the question of how congruent the findings are with reality. Shenton (2004:64) states that ensuring credibility is essential in establishing trustworthiness. This assertion is supported by Given (2016:74), who defines credibility as the ability to present the participants" multiple realities in the findings of the research in such a way that they ring true to people holding similar beliefs. In this study, credibility was advanced through developing a research procedure that allowed me to generate sufficient, multilayered and credible data from the participants.

In addition, a pilot study was used to refine the interview schedule. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of women managers, a variety of participants was included. The participants varied in terms of the industry in which they were working, number of years of service, race, age, highest educational qualification, management level, marital status, whether or not they had children, and sexual orientation. Participants were given the opportunity to refuse to participate, and only those who volunteered were included in the study. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also aimed to establish rapport with the participants before I started asking the questions in the interview schedule. This allowed the participants to talk freely about their experiences as women managers.

3.3.3.2 Transferability

Shenton (2004:69) defines transferability as the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations. In positivist research, the concern usually lies in demonstrating that the results of the work can be applied to a broader population (Shenton, 2004:69). Given (2016:74) explains that

transferability deals with how the findings of a study can be applied within other contexts and similar settings (in the case of this study, male-dominated working environments). In the case of this study, it is possible for other researchers to conduct the same study in other contexts, because the sample is clearly defined. Furthermore, the research methodology is discussed in sufficient depth, and the semi-structured interview schedule used is attached (see Annexure C). However, the study cannot be repeated in a women-dominated working environment or a gender-neutral working environment.

3.3.3.3 Dependability

According to Shenton (2004:71), a research study is dependable if it can be repeated in the same context using the same methods and the same participants, and the same results are obtained. Given (2016:74) supports this by stating that dependability is the degree to which the findings of the study could be repeated if it was conducted within similar findings. As was mentioned in section 3.3.4, it will be possible for other researchers to conduct the same study in the same context, because the sample was clearly defined, the research methodology was discussed in sufficient depth, and the semi-structured interview schedule used is available. Furthermore, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and were checked for accuracy. In addition, data was coded according to themes that emerged from the literature review (see chapter 2) and participants" responses. This allowed me to obtain an information-rich picture of the experiences of women managers.

3.3.3.4 Confirmability

Shenton (2004:72) states that confirmability deals with objectivity, and, as such, certain steps are necessary to ensure that as far as it is possible, the findings of a study are the results of the experiences of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Given (2016:74) states that

confirmability is when a researcher ensures that the findings are the outcomes of the data collected from participants, rather than the perspectives of the researcher. Confirmability in this study was achieved by developing objective interview questions related to the research questions, the research objectives, and the literature review. Furthermore, the research methodology used in this study is described. However, although I was thoroughly prepared for the interviews, and attempted to remain objective at all times, there is a possibility that I could have been influenced by the responses of the participants, since I am a women. Furthermore, as researcher, I personally collected the data, and was not separate from the research process.

3.4 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

A population is an assembly of people, animals, or documentations that the researcher has an interest in investigating (Adams & Lawrence, 2015:118). Thus, a population can include respondents from various origins, such as a particular geographical area, gender, age, or profession. A sample is a subset of the population from which data is collected, while sampling is the process by which a sample is selected (Adams & Lawrence, 2015:120). The population of this study is women managers who are working in male-dominated working environments. For the purposes of this study, non-probability sampling was used to select participants from the population to be included in the study.

3.4.1 Non-probability sampling

According to Latham (2007:7), non-probability sampling is convenient for researchers to gather a sample with little or no cost, and/or for research studies that do not need representativeness of the population. It is also a suitable method to use when asking questions to groups of people that may be sensitive to those questions (Latham, 2007:7). However, researchers need to be careful not to generalise results based on non-probability sampling (Latham, 2007:7). Although

the ideal would have been to use probability sampling in this study, it was not possible, since I had to rely on women agreeing to participate in the study. Consequently, the non-probability sampling method of purposive sampling was used.

3.4.1.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is used when a researcher selects a sample based on the knowledge of the researcher about the population, its features, and the nature of the researcher"s research aims (Latham, 2007:9). For this study, I selected women managers who worked in identified male-dominated working environments. During the semi-structured interview the females had to confirm that their workplaces were male-dominated. The final sample consisted of eight women managers who were working in the Lejweleputswa district of the Free State province of South Africa.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative researchers often use a variety of data in any one study, ranging from observations to interviews to audiovisual materials, when trying to answer their research questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:143). In order to collect the qualitative research data needed to answer the research questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The semi-structured interviews which were used to collect data allowed me to obtain an advanced understanding of women managers" perceptions, feelings, and experiences. The rationale for the use of this data-collection method was to allow for the collection of sufficient data, without missing any vital information. I conducted the interviews at a venue which was agreed upon before the interviews commenced. It was requested that the interviews be conducted in the workplace which was the natural setting within which the women managers were working.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews as data-collection method

This study made use of open-ended questions to gather data, and I personally interviewed the participants. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of providing more detailed information than what is available through other means of data collection, such as questionnaires or surveys (Woods, 2011:2). By virtue of the fact that the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews were standardised, the reliability of the data was increased (Woods, 2011:2). The greatest disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is that the use of occasional spontaneous questions makes it difficult to quantify and analyse the data, and the posing of spontaneous questions to some individuals and not others may be viewed as unfair, and possibly misleading (Woods, 2011:2). Therefore, as far as was possible, the participants were asked the same questions, and in the same way.

Sunandamma and Sarasvathi (2011:12) outline the characteristics of a good interview schedule. These characteristics guided me when I compiled the interview schedule. Firstly, the semi-structured interview schedule was compiled to obtain information required to achieve the research objectives (Sunandamma & Sarasvathi, 2011:12). Secondly, I ensured that no irrelevant and unnecessary questions were included (Sunandamma & Sarasvathi, 2011:12). Thirdly, during the pilot study, I ensured that no unclear, ambiguous, leading or uninformative questions were included. In addition, I ensured that the questions were easy to understand, and that the questions could be answered by the respondents. Fourthly, I was mindful of the sequence in which questions were posed (Sunandamma & Sarasvathi, 2011:13). Lastly, an appropriate introduction and instructions were provided at the start of the semi-structured interviews (Sunandamma & Sarasvathi, 2011:13).

Thus, for the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended questions, and I made use of probing and clarifying questions. This gave the respondents the opportunity to tell their stories as they had experienced them. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes, and the questions which were posed were formulated in line with the research objectives of the study, as follows:

Research objective 1: To understand how social dynamics shape women managers' experiences in male-dominated working environments.

- As a women, how do you balance your personal life and your work commitments?
- If you are in a relationship, does your partner support you in your work?
- To what extent are you experiencing gender differences?
- According to research literature, gender stereotypes are still held today, for example the stereotype that women tend to be more emotional, while men tend to be more dominant. To what extent is this true in your working environment?
- To what extent must women managers display characteristics traditionally associated with men in order to be successful?

Research objective 2: To understand how organisational dynamics shape women managers' experiences in male-dominated working environments.

- How would you describe the male-dominated environment in which you are working?
- How are you experiencing your work as a manager in this male-dominated environment?
- To what extent do women have a voice in managerial decision making?

- As a women, do you have a voice when important decisions are made?
- As a women, how do you experience interpersonal interactions with other managers?
- In a male-dominated culture, males often influence important decisions, values and beliefs. How do you experience the male-dominated culture of the industry?
- In your opinion, to what extent does the organisation embrace your values as a women manager?

Research objective 3: To explore how women managers experience advancement opportunities in male-dominated working environments.

- Briefly explain your career path up until now.
- How did it happen that you became a manager in this male-dominated environment?
- To what extent is advancement of women supported?
- Do you know of any initiatives to promote advancement of women in this industry?
- In your opinion, how can the working environment become more supportive of women advancement?
- How does the male-dominated culture of the industry impact on women advancement?
- Which personal resources are regarded as important to be successful as a manager?

Research objective 4: To gain insight into the challenges that women managers are facing in male-dominated working environments.

- What are the challenges women are experiencing in their endeavours to become managers in this industry?

3.6 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

According to Simon (2011b:1), the researcher"s role in qualitative studies is very important, since the researcher acts as an instrument in the data-gathering process. This means that the data is mediated through this *human instrument*, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines (Simon, 2011b:1). According to Postholm and Madsen (2006:1), the role of a researcher depends on which paradigm they conduct their research in. Existing paradigms include the positivist paradigm, where researchers focus on capturing what already exists in the world and representing it objectively, and the constructivist paradigm, where researchers will interpret data and construct their beliefs within a social, historical and cultural framework (Postholm & Madsen, 2006:1). Thus, the current study is conducted within a constructivist paradigm.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The importance of acting ethically has become a significant element of doing research in any given context or environment (Macfarlane, 2009:1). Before interviewing the participants, the women managers working in male-dominated working environments were approached, and permission was obtained to conduct the research study. Although a meeting was scheduled with the various organisations, an official letter was sent to the organisations to request permission to conduct the research study (see Annexure A).

Prior to collecting the data, an explanatory letter was emailed to the participants a week before the interviews, explaining the nature and objectives of the study. In order to ensure that the participants gave informed consent to participate in the study, an introduction was given, outlining the purpose of the study and the research procedure that would be followed, as well as ethical considerations that would be observed. The participants were requested to sign a written consent form before participation in the study (see Annexure B).

The participants were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary, and that, as such, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, the participants were assured that their identities and personal information would be kept confidential at all times. The participants were also requested to provide me with their contact details if they wished to receive a summary of the findings of the study. The interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participants.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Mills and Birks (2014:43), data analysis is based on the researcher"s decision-making processes, which are based on the evidence collected. In this particular study, all data collected from the recorded interviews was transcribed, and the transcripts were analysed. Qualitative data was gathered, summarised, coded, and sorted according to themes (categories), after which it was interpreted and given meaning. This was done using inductive reasoning, since meaning was created from patterns in the observed data.

3.8.1 The process of analysing the qualitative data

According to Flick (2014:304), there are a number of steps that are used to analyse and present qualitative data. The following steps were used for the purposes of this research study. During the first step, data was reduced, in order to locate and examine the phenomenon of interest. In this step, transcripts were coded in order to establish central ideas. During the second step, data was reorganised, classified, and categorised. In this step, themes were identified through reconstructing and reorganising the data. This also allowed me to establish links between various data-collection methods. The codes were developed through an iterative process, which included reading, doing focused coding, reflection, writing, and rereading, in order to break the codes down into larger ideas, commonly known as themes, or categories, and ultimately to develop assertions regarding the phenomenon of interest (Flick, 2014:305). During the third step, data was interpreted, and the findings were written up. A wide range of methods was used to present the data, including identifying themes that were supported by direct quotations from the interview transcripts, and getting the participants to write narratives that represent their experiences and perspectives (Flick, 2014:305).

