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Information systems (IS) employees perceptions of gender-based power politics and its impact on women in IS: a case of a South African bank

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By

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DECLARATION

I understand that plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that it is one's own. I understand that plagiarism is wrong.

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Abstract

Purpose of the study

This paper aims to study the impact of gender-based power politics on women in IS in South Africa. There is limited research which has focused on how women are affected by gender-based power politics in IS, in the South African context. Research has shown that women in IS are often marginalized, discriminated against, sexually harassed and often earn lesser salaries than their male counterparts and therefore, given the history of South Africa, this is an important issue that needs to be researched in-depth, as women in IS are affected by it daily. This qualitative, exploratory research addressed this gap by examining people's perceptions of gender-based power politics in IS in the workplace, how gender-based power politics manifest and what impact gender-based power politics have on women in IS, in the workplace

Methodology

The philosophical stance underpinning this study is interpretivism. The Revised Invisibility Vortex (RIV) framework was used as a theoretical lens for the phenomenon being studied. A single case study was used for this study and the research was conducted at Esona, a South African Bank. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews.

Findings

The findings from this research show that IS is still a male-dominated space, at least in terms of numbers. The findings also show that people's perceptions are that gender-based power politics do exist in IS. Women have experienced gender-based power politics at different levels and in different roles in the IS space in the organisation, albeit that this is not all women. It is not always the men who are responsible for gender-based power politics, sometimes it is women against other women. This study also shows gender-based politics manifest for men as well. This study further shows that gender-based power politics manifest in various forms. Women feel that their ideas get ignored, that men get better salaries than women, that IS is an 'Old Boys' Club. This study also shows that there have been cases of harassment, not just against women, but against men too. This study shows that women deal with and are impacted differently by gender-based power politics.

Some deal with it by confronting it directly, others by influencing how men view women and some by strategically using their status of being the minority to positively influence men's way of thinking. Being in the minority puts some of the women under a lot of scrutiny and some are strategically silenced. Interestingly, some men felt that the women put themselves under a lot of pressure to perform.

Contributions

A major theoretical contribution of this study is the adoption and modification of the RIV framework to study gender-based power politics in the IS context. The initial conceptual framework was extended to suggest that there is not a single circle of power, but that there are concentric circles of power, each with their margins. The key practical contribution of this paper is that it may help South African organisations to understand the phenomenon of gender-based power politics and the impact it has on both men and women, and thus help organisations with defining their gender transformation strategies.

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ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

IS	Information Systems
IT	Information Technology
RIV	Revised Invisibility Vortex
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
Gender-based power politics	Use of power by individuals to advance their self-interests at the expense of organisational goals, and on the basis of gender.

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1. CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background to the research, problem statement and significance of research are discussed. Furthermore, the aims, objectives and research questions are detailed.

1.1. Definition of Power, Organisational Politics and Gender-based Power Politics

Lukes (1974) argues that power has three dimensions: *(i) Decision Making Power - this* is a power exercised through formal decision-making structures. This is a typical hierarchical framework where those above have the decision-making power over those below them. This dimension is the most visible of all the dimensions (Lukes,1974). This is the type of power that is perceived as authority by some, where the subordinates have to submit to their authority, whether they are willing or not (Singh, Inam and Qamar, 1997); *(ii) Non-Decision-Making Power* - this is power exercised through the control of which factors can be openly discussed in decision making. The factors around the decision making are managed and issues that can affect decision making but have the potential of causing conflict or debates, are avoided (Lukes,1974); *(iii) Ideological Power* – this happens when people are influenced into accepting the status quo, such that they never challenge it (Lukes,1974). Singh, Inam and Qamar (1997) also argue that the power and influence are related and that the one who possesses the power can influence others. Kvasny and Trauth (2003) further argue that where power is concerned, the one who has the power will always have one over whom they exercise the power. One dominates, and the other is marginalized.

Some scholars have defined organisational politics as unauthorized efforts by individuals to advance self-interests at the expense of others and/or organisational goals. In other words – the use of power to promote personal agendas (Kacmar and Ferris, 1993; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Ferris and Judge, 1991). Mintzberg (1985) argues that the lack of formal structures of authority or even the presence of strong formal structures of authority in organisations can lead to political behaviour. Organisational politics ensue when people use power to fulfill personal interests. Mintzberg (1985) further argues that political behaviour is not desirable as it often causes division

and conflict in organisations.

Gender-based power politics can therefore be defined as the use of power by individuals to advance their self-interests at the expense of organisational goals and on the basis of gender. This is the definition which will be used for this study

1.2. Background

Organisational politics are common within many organisations and there are different types of these politics which manifest themselves in different ways. Politics of power are among the type of politics that are found at play in many organisations (Ferris, Gail, and Patricia, 1989). Studies have also shown that gender-based power politics do exist in Information Systems (IS) (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; McGee, 2018; Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009). There is an argument that if IS is a male-dominated field, gender-based power politics are likely to ensue as women enter the IS domain (Lewis and Simpson, 2012) Research has shown that IS, is a male-dominated field and has been for decades (Trauth, 2002; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004; McGee, 2018).However, very limited research has been done on the issue of gender-based power politics and how this has affected women in the IS discipline, particularly in the context of South Africa. A systematic database search (including national journals) found only three articles related to gender in IS careers in South Africa, with a small number of articles addressing similar careers such as STEM and professionals in general. Whilst the published research is sparse, many news articles are discussing the issue, focussing mainly on the cultural issues of stereotyping and hostility surrounding the 'status' quo that technology is 'not for women'.

According to Stats South Africa (2017) the labour participation rate in South Africa is 54.5% women to 66.6% men. The World Economic Forum (WEF) (2018) cites a similar figure 52.2 to 65.2, and the International Labour organisation (2017) cites 47.9% for women and 62% for men. However, according to the WEF, the balance for professional and technical workers is much more equal, with 51.9 female and 48.1 male. Despite this, only 28% of the female population possess Artificial Intelligence (AI) skills, with 72% of males possessing AI skills. Plus, unfortunately, South Africa is ranked 117th in the world for 'wage equality for similar work' (World Economic Forum, 2018), thus indicating that gender equality issues do exist in the labour force.

In a country like South Africa, this type of research becomes even more important. Among other things, discrimination based on gender forms part of South African history and this is one of the issues South Africa is still grappling with. Research has also shown that even in the present time, in South African society, control of women by men is at the core, and those that try to resist are often faced with physical abuse, to the point of sexual violence in certain circumstances (Coovadia, Jewkes, Barron, Sanders, McIntyre, 2009). This thesis therefore argues that women in IS in South Africa are not exempt from these nation-wide issues and that the effect of gender-based power politics in South Africa, in the IS field, should be thoroughly researched.

1.3. Problem Statement

There is limited research on the impact of gender-based power politics on women in IS in South Africa. Given the history of South Africa, this is an important issue that needs to be researched in-depth, as women in IS are affected by it daily. This gap, therefore, needs to be addressed. Research has shown that women in IS are often marginalized, discriminated against, sexually harassed and often earn lesser salaries than their male counterparts (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; McGee, 2018; Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009; Coovadia, Jewkes, Barron, Sanders, McIntyre, 2009). Most of these research papers are not in the South African context as there is limited research in the South African context on this subject, thus the need for this research.

If any of these issues are to be addressed, it is important to look at the root cause and not just address it at face value. Lewis and Simpson, (2012) argue that those with power will do anything to keep their power, thus it is possible that gender-based power politics are at play and are a root cause of the problem of women being marginalized etc., thus the need to study the impact of gender-based power politics on women in IS. Research into the perceptions of gender-based power politics in the South African context is important, as it will also assist organisations in their transformation agendas.

1.4. Significance of research

This study focuses on the issue of gender-based power politics, specifically in the IS discipline in organisations in South Africa. Gender-based power politics in the IS discipline do exist and it is in the interest of this study to examine the impact of these gender-based power politics on women in

IS. There is limited research which has focused on how women are affected by the gender-based power politics in IS, in the South African context. This study aims to address this gap through the application of the Revised Invisibility Vortex (RIV) framework, as it has never been applied in IS based on a review of the literature. This research may also assist Esona bank and other organisations in understanding and dealing with the gender inequality issues they find themselves faced with and in developing their gender transformation agendas. It may also help the organisation to address the challenge of having women representation only at entry levels and not enough representation in senior roles.

This study may help South African organisations to understand the phenomenon of gender-based power politics and the impact it has on both men and women. This would be particularly useful for countries like South Africa – that have a deep root in patriarchal belief systems and a history of oppression.

1.5. Aims, Objectives and research questions

This study aims to study the impact of gender-based power politics on women in IS in South Africa. This is specific to women in the workplace.

The objective of this study is to analyze people's perceptions of gender-based power politics, the different ways in which gender-based politics manifest themselves, and how women in IS are affected by gender-based power politics.

Therefore, the research question for this study is: *What are people's perceptions of gender-based power politics and its impact on women in the IS discipline in the workplace?*

The sub-questions are:

1. *What are people's perceptions of gender-based power politics and their existence in IS at Esona Bank?*
2. *How do gender-based power politics manifest themselves in IS at Esona Bank?*
3. *How are women in IS impacted by gender-based power politics at Esona Bank?*

Understanding the perceptions and impact of gender-based power politics may help to uncover the underlying issues behind the marginalization of and discrimination against women in IS (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; McGee, 2018; Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009; Coovadia, Jewkes, Barron, Sanders, McIntyre, 2009). This may also help organisations in dealing with gender inequality issues.

2. CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, relevant literature is reviewed. Firstly a review of the literature with regards to why IS is dominated by males is conducted. A review of the literature with regards to perceptions around why power politics exist in IS, how these power politics manifest themselves and what impact these gender-based power politics have on women occupying IS roles, is done.