After conducting the first interviews, the following provisional categories emerged:

- The existence of gender differences,
- Work experiences,
- Family and spousal support,
- Stereotyping,
- Men versus women (groups),
- A lack of initiatives,
- Coping as women managers,
- Women managers not being equal to male managers, and

- Women managers not having a voice in male-dominated working environments.

As new categories emerged during subsequent interviews, they were included in the initial list of categories mentioned. These categories were clustered together in order to create the themes of the study, as well as the theoretical constructs which will guide the presentation of the findings of the study, as well as the discussion thereof.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the research methodology of this study was explained. The study was conducted within a constructivist and feminist paradigm, using qualitative research methods. This was deemed appropriate, since the aim of the study was to understand the experiences of women managers in the context of male-dominated working environments. In the following chapter, the findings of the study will be presented.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 3, the research methodology and design employed in this study were described and explained. The ethical considerations that were observed were discussed, as well as the methods used to ensure the transferability, credibility, and dependability of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight women managers working in male-dominated working environments. In this chapter, the data collected from the sample will be analysed and presented. The analysis will be guided by the literature review presented in chapter 2. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents, and were transcribed after each interview session. The interviews took place at the workplaces of the participants. A detailed participant profile of all eight women that participated in the study will be provided in the following section.

4.2 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Interviews were conducted with eight women that hold managerial positions in male-dominated working environments. A biographical questionnaire was compiled and circulated, and was completed by the participants (see Annexure C). To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the women managers in the sample were coded as follows:

- Respondent 1 (R1)
- Respondent 2 (R2)
- Respondent 3 (R3)
- Respondent 4 (R4)
- Respondent 5 (R5)
- Respondent 6 (R6)

- Respondent 7 (R7)
- Respondent 8 (R8)

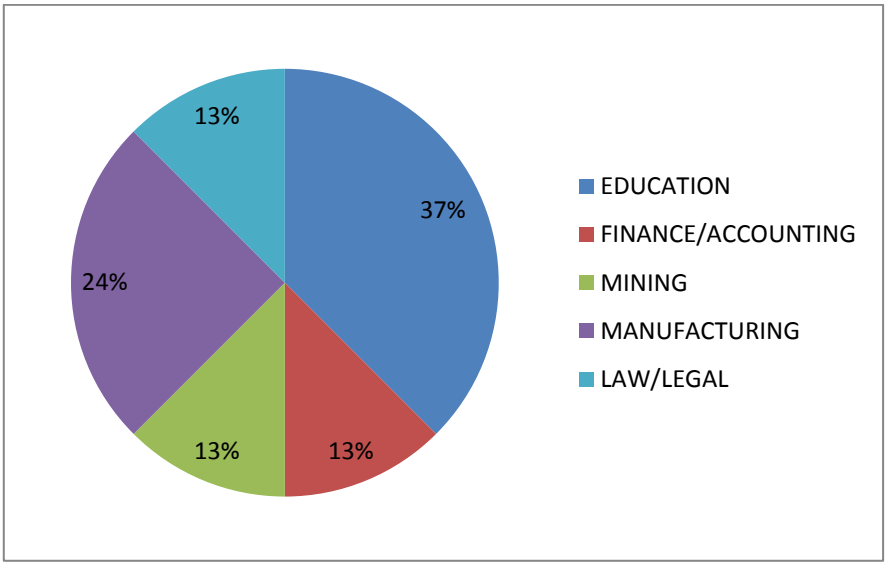
4.2.1 Biographical data

In this section, the biographical data collected from the participants will be presented. The following biographical variables were included: the industry in which the participant was working, number of years of service, racial distribution, age distribution, highest qualification, management level, marital status, whether or not the participant had children, and the participant"s sexual orientation.

4.2.1.1 Distribution of participants by industry

The industries in which the participants were working are indicated in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Industries in which participants were working

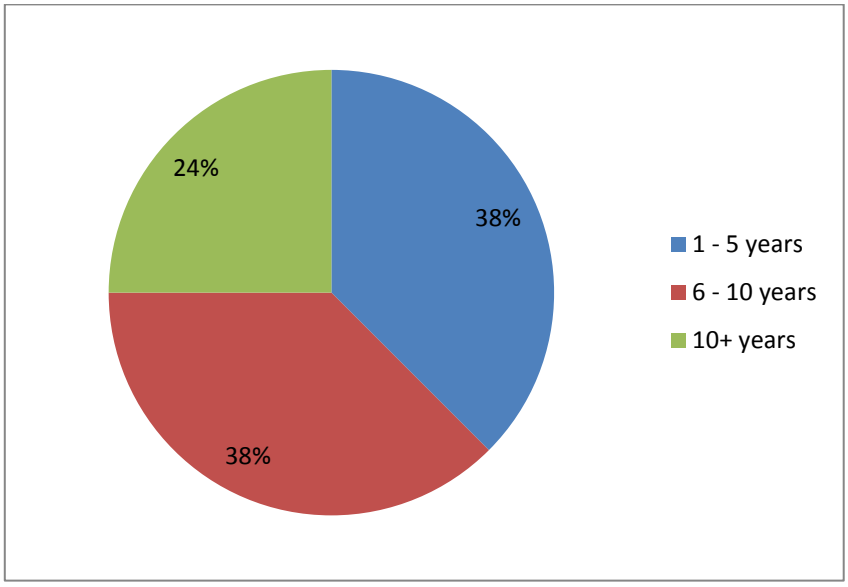


According to the information presented in Figure 4.1, the eight women respondents were working in various industries. Most of the women managers (37%, n=3) were working in the education industry, followed by the manufacturing industry (24%, n=2), the legal industry (13%, n=1), the mining industry (13%, n=1), and the finance or accounting industry (13%, n=1).

4.2.1.2 Years of service of participants

The respondents were asked to indicate their years of service in the organisation, and their years of service in the male-dominated industry. Number of years of service at the current organisation is indicated in Figure 4.2, and number of years of service in the male-dominated industry is indicated in Figure 4.3.

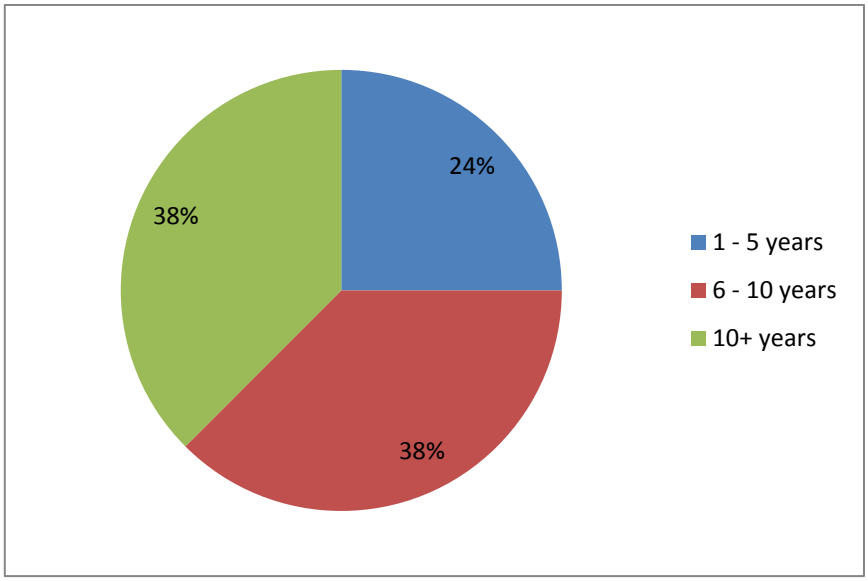
Figure 4.2: Years of service in the organisation



As is evident from the information presented in Figure 4.2, the respondents had been working in their current organisation for different lengths of time. A total of 38% (n=3) of the respondents indicated that they had been working for their organisation for a period of 1–5 years, while another 38% (n=3) of the

respondents had been working 6–10 years for their organisation, and only 24% (n=2) had been working for more than 10 years for their organisation.

Figure 4.3: Years of service in the industry

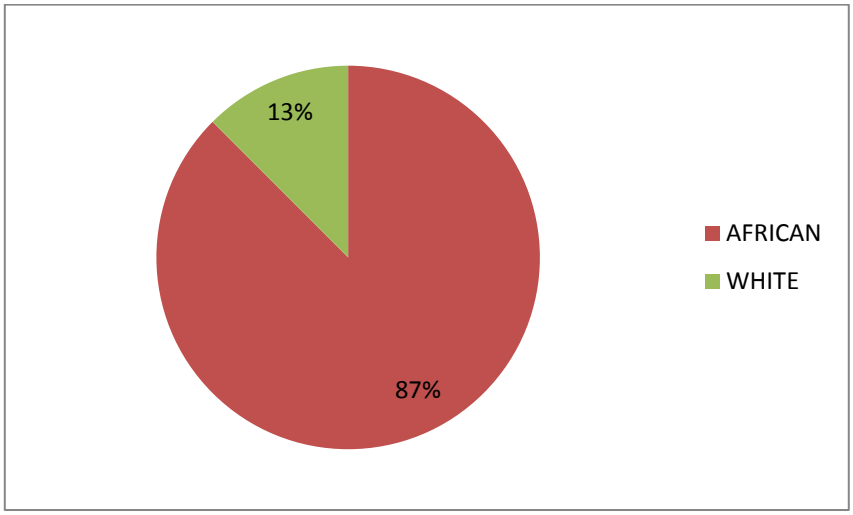


From the information presented in Figure 4.3, it is evident that the respondents had been working in their particular male-dominated industry for different lengths of time. A total of 24% (n=2) of the respondents indicated that they had been working in a male-dominated industry for a period of 1–5 years, while 38% (n=3) of the respondents had been working 6–10 years in a male-dominated industry, and 38% (n=3) had been working for more than 10 years in a male-dominated industry.