2.1. Gender-based Power Politics in Information Systems

The Information Systems (IS) field is traditionally a male-dominated field and women are under-represented (Trauth, 2002). While other industries have seen an increase in the number of women employed, the IT industry has seen a steady decline since the early nineties (Hemphill-Merrills, 2016). According to a study (Hellens, Nielsen and Trauth, 2001), some women found Information Technology (IT) to be very masculine, that even the language is masculine, it is a man's world. IS is dominated by males and their ideas, beliefs, and views have become the norm. Policies, procedures and ways of working have been defined according to men's standards – such that women must align to these standards to be recognized, or they can challenge the status quo (Crump, Logan and Mcilroy, 2007; Hacker, 1981; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004). Male-dominated fields tend to have one thing in common, that they are designed for men and women are expected to align to these standards (Demaiter and Adams, 2009). Women's perception of the IS work culture is that of male dominance and preference (Hemphill-Merrills, 2016). There is a perception therefore that, if IS is a male-dominated field, gender-based power politics are likely to ensue as women enter the IS domain (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

2.1.1. Information Systems - a male domain

This section relates to the first research question.

Literature shows different reasons as to why IS is dominated by men, which may indicate why women tend not to take up positions in IS. The first view is the essentialist view which argues that the different inherent behaviours between men and women are the reason why they are fewer women than men in IS (Trauth, 2002; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004). This view focuses on ability and argues that females do not possess the same ability as males when it comes to computing and males possess better capabilities for computing (Clarke and Teague, 1994). Crump, Logan and Mcilroy (2007) showed that some women believe that men are inherently better at computing than women, which may indicate why they do not take up roles in IS. This has also been evidenced in South Africa (Pokpas et al., 2019). Another study also showed that women had lower confidence in their abilities regarding computer skills and believed that computer related tasks would be harder for them than men (Beyer, 2014). Jung, et al (2017) suggest that the perception that one must be intelligent to study technology may the reason that deterres women from studying technology.

The second view is the social construction view – which argues that society has classified IS as men's work (Trauth, 2002). Society and families have categorized which roles are suitable for which gender (Clarke and Teague, 1994). There is a general perspective that technical things are for men, to the extent that in some girls' high schools – some technical subjects were at some point not offered (Hellens, Nielsen and Trauth, 2001). Galpin (2002) argues that, globally, the participation of women in IS is determined by different cultural and societal values, and these differ from country to country. Medeiros (2005), in a study in Brazil, found that women's participation in IS was decreasing and that this was directly linked to how their families viewed IS. In some societies and cultures, the view is that women are supposed to stay at home and therefore are not encouraged to enter into IS (Trauth, Quesenberry and Haiyan, 2008). In some societies and cultures, women are expected to give up their careers because it is only men who are supposed to have professional careers (Trauth and Quesenberry, 2006). The traditional family model that women must stay at home and men must be the ones who work, has also contributed to this situation (Minguez, 2005). Women may be conforming to this status quo and not taking up

roles in IS or not working at all. Women generally value and are influenced by the opinions of those close to them, and are more likely to take up careers in IS if they are encourage to do so, and the opposite is also true (Beyer, 2014; Dubow, Kaminsky and Weidler-Lewis, 2017; Jung et al., 2017).

The third view is the individual differences theory and according to this theory, women choose or do not choose IS because of their individual characteristics and how they individually react to sociocultural pressures (Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004). This theory has three dimensions: *(i) Individual Identity Construct* – this includes the individual's demographics and the industry in which they work; *(ii) Individual Influence Construct* – this includes the individual's character and the things which personally influence the individual; *(iii) Environmental Influence construct* - this includes the individual's cultural background and views. All three dimensions influence women's decisions to be part or not to be part of the IS discipline (Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004).

The fourth view is the human-capital paradigm which argues that women generally have less experience in life, in the workplace, less training, thus meaning that they have lesser human capital than men (Igbaria and Chidambaram, 1997). Therefore, this theory argues that women may be lagging behind in terms of jobs and salaries, solely due to human capital reasons (Igbaria and Chidambaram, 1997).

While the above views address why women do not take up careers in IS, which possibly has an influence on why there are fewer women in IS, there are also issues around the retention of women in IS. This means that even though women may take up careers in IS, they may also leave IS, for various reasons. Ahuja (2002), through a review of the literature, theorized that if the workplace environment is not welcoming, dominated by men and hostile towards women, that this negatively influences women's choice and stay in IS. It is, therefore, not enough that women take up careers in IS, organisations need to ensure that they retain women in IS, otherwise they may forever be faced with the underrepresentation of women.

Mentoring and support structures for women in IS, are also seen as important when it comes to retaining women in IS. The mentors do not have to be female mentors, male mentors are also helpful (Trauth, Quesenberry and Huang, 2009). This means that lack of mentoring and formal support structures may lead to women leaving IS and that would be one of the reasons why IS is

still a male-dominated field.

Whatever the reasons are, organisations are faced with a challenge as women continue to be underutilized and under-represented in IS (Trauth, 2002; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004; McGee, 2018) and it is important for organisations to do a critical analysis to understand the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in IS.

2.1.2. The manifestation of gender-based power politics in IS

This section relates to the second research question.