4.2.1.3 Racial distribution of participants

The racial distribution of the participants is indicated in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Racial distribution of participants

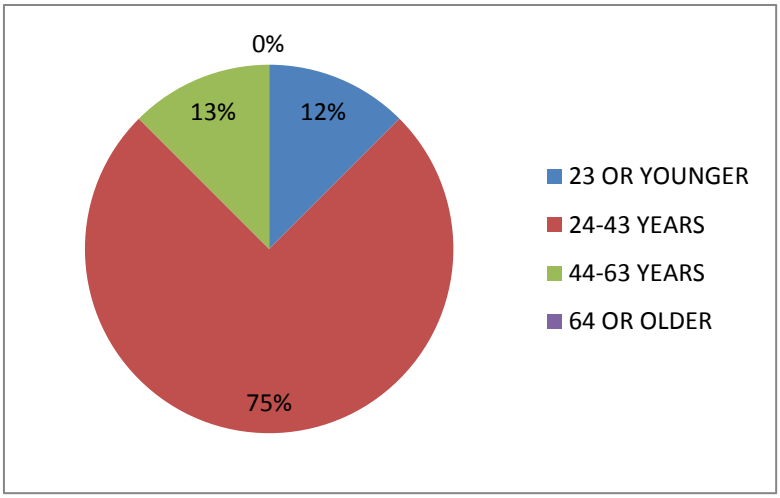


According to the information presented in Figure 4.4, most of the respondents who participated in the study were black African (87%, n=7), while there was only one white respondent (13%, n=1) that participated in the study.

4.2.1.4 Age distribution of participants

The age distribution of the participants is indicated in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Age distribution of participants

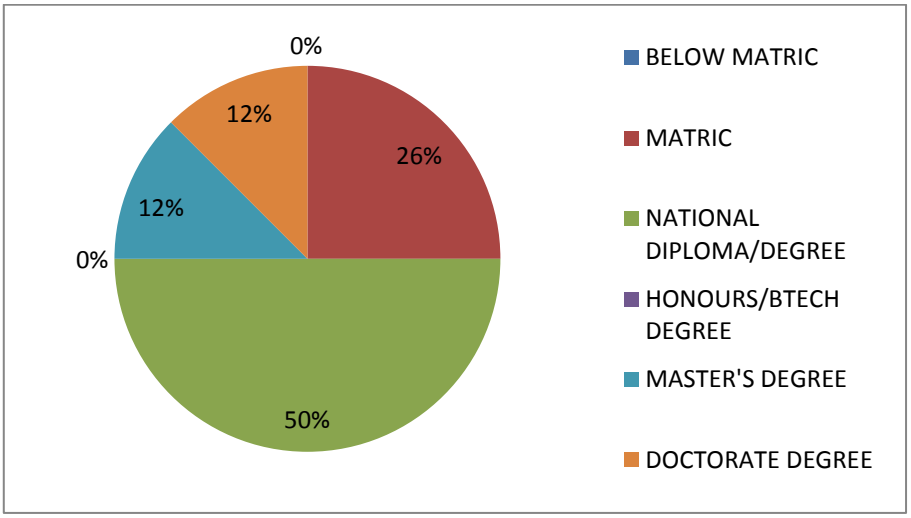


According to the information presented in Figure 4.5, most of the respondents were in the age group of 24–43 years (74%, n=6). Only one respondent was 23 years or younger (13%, n=1), while one respondent was in the age group of 44–63 years (13%, n=1).

4.2.1.5 Highest qualification of respondents

The highest qualification of the participants is indicated in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6: Highest qualification of respondents



From the information presented in Figure 4.6, it is evident that 50% (n=4) of the respondents possessed a National Diploma or Degree, while 26% (n=2) of the respondents had a Matric. Only a few of the women managers had a Master's Degree (12%, n=1) or a Doctorate Degree (12%, n=1), and there were no respondents that indicated that they had a qualification below Matric.

4.2.1.6 Management level of respondents

The management level of the participants is indicated in Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7: Management level of respondents

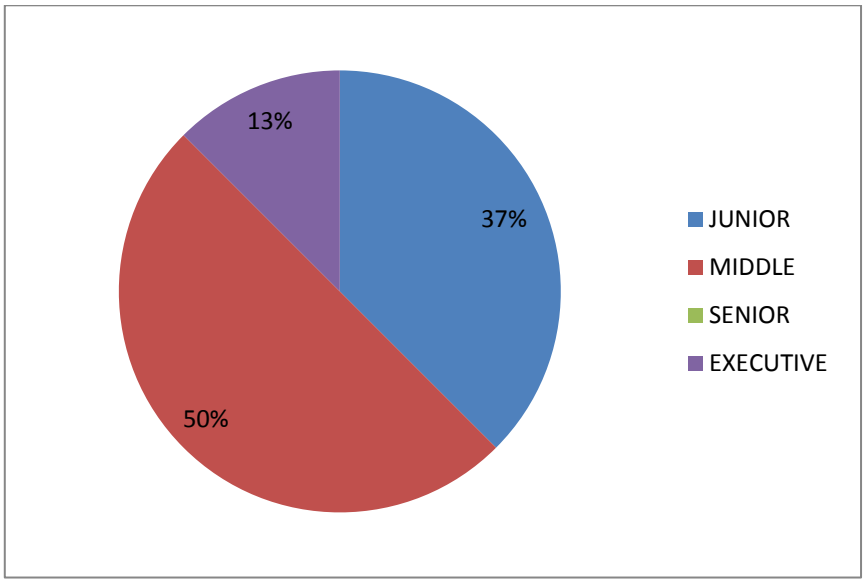


Figure 4.7 depicts that most of the respondents (50%, n=4) were working in middle-management positions, while 37% (n=3) were working at junior-management level, and 13% (n=1) were working at executive-management level. According to the figure, there were no respondents who were working in senior management.

4.2.1.7 Marital status of respondents

The marital status of the participants is indicated in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8: Marital status of respondents

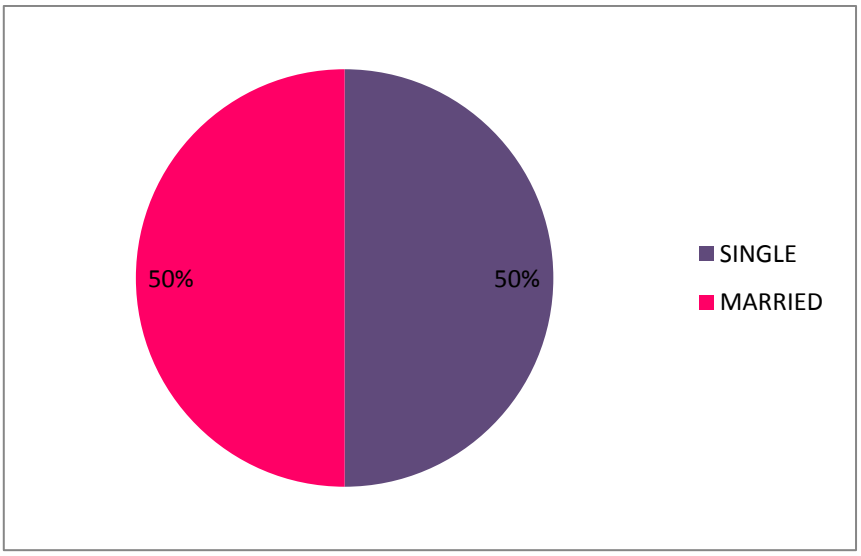


Figure 4.8 shows that 50% (n=4) of the respondents were married, and that the other 50% (n=4) of the respondents were single. There was no indication that any of the women managers in the sample was divorced or widowed.

4.2.1.8 Distribution of respondents with children and those without children

The distribution of respondents with children and those without children is depicted in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9: Distribution of respondents with children and those without children

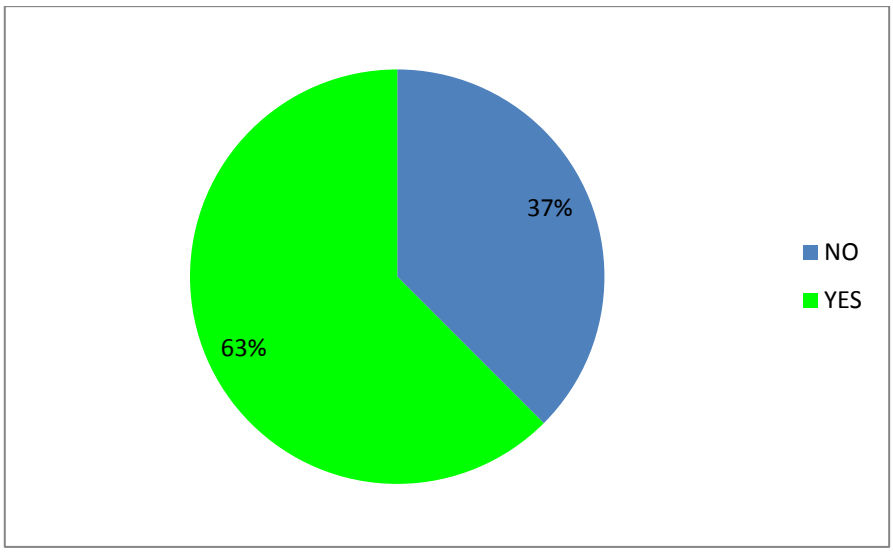
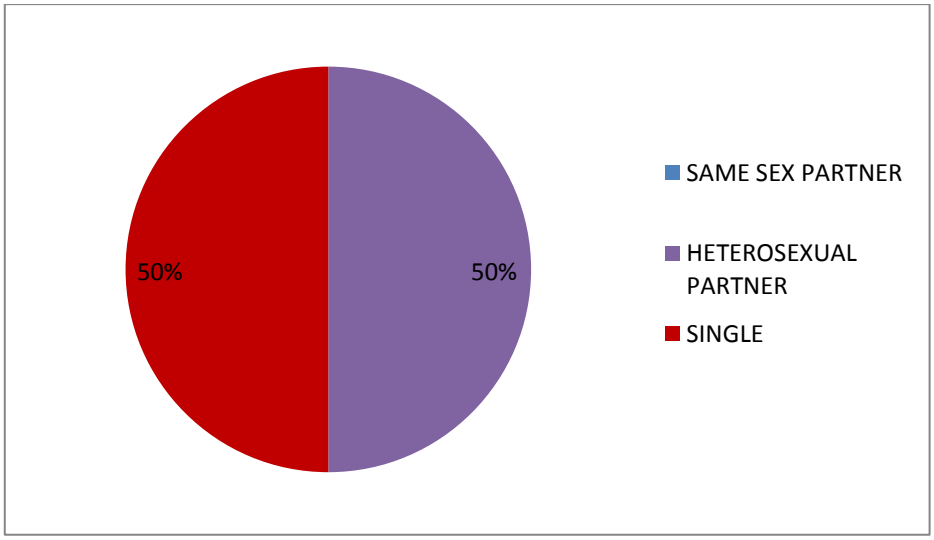


Figure 4.9 shows that most of the respondents had children (63%, n=5), while 37% (n=3) of the respondents did not have children.

4.2.1.9 Sexual orientation of respondents

The sexual orientation of the participants is indicated in Figure 4.10.

Figure 4.10: Sexual orientation of respondents



From the information presented in Figure 4.10, it is evident that 50% (n=4) of the respondents were heterosexual, while the other 50% (n=4) were asexual.