Markus' (1983) Interaction Theory posits that users resist systems or technologies because of the interactions with the other users or groups of users of the system or the implementers of these systems. There are two variations of the interaction theory, one being the sociotechnical variant and the second being the political variant. A sociotechnical variant occurs when the users' roles are affected by the implementation of the new technology or where the technologies are bringing different work structures to those that are already there in organizations. The political variant of the interaction theory argues that people will resist new systems or changes if they are likely to lose power because of the implementation of these changes (Markus,1983). Therefore, if men are to lose power because of the introduction of women to 'their' field, they may resist and try to keep women out of the circle of power and privilege. The resistance may express itself in different ways and may not always be visible. Singh, Inam and Qamar (1997) argue that power is highly related to conflict and power leads to conflict. Where there is conflict because of power related issues, power politics are likely to ensue. This argument then explains why we have power politics in organisations and gender-based power politics. Those with power do not want to let go of the power and those without the power, want the power (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). This contest for power leads to political games, whether they are gender-based or just pure power politics.

Gender-based power politics manifest themselves differently, sometimes in very overt ways and sometimes in very covert ways (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006).

2.1.2.1. Covert Power Politics

One of the covert expressions of gender-based power politics is the social exclusion of women by

their male colleagues (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006). Ragins and Cotton (1991) showed that social networks in the workplace are dominated by men. Ahuja (2002) argues that organisations rely on referrals from informal social networks when recruiting and even for promotions within organisations and therefore this puts the women who are deliberately excluded from these social networks, at a disadvantage. McGee (2018) also found that women were socially excluded from informal networks and that these exclusions created unhealthy work environments. According to this study (McGee, 2018), the few women who happened to be included in these informal networks benefited and their careers advanced better because of these informal networks. This shows that deliberate exclusion of women from these informal networks puts them at a disadvantage. Morgan, Quesenberry and Trauth (2004) refer to this as the "Old Boy's Network" which is described as an invisible and informal social network which is a men's network, where women are excluded. In their study, they found that men in this network keep information and resources which are important for navigating through the workplace to themselves. It is almost like there is a sense of community for the men, they look out for each other and women are excluded.

Another example of a covert expression of gender-based power politics was found in a study (Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009), where some of the women expressed how they would not be considered for IS jobs, and stereotyped as being single and unstable and this was not necessarily said but implied through the questions asked at job interviews. In terms of career advancement, women are rather more constrained than their male counterparts and women's performance is less likely to be attributed to their skills than it is for men (Ragins and Cotton, 1991b).

Another example of the covert expression of the gender-based power politics was where a woman felt that she was not promoted because she had just given birth and not because she lacked skills (McGee, 2018).

Another covert manifestation of power politics is when women are deliberately placed in roles which have limited opportunities or are risky and whoever is placed in them is more likely to fail than to succeed (Yaghi, 2017).

2.1.2.2. Overt Power Politics

More overt expressions of gender-based power politics are through discrimination, sexual

harassment or hostile environments (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006). Men frequently make the workplace a hostile environment for women in technical roles and for women who work in technical firms (Meiksins et al., 2018).

Some women feel that they need to work harder than their male counterparts and have to fight in order for them to be recognized and promoted (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006). Carli and Eagly (2016) talk about the labyrinth metaphor which speaks to how women only get promoted to managerial positions after overcoming obstacles that their male counterparts do not have to overcome. Some women express that their male colleagues could get away with being lazy because they were men (Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009). Women consistently find themselves working in environments where their growth is hindered (McGee, 2018). Truman and Baroudi (1994) showed that the salaries received by women were lower when compared to their male counterparts – even though the women possessed more experience. Lufkin et al. (2008) argue that women remain sidelined to lower-paying roles than their male counterparts. Carli and Eagly (2016) refer to this as the sticky floor metaphor where women are discriminated against in the early stages of their careers which results in them being locked in low end roles and results in them being stagnant.

2.1.3. The impact of gender-based power politics on women in Information Systems

This section relates to the third research question.

There are three themes that, based on previous literature review, seem to emerge from IS literature, concerning the effect of gender-based power politics on women, and these are discussed below.

(i) Conceding to Power Discourse

Conceding to power discourse occurs when people voluntarily exclude themselves from a discipline or when they resist it (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003; Trauth and Howcroft 2006). Women can respond to pressures from society's preconceived ideas about the role of women and choose to voluntarily exclude themselves from IS, or they can choose to leave a particular department or organisation, where these power politics are at play, thereby conceding to the male domination (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003; Trauth and Howcroft 2006). The IT industry has seen a steady decline of women employed in IS over the years and additionally, women are choosing to study other

majors instead of those related to IT (Hemphill-Merrills, 2016; Meiksins et al., 2018; Corbett and Hill, 2015). This could be an indication of women conceding to the power discource by choosing to stay away from the discipline.

(ii) Conforming to the Power Discourse

Conforming to the power discourse occurs when people adopt the views of the dominant group about that discipline(Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). In the case of IS, this occurs when women conform to the standards and views set by men concerning IS (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). This links back to Lukes (1974) ideological power, where people are influenced into accepting the status quo and never challenge it. A study (McGee, 2018) showed that indeed this does occur, where women feel the need to adapt to the status quo if they want positions of power in organisations. They must talk and behave in non-feminine ways to be recognized as strong leaders.