4.2.1.10 Concluding remarks

From the above discussion regarding the demographic variables of the sample, one can see that the sample was representative of various industries. This shows that some organisations in various industries are still male-dominated. In terms of years of service and years in the industry, the sample was almost equally distributed in terms of the different categories presented. The sample was skewed towards black African women and women in the age group of 24–43 years. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents had a post-matric qualification and were working at middle-management level, although the sample also included respondents that were working at junior-management level and executive-management level. The sample was equally distributed in terms of marital status, namely married respondents and single respondents. The sample did not have any divorced women managers. It was further indicated that most of the respondents had children. The sexual orientations of the respondents were indicated as asexual and heterosexual, respectively. Thus, the sample did not have any homosexual or bisexual participants.

4.3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Each of the themes in the study will be discussed and interpreted from within a feminist perspective. When verbatim responses by the women managers are quoted, they are enclosed within quotation marks, and are identified by the code of the participant (see section 4.2). For example, the code “R1” represents respondent 1, and “R2” represents respondent 2.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Social support needed by women managers

The first theme that emerged was the need for social support by women managers. The respondents indicated that they needed support in order to function effectively as managers in a male-dominated working environment. The need for family support was illustrated by the following comment: "*I have a very understanding family, so I have a great deal of support with regards to my work commitments […] it's much easier for me to be able to balance the two, because […] with the supportive structure that I have, it's much easier for me to be able to balance my personal and work commitments, and to make sure that it doesn't necessarily clash at any point*" (R5). One participant responded as follows: "*Well, at the moment I will say I'm lucky, because I am still staying with my mom, so I'm balanced, because when I get home the kids are bathed, they have eaten […] so I don't have stress*" (R6). Another respondent also acknowledged that she had family support: "*I have the support of my family*" (R3).

Respondents also noted that spousal support is essential in order to function effectively as a women manager in a male-dominated working environment. This was illustrated by the following comment: "*When my children were small, obviously now I'm older, and they are out of the house, so it's just me and my husband at home, and he supports me 100% in my job, so that makes it a lot easier for me*" (R1). Another respondent reported that she received support from her spouse: "*I talk to him about the problems, and he gives me the solutions. He understands that the job I'm in is very stressful, and he helps me with the homely duties, so he compensates for the other males at my job, because they do not understand. He supports me 100%*" (R2). The importance of spousal support was also mentioned as follows: "*We have a lot of discussions, and especially because of the […] position that I have […] I would say that he supports me*" (R8).

The importance of having support while having young children was illustrated by one respondent as follows: "*When I was younger and I had to go out, I had a good support system, with my parents being close by. You cannot be a female*

manager if you do not have a good support system, especially when you have smaller kids […] you just make it work because you want to" (R1).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Social constraints experienced by women managers

The second theme that emerged was social constraints experienced by women managers. This theme will be discussed in terms of group identity and stereotyping.

4.3.2.1 Group identity

The respondents reported that they were regarded as an "out group". This was illustrated by comments such as "*I will state my view, I will try to persuade them, but if males decide that that is what they want to do, they stick together and they will enforce it […] there was a male clan that decided […] and yes, they enforced it*" (R1). Other respondents noted that *"one male can only listen to another male when decisions are made; a female can't necessarily get up to the standard of the males*" (R2), and "*women can also influence certain things in the organisation, but it will always be challenged by the male counterparts*" (R3).

4.3.2.2 Stereotyping

Two forms of stereotyping were reported, namely general gender stereotyping and stereotyping of managerial positions.

4.3.2.2.1 General gender stereotyping

In terms of general gender stereotyping, most respondents mentioned that general gender stereotyping still exists in the workplace.

The existence of general gender stereotyping with reference to women sexuality and associated issues was illustrated by the comment "*After I was appointed as manager, I experienced sexual harassment in the workplace […] it was a form of somebody having sexual advancements towards me that I didn't like […] women are just taken as objects*" (R2). Another respondent noted that "*because you have a pair of breasts […] they think it's […] repellent for women to be part of this industry*" (R5). Respondents also mentioned that "*whether you are a manager or you are just whoever, you are a mother, and you are a wife to somebody […] I am deemed to be emotional when it is that time of the month [when I have my menstrual period]*" (R7). Another respondent mentioned: "*Small things like 'It's that time of the month', 'You should be a mother by now', 'You should go home', 'A woman's place is in the kitchen', even when they are joking, it hits the spot*" (R2).

4.3.2.2.2 Stereotyping of managerial positions

In terms of the managerial position itself, the women in the sample experienced stereotyping, which is evident from the following responses by the participants: "*As a woman, you are expected to wear these suits, and to portray yourself basically as a man, and to minimise your womanhood as much as possible*" (R8), "*Men think you don't have the necessary skills to be a manager in this field*" (R2), and "*Men don't believe that whatever we do will make it better […] it's like they will always know these things are heavy; you can't carry them*" (R7).

One respondent commented that "*men think you can't do the job*", and "*[i]t's hard to be promoted, because men think women belong home with the kids*" (R3). Another respondent commented as follows: "*They [men] think they know everything, especially in the manufacturing industry […] because they have been exposed to that before by their dads, and whatever […] by the time you start learning the ropes, then everybody thinks you are such a dumb somebody*" (R7). Other comments were: "*As women, we feel that we are not as good […] we can*

never really compare to men" (R4), "*They [men] still think you are unable to do the job*" (R2), and "*They [men] will always see you as a woman first, even though we should view each other as colleagues, and as equals*" (R8).

One respondent mentioned that as a women manager, she had to display characteristics traditionally associated with men, as is evident from the following response: "*You have to take the not so pleasing characteristics of a man for the men there to take you seriously*" (R2). Another respondent noted that "*sometimes to be taken seriously, you have to be as aggressive as a man*" (R3). Yet another respondent mentioned that "*to be taken seriously, you have to behave like a man […] you have to be quite assertive, and display such characteristics that are more inherent to men*" (R4).

4.3.3 Theme 3: The organisational culture of male-dominated working environments

The third theme that emerged was the organisational culture of male-dominated working environments. The respondents had different views regarding whether the organisational culture supported their values and beliefs. Some respondents indicated that their values and beliefs were respected at all times, while another respondent indicated that it depends on the situation, and yet others felt that their values and beliefs were not respected. The respondents that indicated that they are respected noted the following: "*I feel I have the respect of my colleagues*" (R1), and "*We have a number of feminist men, who value the opinions that women possess […] who value women in general, and even more so if this particular female is in a managerial position, they are most likely to be supportive*" (R5).

Another noted that "*I think my boss does, even if he doesn't say it himself, but he always comes here saying he is happy with my job*" (R6). The respondent that indicated that respect for women values and beliefs depends on the situation

stated: "*Well, it depends on the situation; sometimes they [female values and beliefs] are embraced, and sometimes they are not*" (R3). Respondents that indicated that their values and beliefs are not respected noted that "*it's very little, very little, 'cause I don't really have that much influence*" (R4), and "*honestly, not enough […] I feel more can be done*" (R8).

The respondents indicated that having a voice and being able to express opinions depends on the situation, and on whether women are assertive, or can stand up for what they believe in. This was evident from the following responses: "*If a female is a tough cookie […] dominant, the decision will be taken. If you are a softie, there is no chance anybody is going to listen to you*" (R2), and "*I think that we do have a voice, but you will find that most times it is overshadowed by other males*" (R8). Another respondent noted that "*very little, but I always try to get heard or to be heard when it comes to important decisions*" (R3).

4.3.4 Theme 4: The experience of work

The fourth theme that emerged was the experience of work. Respondents expressed differing perceptions regarding how they are experiencing their work as women managers in male-dominated working environments. Most of the respondents indicated that their work is experienced as stressful, challenging, tough, and frustrating, mostly because of the men that they have to work with. This was evident from the following responses: "*[My work is] very stressful. Because you are a woman, you will have to take tips from a man. They do not understand that women can do the job probably better than the men, but we won't say that out loud*" (R2), "*I must say it [my work] is challenging, 'cause I work with men […] and I'm always undermined*" (R3), *"It [my work] is very challenging, and I cannot be taken as seriously, because I am a woman*" (R4), and "*It [my work] is very frustrating, because you get a lot of males who want to flex their muscles, and you get a lot of males who have this sort of [attitude of] entitlement*

that is based on basically that they are male, and you constantly have to deal with that" (R8).

There were other comments that were made about the work experiences of the women in the sample. For example, one respondent indicated that her work was tough, but that she was positive about it, because she had the support of the men that she was working with. She commented: "*My work is […] a very tough job […] it requires men, you see […] we work with very heavy stuff, but they [me male subordinates] are very helpful […] they don't argue*" (R6). Another respondent indicated that although her working experience was stressful, the stress was not gender-based; it was based on the work experience, and not the men that she worked with. This was illustrated by the following comment: "*Working with finances, it doesn't really matter if you are a woman or you are a man; the stress doesn't change or doesn't reduce just because you are a female […] the experience is relatively refreshing, because, well, you get to work with different people, including this very males […] it is very co-operational with regards to the men and the women in this industry*" (R5).

Another respondent indicated that as a women manager, one needs to know one‟s work, so as to avoid being embarrassed by male counterparts in front of the people that one works with. She commented as follows: "*You have to know your work, and don't let anyone teach you something in your own work […] they [men] can really embarrass you, so you must know your stuff. It's better to know your work before somebody points your mistakes*" (R7). Thus, it seems that although most of the respondents indicated that their work was experienced as stressful, challenging, tough, and frustrating, mostly because of the men that they have to work with, some respondents mentioned that they were not necessarily negative about their work. Furthermore, the difficulties that they were experiencing in terms of their work were because of their experience of the work, and not because of gender differences.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Personal resources needed to cope as a women manager

The fifth theme that emerged was personal resources needed to cope as a women manager. In Table 4.1, a summary is presented of the personal resources mentioned by the respondents.

Table 4.1: Personal resources needed to cope as a women manager in a male-dominated environment

Personal characteristic	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8
Resilience	X							
Interpersonal skills	X		x					
Good social judgement	X							
Conflict-handling skills	X							
Planning and organising	X							
Professionalism	X			x				
Assertiveness		x						X
Dominance		x					x	
Leadership skills		x						
Practical solutions		x						
Problem-solving skills		x						
Patience			x	x	x	x		X
Knowledgeability			x					
Integrity				x				
Personal characteristic	**R1**	**R2**	**R3**	**R4**	**R5**	**R6**	**R7**	**R8**
Setting oneself apart					x			
Confidence					x			
Open-mindedness					x			
Focus						x		
Multitasking	X	x		x			x	

The summary provided in Table 4.1 shows that the six most important personal resources, as identified by the respondents, required by women managers in order to cope in a male-dominated environment are patience, multitasking, assertiveness, dominance, interpersonal skills, and professionalism. In terms of patience, the following responses indicate that it is necessary to have patience in order to cope as a women manager: "*Be very patient, because people are not the same*" (R3), "*Well, integrity, patience*" (R4), "*A high level of patience is necessary, especially when you are in a managerial position; it can be very stressful*" (R5), "*Well, I think being patient is one of the things to be successful*" (R6), and "*You have to have a lot of patience, because […] it is so very tiring and exhausting to constantly repeat yourself and to constantly prove yourself as a manager and as a woman, or as a female manager*" (R8).

Apart from patience, the respondents also indicated that women must be able to multitask in order to cope as a women manager. This was illustrated by the following comment: "*Some days your priority is your sick child, and some days your priority is this very important meeting, but I think that what make us as females unique is that we can actually do it, while […] males tend to focus on one thing […] we are made to multitask*" (R1). Other respondents commented as follows: "*Women are amazing, let me tell you that. Firstly, we can juggle home, we can juggle work, we can juggle everything. So I juggle it very efficiently […] women are made amazing. We are able to multitask, and our home situation never influences our work, so we are able to juggle these things easily. It's like second nature*" (R2), "*Naturally, women are good at multitasking […] we were born like this […] it's not something that you can learn along the way. You were born like this. I can cook and clean at the same time*" (R7). Another respondent also referred to women being able to multitask, by stating that "*I mean, as a woman, we are born to be multitaskers, so that's not really a challenge*" (R4).

The respondents also mentioned that interpersonal skills are important. This is evident from the following responses: "*I think you have to […] show the people you work with that you are not above them, but you walk beside them, and they strengthen you*" (R1), and "*You have to be able to have people skills […] because people are not the same*" (R3). Respondents also noted that professionalism and assertiveness are important characteristics to have. This was illustrated by the following responses: "*You must be able to be professional enough and have that presence of being the manager, without dominating […] I think that earns the respect of the people*" (R1), "*I have to uphold a certain level of professionalism when performing my job, and obviously through conduct*" (R4), "*Assertiveness […] basically, your head must be strong and be able to take the hardships that come with the position you are in*" (R2), and "*Being assertive: I cannot stress how important that is, because people need to take you seriously at all times, especially as a woman who is a manager*" (R8).

Lastly, respondents indicated that dominance is an important characteristic to have as a women manager, because of their working environment being male-dominated. This was evident from the following comments: "*Dominance […] be able to take the hardships that come with the position you are in*" (R2), and "*You must just be tough and be a bully. Be a bully, otherwise you will be bullied all the way. You must just be a bully and be a tough cookie. That's all I can say*" (R7).

4.3.6 Theme 6: Requirements for women advancement

The sixth theme that emerged was requirements for women advancement. Respondents reported similar requirements to advance to managerial level in male-dominated working environments. Firstly, most of the respondents noted that they were promoted internally to the managerial positions that they are currently holding. Apart from one respondent, all of the respondents indicated that they were promoted, and were thus not recruited externally. One of the respondents noted that "*I think mostly it was because as a person who is already*

on the inside, it was easier for me to achieve something like that, and as much as I don't like to admit it, it had a lot to do with the fact that my mentor was someone who is male, and was someone who was already in a senior position" (R8). Another respondent mentioned that "*[s]eeing as I was an intern there, I had a better chance of proving my capabilities*" (R4).

Secondly, a core requirement mentioned in order to advance to a managerial level in a male-dominated working environment was that of qualifications. One respondent mentioned that her promotion was due to her qualifications: "*It's because of my qualifications. I think having qualification is a boost*" (R7). However, the other respondents noted that they were better qualified than the male applicants, and, as such, they were promoted to managerial level. In this regard, one respondent commented as follows: "*I think I was just at the right place at the right time with the right qualification. The people [males] at that stage […] didn't have the higher qualification than I had, so at first my qualification got me into the position, and then I just grew into the manager's post*" (R1*).* Another respondent noted that she was promoted because "*I had more experience than them [males], and also qualifications*" *(R6).*

Apart from being promoted internally and having the necessary qualifications, the respondents indicated that they had to continually work very hard to prove themselves in their jobs, and in their subsequent promotions to the managerial positions that they currently hold. This was illustrated by the following comments: "*I proved myself with regards to the work […] I gave 110%, and that's how eventually they noticed that the woman can do the job*" (R2), "*I worked very hard through the positions I have held to have proven myself*" (R3), "*Seeing as I was an intern there, I had a better chance of proving my capabilities*" (R4).

4.3.7 Theme 7: Initiatives that support women advancement

The seventh theme that emerged was initiatives that support women advancement. Respondents expressed different views when it comes to initiatives that promote women and women managers. Some of the respondents acknowledged that the organisations are actively promoting women development, but the majority stated that initiatives exist, but they are not being implemented, or the respondents are not aware of any initiatives to promote women managers. One respondent that indicated that organisations are actively promoting women development stated that "*I think lately there is a big drive […] and developing opportunities are there for everybody in this institution […] there are specific drives to get females*" (R1). Another respondent noted that "*there are a number of initiatives that do promote female advancement in this industry*" (R5).

Respondents that indicated that there are initiatives to develop women managers, but that they are not being implemented, commented as follows: "*There probably are, but as far as I know, I haven't seen any being used in my organisation*" (R3), and "*Well, not really, 'cause like I said, they [women managers] are not as visible*" (R4). Other responses were: "*I think that there are some, but at the same time, they are not being properly implemented, and the people that should be doing this job are basically doing a poor job*" (R8), and "*No, not at all […] there's absolutely none, in my opinion […] it's all practical on paper, but the things that are happening are not conducive to females, even though they say they are so*" (R2). One respondent that indicated that they are not aware of any initiatives to promote women managers in male-dominated organisations commented as follows: "*Well, unfortunately nothing […] we haven't had any workshops whatsoever*" (R6).

4.3.8 Theme 8: Challenges that women managers are experiencing

The eighth theme that emerged was challenges women managers are experiencing. Respondents indicated that as women managers, they face a number of challenges in their respective male-dominated working environments. The challenges can be clustered together as a shortage of women managers, out-of-role behaviour, lack of women support, male beliefs about women, and male dominance and patriarchy. These clusters will be discussed separately in the following sections.

4.3.8.1 Shortage of women managers

The respondents noted that currently there is a shortage of women to fill managerial positions. One respondent commented as follows: "*We were almost forced to go head-hunt females for the position […] specifically head-hunting a black female or black females for that position*" (R1). One of the reasons offered for the shortage of women managers is that of experience. The same respondent indicated that "*males tend to have more experience, because they were … 10 years ago males would have been the leaders or managers, and the females would have stayed home or not go to university […] to wipe out that sort of deficit is going to take time*" (R1).

Another reason offered for the shortage of women managers in male-dominated working environments was the lack of mentorship programmes for women. One respondent indicated that she got promoted due to mentorship training from her male mentor. This was illustrated by the following comment: "*As much as I don't like to admit it, it had a lot to do with the fact that my mentor was someone who is male, and was someone who was already in a senior position*" (R8). The respondents also indicated that there is a lack of women managers due to women leaving male-dominated working environments. Some of the responses were: "*Women are more likely to leave the industry, because of how it's structured, than stay*" (R3), "*As a woman, we feel that we are not as good […] we*

don't really have our place, and we can never really compare to men, and we end up leaving the organisation and industry to pursue maybe something more female" (R4), and "*It was difficult, and at some point I wanted to leave […] they will make you feel like leaving. They will make you feel like a woman. That's how men are*" (R6).

4.3.8.2 Out-of-role behaviour

The respondents indicated that women need to display certain characteristics traditionally associated with men in order to succeed or be taken seriously in their respective working environments. This was illustrated by the following comments: "*Sometimes, to be taken seriously, you have to be as aggressive as a man*" (R3), "*If you are a female […] you have to take the not-so-pleasing characteristics of a man for the men there to take you seriously*" (R2), "*To be taken seriously, you have to behave like a man. You have to be quite assertive and, you know, display such characteristics that are more inherent to men*" (R4), "*Traditional male characteristics have to be displayed by women managers, for better results to be achieved*" (R5), "*Sometimes you have to act like a man, so things go right, 'cause being soft all the time, men don't listen*" (R6), and "*As a woman, you are expected to wear these suits, and to portray yourself basically as a man*" (R8).

4.3.8.3 Lack of support among women

The respondents noted that there is a lack of support among women. This was illustrated by the following comments: "*Females are actually sabotaging each other in order for the other individual not to be more successful than the other one, or advance in the way that they deserve*" (R5), "*The other disappointing factor is that as females, we do not support each other, so they can gang up against you with other males*" (R7), and "*As women, we should stand together in working environments, because we are the ones actually who make these male colleagues disrespect us in many ways, because now I will be friends with other*

male colleagues because I want their support in everything I do […] I am telling you, females are the ones who are going to cut that ladder while you are still going up. They will cut it, and you will fall. We can be very cruel to each other. We don't support each other; we would rather gossip" (R7).

4.3.8.4 Male beliefs

The respondents indicated that there are a number of beliefs that men hold about women managers that lead to gender stereotyping and gender-bias behaviour towards women managers. This was illustrated by the following responses: "*It's hard to be promoted, because men think women belong home with the kids*" (R3), and "*Men just overlook women, because, well, they are women, because they don't possess certain characteristics males possess*" (R5).

4.3.8.5 Male dominance and patriarchy

The respondents indicated that men still reinforce male dominance and patriarchal behaviour through their actions within the workplace. This was illustrated by the following comments: "*The current male dominancy is just because of the way the past was*" (R1), "*I experienced sexual harassment in the workplace […] women are just taken as objects […] [I] went to a disciplinary hearing, but […] they didn't take my word for it*" (R2), and "*Every male in the industry thinks you are incompetent, so you have to prove yourself at every turn […] you are a woman. You will have to take tips from a man*" (R2).

Other respondents commented as follows: "*They [males] still think you are unable to do the job*" (R3), "*People [males] believe that women cannot compete at the same level to which men can*", (R5), "*It's just the random one […] that have this patriarchal ideologies that really lash out at people*" (R5), "*They [males] think they know everything […] they don't take you seriously, because they don't believe that whatever we [females] do will make it better*" (R7), and "*As a woman,*

you constantly have to explain a lot of things and work extra hard, you know, more than is expected of you […] a lot of males want to flex their muscles, and you get a lot of males who have this sort of [attitude of] entitlement that is based on basically that they are male, and you constantly have to deal with that" (R8).