(iii) Challenging the power discourse

The people in this category challenge the status quo and refuse to conform nor concede to the power discourse. They refuse to accept the status quo and the limits set on them by the dominant group (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). These are the women who choose to stay and deal with these challenges daily (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006). In challenging the status quo – some women even join self-empowering institutions to deal with the pressures of power politics (Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009). These self-empowering help empower the women to deal with gender-based power politics. Kvasny and Trauth (2003) found that women in this category challenge the powers that be, either overtly or covertly. Some women choose to subtly challenge the status quo by educating and developing themselves so that they are better people. Others, overly challenge the status quo by confronting it, refusing to be victimized, they remain strong and fight the system. McGee's (2018) study showed that some women refuse to conform to the status quo and challenge it as they recognize that they are in positions to do so. A study done in the United States of America showed that regardless of the challenges women are faced with in a male dominated field such as IS, they are determined to stay, and interestingly, majority of these women held senior management roles (Hemphill-Merrills, 2016).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This section details the theoretical frameworks which were considered for this study and the one which was subsequently adopted.

Giddens' Structuration theory was considered for this study. Giddens' argument is that social structures and human agents do not exist exclusive to each other. Social structures influence how human agents behave, and these behaviours in turn reproduce these social structures. While social structures are believed to inform the behaviour of human agents, human agents are believed to possess the power to influence social structures (Karsten, 2008; Giddens, 1984). While this is a theory that has been shown to be applicable in IS research, it is limited for the purposes of this study in that it does not explain the nature of gender-based power politics and how these politics can be concealed, which relates to the covert power politics discussed in section 2.2.2.1.

The second theory which was considered for this study was Markus' (1983) interaction theory which focuses on the interaction between users, group of users or implementors of systems and the main argument is that users resist systems because of these interactions. There are different variations of the Interaction theory, the first one being the *sociotechnical* variant and the second one being the *political version* variant. A sociotechnical variant occurs when the users' roles are affected by the implementation of the new technology or where the technologies are bringing different work structures to those that are already there in organizations. The political version variant occurs when power politics are at play. When users lose some form of power due to a technology implementation – they are likely to resist the technology and those that gain power – are likely to accept the system (Markus, 1983). The limitation of this theory is that it focuses on the adoption of new systems and not so much on the politics which occur as women try to take up space in a male-dominated world.

2.2.1. The Revised Invisibility Vortex

The theoretical lens which is adopted for this study is Revised Invisibility Vortex (RIV). The RIV was developed by Lewis and Simpson (2012), it was originally called the Invisibility Vortex (Lewis and Simpson, 2010) and was in 2012 revised, thus the RIV. The RIV conceptualizes visible and invisible power held by men and also conceptualizes the gender-based power politics which

unfold as women, who are marginalized, reveal this male power. The RIV is considered useful for this study because it will allow us to explore the gender-based power politics at play, even the hidden ones, and will also allow us to explore the impact of these gender-based power politics on women in the IS discipline. The benefit of this framework is that it does not only look at the impact of gender-based power politics on women, but it offers a deeper analysis of the nature of the gender-based power politics – and how these can be concealed. No other theory or framework in IS, to the knowledge of the researcher, addresses this gap.

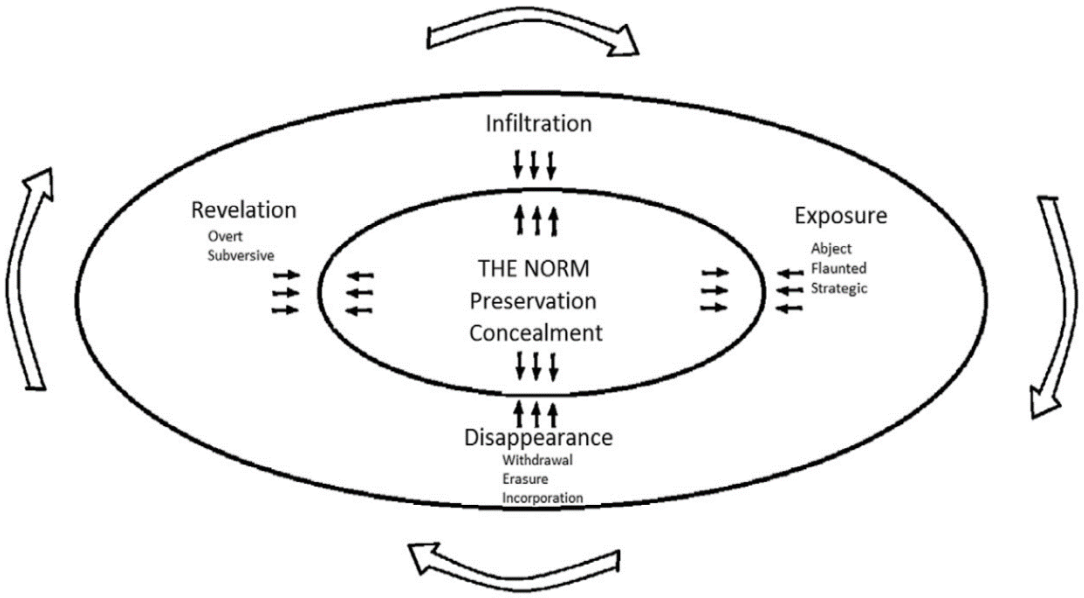

Figure 1: The Revised Invisibility Vortex (Lewis and Simpson, 2012)

The conceptual framework in figure 1 seeks to encourage a deeper understanding of male domination, the power, and privilege, the power dynamics that are at play as women try to reveal this male power and the effect of the power dynamics on women in IS.

The different concepts of the RIV framework are discussed below.

2.2.1.1. The Norm – The Circle of Power

At the center of the Vortex, is the male domination – the center of power or privilege. Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue this is the dominant group (men), which has all the power. They further

argue that this male power is not always visible – such that people can think that it does not exist because this male domination has become the norm. The center of power will do anything to preserve and conceal its privilege (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

2.2.1.1.1. Preservation of Power

Those in the circle of power will do anything to preserve this privilege including normalizing it. Even the few women who manage to enter this circle are indoctrinated into the belief system that this is a man's world. These women get so indoctrinated into this belief system such that they even become involved in keeping the other women outside the circle of power (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

2.2.1.1.2. Concealment of privilege

Lukes' (1974) second dimension of power speaks of how those in power will manipulate the agenda and not bring to the surface certain information that may cause conflict, even though the information being withheld is detrimental for decision making. The concealment of privilege by the circle of power means that certain information that is critical for decision-making is not revealed (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

2.2.1.2. The Margins

Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that outside the circle of power – as the women reveal the privileges of the center of power, gender-based power politics ensue, and the gender-based power politics have certain effects on women which are discussed below.

2.2.1.2.1. Revelation

Revelation takes place when the women outside the circle of power reveal and challenge the privileges and benefits of the dominant circle. These would generally be the women close to the circle of power. The revelation of the circle of power privileges can either be overt or subversive. Overt revelations occur when the women outside the circle of power directly confront the privileges of the norm or circle of power. Subversive revelations occur when women challenge the norm in more subtle ways such as infiltrating the circle or trying to influence the way of thinking of those in the circle of power (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

As revelation takes places, certain power dynamics unfold. These are exposure and/or disappearance (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). I discuss these in detail in the following sections.

2.2.1.2.2. Exposure

Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that as women try to reveal the privileges of the norm and the norm is trying to preserve and conceal its privilege, the women can result in attention being drawn to them and being overly exposed. This exposure could either work positively or negatively. It could work positively when the women, through being exposed, strategically influence the circle of power's practices and ways of doing things. On the negative side, they could be flaunted, as "others" and this could put them under immense pressure to always perform, to always deliver. This exposure can be abject meaning that it puts them under a lot of scrutiny (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

2.2.1.2.3. Disappearance

Through the pressures of being exposed, women can then choose to disappear. Disappearance can take three forms:

(i) ***Withdrawal***

This occurs when women voluntarily and militantly exclude themselves from a male-dominated field (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

(ii) ***Erasure***

Occurs when women are trapped into roles where they are constrained, and because they are overly exposed as a category and not individuals, their individuality disappears and their influence also disappears (Lewis and Simpson, 2012)

(iii) ***Incorporation***

Occurs when women conform to the standards and practices set by the circle of power. In this way, they are silenced and cannot challenge the status quo, they become part of the status quo (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). Demaiter and Adams (2009) found that women who conformed to the norm and did not emphasize the gender differences were more successful and survived the power discourse. In this way, the male privilege is preserved and concealed as if it does not

exist. This does not assist in dealing with the issue of gender-based power politics, one cannot challenge something that they believe to not be an issue. Demaiter and Adams (2009) also suggested that the women in their study seemed to be oblivious to gender because they did not struggle to get promotions – and asked the question about whether if the same women who were oblivious to the gender issue, would be if they were not getting the promotions they were getting. This is what is referred to in Lukes' (1974) third dimension of power (ideological power) where the powers that be manipulate the marginalized to accept the status quo and leave it unchallenged.

2.2.2. The Application of the RIV in Information Systems

2.2.2.1. The Norm in Information Systems

IS literature has shown that the number of women in IS is lower than that of men and has been decreasing over the years(Truman and Baroudi,1994; Lufkin et al., 2008). The number of women graduating with Information Technology or Computer Science has also been dropping(Jung et al., 2017). A study also showed that in 2016, only 16.4% of female students in the United States of America were awarded Computer Science Degrees (Meiksins et al., 2018). Literature has also shown that IS is not only dominated by men but favours men more than women, from the way it is designed to men's standards (Hellens, Nielsen and Trauth, 2001). IS literature has also shown that men will do all that it takes to protect the norm and to conceal it as if it does not even exist (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

Men's ways of protecting and concealing their privilege and power manifest themselves in gender-based power politics, which can either be overt or covert in nature (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). We have seen above how women can be discriminated against, excluded from work social networks, overlooked for jobs and promotions, subjected to lower salaries than men and made to conform to men's standards. These are all expressions of men trying to protect and conceal their privilege and power (Beckhusen, 2016; Ahuja, 2002; Trauth, 2002; Hellens, Nielsen and Trauth, 2001; Crump, Logan and McIlroy, 2007; Hacker, 1981; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004).