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented an analysis of the research findings that were derived from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the eight women managers in their respective working environments. This analysis was informed by the identification of eight themes which emerged from the data collected during the interviews.

Collecting the data was an eye-opening and life-changing experience for me. When I reflect on the exercise, it was interesting to note the emotions that accompanied experiences in the workplace. During the course of the interviews, the respondents expressed their anger, concerns, anxiety, and genuine kindness and love for their work, and those who support them in it. This was appreciated. It was refreshing to gain insight into women"s real-life experiences. Although the participants presented themselves well during the interviews, I could clearly feel that most of the participants had genuine concerns and were experiencing difficulties in the male-dominated working environments in which they work. I noted that each respondent approached the interview differently, and although some of the respondents were eager to share their experiences, others found it more difficult to share how they felt about their workplaces, and the people they share them with.

I was aware of the potential risks associated with participants sharing experiences regarding sexual harassment and discrimination. Therefore, I made sure that I was well prepared for such situations, and I tried to offer support in an appropriate manner. Although I was prepared for stress-management debriefing,

it was not necessary to debrief any of the participants. During the interview sessions, it became clear to me that women do not always have the opportunity to be heard, particularly when working in a male-dominated working environment. However, I felt honoured by the willingness of the women managers to put their trust in me by sharing their thoughts with me. I found it amazing to do a study of this nature, which offered the women managers in the study an opportunity to talk about issues that are close to their heart, without fear of any preconceived ideas on my part.

The semi-structured interview schedules, which were distributed to the participants before the interviews commenced, provided the women managers and me with a framework to build trust and confidentiality. It also made the women managers more comfortable in sharing their experiences with me, and for that I am truly grateful. I was also deeply inspired by the women managers, who face difficulties every day, but are still able to rise above them and excel in their managerial positions, setting an example for women who are entering the workplace, and for those who are still advancing through the ranks.

In chapter 5, a summary of the literature review and empirical investigation will be presented. Thereafter, the research questions will be discussed, and recommendations will be made.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore the work situations of women managers, and thus their experiences in male-dominated working environments, in order to understand why problems are still experienced with regard to gender equality in managerial positions. This research study sought to accomplish the following specific objectives, as stated in section 1.9:

1. To understand how social dynamics shape women managers" experiences in male-dominated working environments;
2. To understand how organisational dynamics shape women managers" experiences in male-dominated working environments;
3. To explore how women managers experience advancement opportunities in male-dominated working environments;
4. To gain insight into the challenges that women managers are facing in male-dominated working environments; and
5. To provide recommendations on how to change male-dominated working environments, so as to develop an environment that will be supportive of gender equality and transformation.
6. This chapter outlines the major findings of the study and the significant issues that came to light from the literature review and the empirical evidence from the study. After a discussion of the findings of the study, recommendations are made for practice and theory with regard to changing male-dominated working environments, so as to develop an environment that will be supportive of gender equality and transformation, and the limitations of the study are explained.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 highlighted previous research studies investigating women in the workplace. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in the study were also presented. The conceptual framework presented in chapter 1 (see Figure 1.1) demonstrated that this qualitative study intended to explore the real-life experiences of women managers working in male-dominated working environments, which is necessary to achieve gender equality at managerial levels, and to empower women, which is necessary in a democratic society such as that of South Africa.

Chapter 2 provided a detailed exposition of feminism and feminist theory, the legislative framework that is applicable to women in the workplace, a discussion of women participation in a social and an organisational context (see sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2), with a specific focus on gender stereotyping, social identity, male-dominated working environments, and organisational and gender diversity. In addition, women career development and its contributors were discussed, as well as barriers to women career development. Women managers were discussed in relation to gender differences in leadership styles and women at executive level. This comprehensive literature review allowed me to gain a holistic overview of the theory regarding women in the workplace, which was used to interpret the findings of the study.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

Information derived from chapters 1 and 2 provided the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that informed the empirical study, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4. The investigation was conducted using a qualitative research design, and from a feminist perspective (see section 3.3.1). Data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews conducted with the women participants in their male-dominated working environments (see section 3.5.1). Thus, I had intensive contact with the participants in their natural working environments,

exploring their experiences in male-dominated working environments. Being the main instrument through which the data was collected, I endeavoured to practise attentive listening and empathic understanding, without having any preconceived ideas about the topic under discussion, so as to capture data as accurately as possible.

A number of ethical considerations were observed, such as obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, obtaining permission to record the interviews, and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, so as to ensure that the rights of the participants were protected at all times, and also to ensure that at no point were the rights of the participants violated (see section 3.7). By paying attention to these ethical considerations, I respected the rights of the participants, and made sure that the participants were not harmed through their participation in the study. This allowed the women managers in the study the opportunity to articulate their experiences in a safe and secure setting.

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews was recorded, and the recordings were transcribed. The data was analysed and interpreted, so as to identify themes. The identified themes were social support needed by women managers, social constraints experienced by women managers, the organisational culture of male-dominated working environments, the experience of work, personal resources needed to cope as a women manager, requirements for women advancement, organisational initiatives that support women advancement, and challenges that women managers are experiencing. These themes were considered and clustered together to identify the appropriate theoretical constructs, namely social context, organisational context, and women advancement and retention, which correspond with the objectives of the study.

5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

How do women managers experience social dynamics in male-dominated working environments?

5.4.1 Theme 1: Social support needed by women managers

The first theme that emerged was the need for social support by women managers. The respondents indicated the importance of family and spousal support in order to function effectively as women managers. This support becomes increasingly important in the case of women managers with young children. The findings in terms of social support are consistent with the findings of Mashupi (2013:83), who reported that support systems are a necessity to cope as a senior manager in a male-dominated industry (civil engineering, in the case of her study). However, while the respondents in the current study only referred to the support of family and the spouse, respondents in Mashupi"s (2013:83) study indicated support in a variety of forms, namely mentors, the work environment, family, friends, domestic helpers, and au pairs.

From the responses of the participants, the general feeling was that it is almost impossible for women managers to cope with their managerial roles in male-dominated working environments without receiving social support, although the support can take different forms. This reliance on social support can be attributed to organisations glorifying employees that work as if they do not have any personal life requirements (Martin, 2013:27). One respondent mentioned that "*if you are a female, you have to do the whole dominant thing, the whole 'I do not care what your family life is; do the work!'*" (R2). It is thus important that male-dominated workplaces become more aware of the importance of creating work-life balance. This will be particularly important in the case of women managers that have little or no social support.

5.4.2 Theme 2: Social constraints experienced by women managers

The second theme that emerged was social constraints that have shaped women managers" experiences in male-dominated working environments. The following social constraints were identified from the responses of the participants: group identity, and stereotyping.

5.4.2.1 Group identity

In terms of group identity, respondents indicated that men are still regarded as the “in-group” in male-dominated working environments, while women are seen as an “out-group”. This is not surprising, since men dominate male-dominated working environments. However, this group membership influences the way men perceive, feel, and behave towards women in various work settings. Furthermore, it can lead to gender stereotyping, discrimination, and conflict in the workplace (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002:581), which was mentioned by some of the respondents.

At a more subtle level, in-group/out-group behaviour can lead to differential treatment, which was also mentioned by the respondents. Respondents indicated that men are inclined to act in a dominant manner towards the out-group (i.e. women), by forming male clans in the workplace, which leads to women feeling inferior and less capable than men of being successful in managerial positions. The respondents also noted that they are not fully accepted because of their gender.

The findings of the study in terms of “in-group”/“out-group” behaviour are consistent with the findings of Martin (2013:29), who found that gaining acceptance into the male “in-group” is a challenge for women once they enter a male-dominated working environment, and this can lead to discriminatory practices by their male counterparts. Mashupi (2013:21) found that most women do not have a sense of belonging, because of the “old-boys" network” that exists

within the industry. This may lead to women isolating themselves and feeling inadequate to offer their opinions and make contributions during managerial decision making. This will not only have a negative impact on the well-being of women managers, but will also prevent women managers from functioning optimally, which, in turn, may influence organisational effectiveness.

5.4.2.2 Stereotyping

Apart from the social constraint of gender identity, the women managers in the study also experienced stereotyping in the form of general gender stereotyping and stereotyping of managerial positions. In this regard, Mashupi (2013:22) found that gender-based stereotyping exists in male-dominated working environments, specifically in relation to the leadership styles of male managers versus women managers. In another study, Martin (2013:29) found that gender-based stereotyping is prevalent in male-dominated working environments, specifically in relation to how women are viewed as not being committed to their work, and to how they dress in the workplace, which can lead to behaviour manifestations such as sexual harassment.

In section 2.4.1.1, various forms of gender stereotyping were identified, namely “sex-object” stereotyping, “mother” stereotyping, “iron-maiden” stereotyping, and “sex-role” stereotyping. Each of the respondents mentioned that they have experienced one or more of these forms of gender stereotyping. The only type of stereotyping which was not experienced by any of the respondents was “child” stereotyping.

In terms of “sex-object” stereotyping, the respondents noted that women in the workplace are judged based on their appearance and actions, which leads to men making sexual advances, which often ends up in sexual harassment. Two of the respondents (R2, R5) mentioned sexual harassment during the interviews. One respondent (R5) mentioned that sexual harassment may hamper women

advancement in the workplace. The other respondent mentioned that she was subjected to sexual harassment, and that a disciplinary hearing took place. However, no penalty was imposed on the perpetrator, because "*they didn't take my word for it; they said I was just being a woman, so that would be that*" (R2). This shows that although policies and procedures often exist in male-dominated workplaces, they are not always implemented as expected. This may cause women in male-dominated workplaces to keep silent about issues such as sexual harassment, which can be detrimental to their well-being and advancement in the workplace.

Respondents that have experienced "mother" stereotyping noted that they were viewed as less serious professionals when planning families, because they are perceived as being mothers and wives, and their "place" is regarded as being "in the kitchen", not in the workplace. This shows that many men have not changed in their perceptions regarding women and the role that they play in the workplace, in households, and in society in general. It will be difficult for organisations to change these deeply held stereotypes, which have been entertained since early childhood.

Respondents also noted that they have experienced "iron-maiden" stereotyping. According to this type of stereotyping, it is expected of women to display male characteristics before they can be taken seriously in the workplace. This form of stereotyping can also be referred to as sex-characteristic stereotyping, i.e. stereotyping based on the sex of the usual job holder. Sex-characteristic stereotyping refers to women being defined as manly, which reinforces the idea that society often holds that to be confident, ambitious, and competitive are masculine traits, and thus unfeminine.

Most of the respondents mentioned that they had to display male characteristics before they can be taken seriously in the workplace. Two of the respondents (R2, R7) mentioned that women managers need to display dominance, be a "tough cookie", and not be seen as a "softie". Other respondents mentioned that they

have to be aggressive like a man, always act like a man, be a bully like men are, and that women are expected to wear a suit and portray themselves basically as a man, thus minimising their womanhood as much as possible.

As was mentioned, none of the respondents experienced “child” stereotyping. “Child” stereotyping refers to women being seen as children, thus not having their opinions respected. This is an unexpected finding, because it shows that although men still perceive their women counterparts as “mothers”, and they expect them to act as such, they are respected as women. It is possible that this originates from the cultures and upbringing of men, where they were taught to respect their mothers and sisters. Nevertheless, the aforementioned findings regarding gender stereotyping confirm that many women managers working in male-dominated working environments are experiencing gender-based stereotyping, but that they are not necessarily disrespected because they are women.

The findings regarding the social dynamics that shape the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments confirm that not much social transformation has taken place since radical feminism emerged in the 1960s. In line with the thinking of radical feminists at the time, the findings of the study confirm that society must be changed at its core in order to dissolve rigid gender roles.

5.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How do women managers experience organisational dynamics in male-dominated working environments?

5.5.1 Theme 3: The organisational culture of male-dominated working environments

The third theme that emerged was that of the organisational culture of male-dominated working environments. Based on the responses received from the participants, the general impression was that organisational dynamics shape the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments. In terms of decision making, respondents indicated that it can be difficult for women to have a voice when decisions are being made, particularly when it comes to important decisions that need to be made in the organisation. Jonkheid and Mango (2008:22) reported that the women managers in their study claimed that they did not have a voice when it came to decision making, and that their recommendations were often overruled by their superiors or top management. This was attributed to personal agendas and power struggles that exist in the male-dominated working environment, and it was asserted that this could all be avoided if male management styles were less autocratic in nature, and if women managers" mental abilities were more appreciated (Jonkheid & Mango, 2008:22).

Mwando, Mamimine, Kanokanga and Chimutingiza (2014:132) found that over and above gender prejudices, stereotyping and discrimination, based on African history, masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women in decision making are still common occurrences in contemporary African society, particularly in the hotel industry. From the aforementioned findings, it is clear that men still continue to dominate the decision-making process in the male-dominated working environments where the research studies were conducted. This seems to discourage women managers from becoming involved in making

decisions or voicing their opinions. This type of male behaviour could possibly be a result of the cultural background men come from, and the way they have been raised to be dominant decision makers in their homes and communities.

In terms of the value and belief systems of women managers in male-dominated organisational cultures, different views were offered by the respondents. Some respondents indicated that their values and beliefs are respected at all times, while other respondents indicated that their values and beliefs are respected depending on the particular situation, and others noted that their values and beliefs were not respected at all. Thus, some male-dominated organisational cultures have become supportive or somewhat supportive of women values and beliefs, while others have not made significant progress in this regard.

5.5.2 Theme 4: The experience of work

The fourth theme that emerged was the experience of work. Respondents expressed differing perceptions regarding their experience of work. The general impression from the responses was that the work experience of women managers can be described as stressful, challenging, tough, and frustrating. Three of the respondents (R1, R5, R6) mentioned during the interviews that their work stress is not related to working with their male counterparts, but is related to their experience of the work. However, other respondents mentioned that their work experience is made stressful, challenging, and frustrating because they are not taken seriously in the workplace by their male colleagues. They mentioned, for example, that they have to take tips from their male colleagues regarding the way work should be done, they are often undermined by their male colleagues, and their male counterparts tend to want to “flex their muscles” towards the women managers in the workplace.

The above responses indicate that although women have managed to break the glass ceiling to some extent, which has up to now prevented them from entering managerial positions, they are still faced with numerous obstacles in the workplace. Thus, the labyrinth metaphor (Valerio, 2009:16) is still applicable to the work experiences of some women managers. The respondents indicated that they are still experiencing difficulties and obstacles in their endeavours to function effectively as a manager in male-dominated working environments. This may hamper the career advancement of women to senior-managerial level, or it may ultimately cause women to exit the organisation, or the industry.

The findings regarding the organisational dynamics that shape the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments confirm that patriarchy and male dominance are not conducive to women advancement, retention and empowerment. According to ecofeminism, oppressive behaviours are interconnected, and therefore structures of oppression must be addressed in their entirety (Hobgood-Oster, 2002:1). This implies that organisations need to reconsider their existence and transform as a collective, since individuals within male-dominated working environments cannot transform organisations on their own.

5.6 RESEARCH QUESTION 3

How do women managers experience advancement opportunities in male-dominated working environments?

5.6.1 Theme 5: Personal resources needed to cope as a women manager

The fifth theme that emerged was personal resources needed to cope as a women manager. Personal resources are defined as “an individual's positive psychological state of development, characterised by (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed in challenging

tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering towards goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back, and even beyond (resilience), to attain success" (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011:7).

From the responses recorded, the respondents indicated that there are a number of personal resources that are needed to cope as a women manager in male-dominated working environments, among others patience, multitasking, interpersonal skills, professionalism, assertiveness, and dominance. The respondents mentioned that having these personal resources can help a women manager to handle conflict situations in the workplace, to be a good leader, to be a bully in order not to be bullied oneself, and to be able to deal with work-life balance. Furthermore, personal resources have been found to be one of the antecedents of work engagement (Bakker et al., 2011:6). Therefore, one may argue that if women managers use their personal resources to cope as women managers, it can possibly also lead to them being more engaged in their work. This, in turn, will lead to women managers being less likely to quit their positions, and becoming more committed to the organisation (Schaufeli, Taris & Van Rhenen, 2008:179).

5.6.2 Theme 6: Requirements for women advancement

The sixth theme that emerged was requirements for women advancement. Apart from personal resources that are needed to cope in male-dominated working environments, the respondents also indicated that requirements for women advancement have affected their experiences in male-dominated working environments.

The respondents generally felt that in order for them to advance into managerial positions, they needed to meet a number of requirements, such as vacancies being filled internally, having the right qualifications for the job, and continually working very hard in order to prove themselves, often much harder than their male counterparts. Morrison, White and Van Velsor, cited in Burke et al. (2012:96), identified various requirements needed for women managers to advance to executive level, such as help from above, a track record of achievements, a desire to succeed, an ability to manage subordinates, a willingness to take career risks, and an ability to be tough, decisive, and demanding. However, this study was conducted in the public sector in Istanbul. Thus, it seems as if different requirements need to be met in male-dominated working environments in South Africa for women managers to advance in the organisation.

5.6.3 Theme 7: Initiatives that support women advancement

The seventh theme that emerged was organisational initiatives that support women advancement. The respondents expressed different views in terms of initiatives that seek to promote women in male-dominated working environments. One of the respondents (R1) indicated that organisations actively promote women development in the organisation. However, the majority of the respondents indicated that even though initiatives that support women advancement do exist on paper, they are not being implemented. Some respondents mentioned that they were not aware of any initiatives that support women advancement. From the responses recorded, one may conclude that more organisational initiatives are needed to support women advancement. The reason for this is that often women managers feel that they are being taken for granted by their male counterparts, and are set up to fail, with no support, guidance, or information (Martin, 2013:30).

Male-dominated workplaces also need to show an authentic commitment towards organisational initiatives to promote women advancement, because from the responses, it seems that some organisations do have initiatives in place, but that they are not necessarily being implemented and supported by organisational leaders.

5.7 RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What are the challenges that women managers experience in male-dominated working environments?

5.7.1 Theme 8: Challenges that women managers experience in male-dominated working environments

The eighth theme that emerged was the challenges that women managers experience in male-dominated working environments. The respondents reported the following challenges: a shortage of women managers, out-of-role behaviour, lack of support among women, male beliefs, and male dominance and patriarchy. Some of these challenges mentioned by the respondents are also mentioned by Mashupi (2013:19), who identified the following challenges that women managers are facing: slow career progression, work-family balance, long working hours, the organisational culture, promotional policies, gender-based stereotyping, and a lack of support from the organisation. Hoobler et al. (2011:151) reported that the following challenges are the main reasons there are a lack of women managers: the feeling that top-level management positions are untenable for women managers, and perceptions of the implicit values and the organisational culture of male-dominated organisations, which includes the “old-boys club”. They also mention that a lack of women managers in top management means that there is a lack of women support among women, in the form of women mentors (Hoobler et al., 2011:151).

In the current study, the lack of support among women managers was also mentioned, but not in the form of women mentors. The respondents mentioned that women managers in male-dominated environments often sabotage each other, which implies that women managers themselves hold each other back from advancement. It was also mentioned that just as men often form an “old-boys club” or “male clan”, women managers sometimes imitate this political behaviour, forming alliances with other males, to the detriment of other women. This was by far the most unexpected finding of this study.

5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Very few studies have been conducted to understand the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments. Although previous research studies have focused on women in male-dominated working environments, some studies were conducted in a specific industry, and some focused on a specific topic, such as stress or mentorship. The experiences of women managers in a general sample of male-dominated working environments have not previously been studied in South Africa. Thus, it was necessary that more research be conducted.

Since only women managers were included in this study, it is recommended that future studies should incorporate the experiences of male managers in relation to women managers, and should include more male-dominated work environments outside the Free State province of South Africa. It would also be interesting to explore how the work experiences differ between male-dominated, women-dominated, and mixed-gender working environments, respectively, in order to compare the experiences of women managers in different working environments. The current study only included participants that were white and black African, respectively, and it seems necessary to extend the current study to include women managers from other races, such as Indians and Coloureds. It is also recommended that a comparative study be done between women managers who

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are married with children and women managers who are single or divorced with children, in order to determine whether they experience the world of work differently. The most interesting finding was that women managers often sabotage each other, rather than supporting each other, and it seems necessary that this concerning issue should be investigated further. These recommendations for future research will lead to an advanced understanding of the experiences of women managers in the workplace, specifically male-dominated working environments. In addition, they will help organisations to develop strategies to advance gender transformation and gender representativeness at all organisational levels.

5.9 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDUSTRY

The final objective of the study was to provide recommendations on how to change male-dominated working environments so as to develop an environment that will be supportive of gender equality and transformation. In line with this objective, the following recommendations are suggested.

The findings of the study indicate the importance of having social support in order to cope effectively as a women manager in a male-dominated working environment. This implies that organisations should become more flexible and creative when structuring salary packages and when considering fringe benefits. For example, organisations can consider providing child-care facilities, funding children"s education and homework classes, and providing employee assistance programmes and formal mentorship programmes. Flexible working arrangements should also be considered, such as shorter working weeks, job sharing, and working from home, so as to help women managers, particularly those that do not have strong support systems to rely on.