2.2.2.2. The Margins in Information Systems

The Revelation of Power in Information Systems

IS literature has shown both the overt and subversive ways of revealing male power in IS. Subversive ways being through infiltration (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). There are women who subtly challenge the status quo by educating themselves, so that they are able to infiltrate this male-dominated industry (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). Even though the infiltration itself is not happening at high rates and in fact the statistics show that the number of women in IS globally has been decreasing since 1990 (Beckhusen, 2016), it is one of the ways in which women try to reveal and expose male power (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). IS literature has also shown that some women overtly confront the status quo and they use their positions to do so (McGee, 2018; Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). These are women who confront the status and are no afraid to openly challenge the powers that be. These are women who are not afraid to address the elephant in the room (McGee, 2018; Kvasny and Trauth, 2003).

Exposure in Information Systems

Exposure works in three ways and this is that women can be strategic and use the state of being overly exposed to challenge the status quo. They can also be flaunted as "other" in a male-dominated space, which puts them under pressure. Lastly, the exposure can be abject and put them under a lot of scrutiny (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). Abject and flaunted exposure did not emerge in IS literature, however strategic exposure did emerge. IS literature has shown women who use their state of being overly exposed to stay and challenge the powers that be (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003; Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009; Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). These type of women do not concede nor conform to the political pressures, instead, they challenge the male privilege and standards set by men (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003; Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; Kvasny, Trauth and Morgan, 2009; Kvasny and Trauth, 2003).

Disappearance in Information Systems

In relation to the withdrawal and incorporation, Kvasny and Trauth (2003) found that in IS – women either concede to the power discourse or conform to the power discourse. They concede by leaving IS and joining different departments in organisations and by accepting that IS is not for

women. Women also conform to the status quo by accepting the terms under which they must work, for example, deciding not to have children because of the long working hours in IS (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003). When looking at the RIV Framework, conceding to power discourse is the same as withdrawal; conforming to the power discourse is the same as incorporation.

The manisfestation of erasure is not unique to women in IS, but Yaghi (2017)'s study shows women being placed in roles where they are more likely to fail than to succeed. Hemphill-Merrills (2016)'s study also shows this where women in IS are trapped in positions and not considered for promotions.

2.3. Summary and Conclusion of Chapter

In this chapter, the concept of power and politics was discussed. A review of the literature with reference to the phenomenon under study was also conducted. A conceptual framework, the RIV, that used as a theoretical lens for the phenomenon being studied was also presented and discussed. This framework was also related back to IS literature.

3. CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODS

In this section, the research methodology is discussed. The research paradigm and approach that is underpinning this study is discussed. Research design and strategy, data collection techniques and data analysis techniques are also discussed.

3.1. Research Paradigm and Approach

There are different paradigms through which research can be approached. Bhattacherjee (2012) refers to paradigms as mental frameworks or belief systems, through which people view life in general. In research people will generally subscribe to some research philosophy and among others: there is positivist and interpretive research.

The positivist research paradigm is deductive and objective in nature. Positivist researchers take the scientific approach. This research approach focuses on cause and effect relationships and the belief is that things do not just happen, there are causes. Therefore, this approach focuses on

studying these causal links. Positivist researchers maintain an objective stance throughout the research process, they do not get involved, unlike the interpretive researchers who are likely to get involved and therefore the interpretation of results can be very subjective. Another characteristic of positivism is generalization, which means that results from relationships examined for a study can be generalized to the world population. With the positivist approach, the assumption that human beings view life the same way or are exposed to the same realities. Another distinguishing principle for positivist research is the principle of parsimony, which means that things should be explained in the simplest possible way. Positivist researchers are likely to use quantitative methods in collecting the data. This, however, does not mean that qualitative methods cannot be used with positivist research (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Walliman and Baiche, 2001)

Interpretive research, on the other hand, is an inductive method and posits that truth is socially constructed (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2008; Walliman and Baiche, 2001). Which means that there is no one truth for all. What is true for one social group, may not necessarily be true for another group. Interpretive research is very subjective in nature and interpretive researchers subscribe to the school of thought which posits that people interpret the world around them differently. Interpretive research leans more towards the meaning people attach to things. Let me explain this further by using an example, one person may see a chair as something to stand on – while the other sees a chair as something to sit on. It is the same chair – but different meanings are attached to it. In interpretive research, there is no generalization – context is very important. The belief is that what is true in one context, may not necessarily be true in a different context. Historical and social backgrounds play a vital role in interpretive research – because of the stance it takes – that human beings do not view life through the same lenses. If there is any form of generalization that can be done in interpretive research, it must be clearly explained and thoroughly argued – why that generalization is made, and I use the term generalization loosely. Interpretive researchers are likely to use qualitative methods for data collection, though this does not mean that they cannot use quantitative methods (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2008; Walliman and Baiche, 2001).