The respondents felt that they are still excluded from the “in-group”, or “the male clan”. So as to demolish this boundary, it is recommended that peer gender relations should become part of the key performance areas of male and women managers. This will force managers (both male and women) to provide evidence of how they have enhanced peer gender relations. In addition, when peer evaluations are done as part of the performance management system, gender relations should be included. However, this should not be done superficially, and care should be taken to ensure that genuine action is taken. This will signal to subordinates that organisational leaders are committed to promoting gender relations.

The respondents mentioned that decision making is dominated by males, and that they often do not have a voice when important decisions are being made. It was also mentioned that male-dominated working environments show preference for an autocratic leadership style. Based on these experiences of the women managers in the study, it is suggested that male-dominated workplaces should reconsider the type of people that are recruited and promoted within the organisation. Organisations can, for example, use psychological testing during their selection process, so as to identify the decision-making style and leadership style of the applicant, in order to ensure that people are appointed or promoted that are more democratic in their approach, rather than dominant and autocratic. It is also crucial that male managers are trained in chairing management meetings, so as to ensure that one or two dominant personalities do not dominate discussions during meetings where important decisions are taken.

The respondents generally perceived their work as women managers to be stressful, frustrating, and challenging. What is important, however, is how women managers respond to the stressors that they are faced with. If an individual remains optimistic about life, and consequently work, it will be beneficial to their health (Kivimäki, Elovainio, Singh-Manoux, Vahtera, Helenius & Pentti, 2005:413), emotional well-being, and quality of life (Vogel, 2006:37). Montgomery and Rupp (2005:461) assert that poor coping mechanisms have long been

identified as a primary cause of stress (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005:461), which can lead to people feeling depressed and lonely. This shows that it is important for male-dominated workplaces to ensure that more emphasis is placed on employee wellness, and that employee wellness programmes should be considered. Various activities can be included in the wellness programme, such as development of coping skills, physical exercise, group support sessions, or meditation.

Male-dominated workplaces can also consider matching women mangers with life coaches, so that they can cope effectively with their roles as women managers, as well as their often conflicting roles outside the workplace. This will also allow women managers to integrate their personal lives and work lives appropriately, thereby preventing the one from being in conflict with the other. In addition, if wellness programmes are well established, and life coaching is given to women managers, it will lead to them developing their own personal resources, which have been identified as crucial in order to function effectively as a women manager.

The above suggestions regarding wellness programmes and life coaching will not only allow women managers to cope with their current positions, but will also prepare them for future positions, possibly at senior- or top-management level. Some respondents mentioned that they often had to work harder than their male counterparts to be promoted to higher positions. Therefore, it is recommended that male-dominated working environments should develop a promotion policy that is gender-neutral. Furthermore, just as in the case of affirmative-action positions, male-dominated workplaces need to consider whether preference should be given to women when recruiting for top-management positions, so as to ensure gender representativeness at all managerial levels.

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It is also advisable for companies to have a proper performance-management system in place. This will not only ensure fairness, but it will also allow the organisation to identify high-performing women who can be mentored for future senior positions. This approach will break down the barrier whereby women often perceive themselves as not being good enough to be promoted to senior level. Furthermore, if women observe that other women are promoted and invested in, it will create a sense of hope and optimism in them, which will inspire them to set high but realistic goals in terms of their progression within the organisation.

Women managers themselves have an important role to play in their own advancement. The study showed that women managers do not have a strong support system among themselves. A strong support system is critical if women managers are to succeed in male-dominated working environments. Thus, it is advisable for organisations to develop workplace initiatives. Such initiatives can, for instance, pair up women managers with other women managers, whether they are from within the workplace or from outside the workplace, for the purpose of mentoring them. In addition, initiatives should be implemented that can assist in the development of the capabilities of women managers, so that women managers can be adequately prepared to advance up the corporate ladder in the organisation. This can be achieved through conducting workshops, seminars, training, and conferences that seek to empower women, in order to deal appropriately with the challenges that they are experiencing, while also allowing women managers to network with one another.

For this reason, male-dominated workplaces are encouraged to develop formal workplace initiatives that will assist the organisation to create a positive working environment that is conducive to women managers entering and continuing to work in such environments. Such organisational initiatives should include tough, evident, and effective policies directed at accommodating the physical needs of women and implementing change-management schemes and practices that will help to create women-integrated cultures, while providing women with the appropriate emotional support, networking, and mentorship. This will show that

organisations are serious about integrating women into male-dominated working environments. However, history has shown that having formal policies in place is not sufficient to create change in the workplace, and therefore current organisational leaders should be held accountable for full women integration at all organisational levels.

Lastly, it is advised that current policies existing in male-dominated working environments should be reviewed, to establish whether they have had any impact on the working experiences of women managers. In this way, workplaces will be able to attract and retain suitably qualified women and women managers. It would be to the benefit of the organisation and women managers if workplaces could improve their gender policies, involving women managers in the consultation, decision making, and implementation of such policies. Gender policies can include gender-sensitive training and workshops during all employee induction and orientation programmes for both women and men.

In addition, organisations should start to enforce the legislative frameworks that are aimed at promoting women empowerment in the workplace, and they should implement monitoring and control mechanisms for these frameworks, to ensure that they are effective and efficient in guiding change in male-dominated working environments. This will allow women to feel protected at work through legislation. However, unless government shows a strong commitment to enforcing employment-equity legislation, the situation is not likely to change in the near future.

5.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study mainly had three limitations. Firstly, the study is qualitative in nature, and the findings of the study were based on the views expressed by the participants. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be applied to other contexts. Secondly, a non-probability sampling method was used, namely purposive sampling, to select the participants. The sample included eight women managers who were working in the Lejweleputswa district of the Free State province in South Africa. Thus, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to other male-dominated working environments. The third limitation was that the majority of the respondents were black African women, and thus the sample was not representative of all race groups in South Africa. Thus, the study was not representative in terms of race.

5.11 CONCLUSION

The current study set out to understand the experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments. In order to understand why problems are still experienced with gender equality and women representativeness in a country that has recently celebrated 22 years of democracy, the study proceeded to look at the challenges that women managers are facing in male-dominated working environments. The study found that despite government interventions to ensure gender equality, gender bias and gender stereotyping are still evident in some male-dominated working environments. A most surprising finding was that women managers did not support each other in male-dominated working environments, which often led to women managers sabotaging each other and holding each other back from advancement. It was reported that just as males often side with the “male clan”, women managers sometimes imitate this political behaviour, forming alliances with other males, to the detriment of other women.

Central University of Technology, Free State

However, the responses from the participants were generally consistent with previous research findings, confirming that women remain vulnerable in male-dominated working environments, and that males continue to hold more resources, privileges, and patriarchy (e.g. Damaske, 2011:409). In order to address some of the negative experiences reported by the women managers in the study, a number of recommendations were made in order to create more supportive working environments for women managers, in which they are free to develop and grow. The findings of the study confirmed that gender inequalities still exist within male-dominated working environments, and this lends substance to the need for a more active and genuine commitment to gender equality and transformation. Such a hands-on approach will not only benefit organisations, but will also empower women to excel as organisational leaders.

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Annexure A: Introductory letter

Central University of Technology
Welkom Campus
1 Mothusi Road
Thabong, Welkom
9463

Dear Madam

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Mpho Prudence Nyetanyane, and I am an MTech student at Central University of Technology (Welkom Campus). I am in the process of gathering data from women managers in male-dominated working environments in and around Welkom, Free State. My research topic is “Experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments”.

I will be using a biographical questionnaire and interview schedule as my means of gathering data from women managers. I humbly request to conduct my research study on your premises at any time and date that suits you and your women managers.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on 081 799 1157, or at mpnyetanyane@cut.ac.za.

Kind regards

_____

Annexure B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Experiences of women managers in male-dominated working environments

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw from the study at any point, even after you have signed the form, without suffering any consequences. Should you be willing to participate, you are requested to sign this consent form:

I, _____, hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above-mentioned study. I have not been coerced in any way to participate, and I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anyone who is not part of the study, and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation, and what might be the possible risks associated with participation. Furthermore, I will contact the researcher should I need any additional information.

_____ _____

SIGNATURE OF THE PARTICIPANT DATE

_____

Signature of the person obtaining consent

Annexure C: Questionnaire

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions by choosing the option that is applicable to you. Place mark your option with a cross (x).

1. In which industry do you work?

Mining	Agriculture	Tourism	Law/legal
Finance/accounting	Manufacturing	Construction	Government
Education	Health	Transportation	Electrical

2. Is this industry male-dominated?

Yes		No	

3. State the number of years of service you have in the…

Organisation		Industry	

4. Race

Indian	Black African	White	Coloured	Other

If “Other”, please specify: _____

5. Age

23 or younger	24–43 years	44–63 years	64 or older

6. In which year were you born?

1930–1949	
1950–1969	
1970–1989	
1990–2000	

7. What is your highest level of education?

Below matric	
Matric	
National diploma/degree	
Honours/BTech degree	
Master"s degree	
Doctorate degree	

8. Job title

9. Management level

Junior	Middle	Senior	Executive

10. Marital status

Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced

11. Do you have children?

Yes	No

If yes, how many? _____

12. Indicate your sexual orientation.

Homosexual	Heterosexual	Bisexual	Asexual

SECTION B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Briefly explain your career path up until now.
2. How would you describe the male-dominated environment in which you are working?
3. How did it happen that you became a manager in this male-dominated environment?
4. How are you experiencing your work as a manager in this male-dominated environment?
5. To what extent are you experiencing gender differences?
6. To what extent do women have a voice in managerial decision making?
7. As a women, do you have a voice when important decisions are made?
8. As a women, how do you experience interpersonal interactions with other managers?
9. In a male-dominated culture, males often influence important decisions, values and beliefs. How do you experience the male-dominated culture of the industry?
10. In your opinion, to what extent does the organisation embrace your values as a women manager?
11. What personal resources are regarded as important to be successful as a manager?
12. To what extent must women managers display traditional male characteristics in order to be successful?
13. To what extent is advancement of women supported?

14. Do you know of any initiatives to promote women advancement in this industry?
15. What are the challenges women are experiencing in becoming managers in this industry?
16. In your opinion, how can the working environment be more supportive of women advancement?
17. How does the male-dominated culture of the industry impact on women advancement?
18. According to research literature, gender stereotypes are still held today, for example the stereotype that women are more emotional, while men are more dominant. To what extent is this true in your working environment?
19. If you are in a relationship, does your partner support you in your work?
20. As a women, how do you balance your personal life and your work commitments?
21. Is there anything you would like to comment on regarding your experiences as a women manager in this industry that we have not discussed?