Due to the nature of this study, the philosophical stance adopted and underpinning this study is interpretivism and the research approach is qualitative. Qualitative research gives preference to and places significance on the natural setting of events and how people interpret the world around them (Fossey et al., 2002).

This was a suitable approach for this research because it assisted the researcher to capture the events and experiences of the participants, in their most natural setting. This research aimed to study people's perceptions regarding gender-based power politics. The subject of gender-based power politics is a very intricate phenomenon to study. Walsham (1995a) argues that the interpretive approach is the most suitable for studying complicated social phenomena. In line with the objectives of this study, the interpretive, qualitative approach was most suitable as it allowed the researcher to capture people's perceptions and interpretations regarding the phenomenon under study. Each participant's experience and perceptions were not the same.

3.2. Research Strategy

3.2.1. Research Design

In this section, the different research design types are explained and the research design method that was adopted for this study is explained and justified.

3.2.1.1 Descriptive Research

Descriptive studies are done when one needs to describe a situation when one wants to paint a clear picture of a certain phenomenon. The purpose of descriptive is to study the current state of affairs and possibly predict the future. Observations are normally used to collect data for descriptive studies and Walliman and Baiche (2001) argues that observations can be done through different forms including questionnaires and interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Walliman and Baiche, 2001).

3.2.1.2 Relational Research

Relational studies, also referred to as correlation studies are done when a researcher wants to understand a relationship between two or more artifacts. This is not a causal study – but a study of

the relationship between two or more constructs where one is trying to understand how they relate to the other and to what extent (Walliman and Baiche, 2001).

3.2.1.3 Experimental Research

Experimental studies are done to establish causal relationships where change is administered on an independent variable to see the effect it has on a dependent variable. In an experimental study, one will have the experimental group – where the change is administered and the control group where no change is administered and then a study of behaviour will be done before and after the change is administered in both groups. Both groups need to be randomly selected to avoid bias in who is selected to be part of the experimental group and who is part of the control group (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Walliman and Baiche, 2001).

3.2.1.4 Explanatory Research

Explanatory research studies when one wants to study how and why things in the way that they do. These are generally very in-depth studies, that go deeper into understanding a phenomenon. An example would be, after doing a descriptive study on the type of employees an organization employs – an explanatory study would be one where the researcher tries to understand the reasons why this particular organization employs the type of employees it employs or when a researcher wants to understand how these employees are employed – the processes followed in employing that calibre of employees (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009)

3.2.1.5 Exploratory Research

Exploratory studies are particularly useful when one seeks to understand what is happening regarding a particular phenomenon, especially when there is not a lot of research done regarding that phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). There is limited research on the issue of gender-based power politics in IS, in South Africa and certainly, this type of research has never been done in the context of Esona Bank. Therefore, the chosen research design for this was exploratory. This was a suitable research design for this study as provided a deeper understanding of and new insights regarding the phenomenon under study.

3.2.2. Case Study Research

A case study is a research strategy which enables an investigation of a phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 1994). To effectively address the research questions and because of the complexity of the phenomenon, it was imperative that it is studied in its natural setting.

Case studies have the ability to discover unknown social, political and cultural truths regarding a phenomenon being studied (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Gender-based power politics are a social, political and cultural phenomenon, thus the use of a case study.

Case study research strategy is viewed as the most suited strategy when one needs to understand the how's and the why's regarding a phenomenon and when the researcher has no control over how events occur (Yin, 1994). The objective of this study was to study how gender-based politics manifest and how they affect women, thus a case study strategy was suitable.

The challenge of case studies though, is that they can be time-consuming and some view them as not rigorous enough, however, Darke, Shanks and Broadbent (1998) have addressed how these challenges can be overcome, that for case study data collection to be effective and efficient, the researcher needs to plan for it accordingly to the last detail and ensure issues of rigour are addressed. Data collection was properly planned, interview questions were defined and planned properly, the interviews with the participants were set up on time and the participants were informed about what the research was about. The issue of rigour was also addressed through the application of the principles for evaluating qualitative research by Klein and Myers (1999), as detailed in section 3.6.

It is important to mention that ethnography was considered and could have been more beneficial as the research design for this type of study. Ethnography is an anthropological research design which advocates for a phenomenon to be studied in the context of its culture (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Ethnographic studies require time and require that the researcher deeply immerses himself in the culture, with data being collected via observations and interactions with the participants (Bhattacherjee, 2012). However, ethnography as a research design for this study was not feasible for this level of study, the researcher would not have had enough time required for an ethnographic study.

3.2.3. The Justification for Single Case Study

The researcher used a single case study for this study, namely Esona Bank. Single case studies should be considered when the case presents a critical case to apply a well-formulated theory to determine whether the theory explains the phenomenon under study. The theoretical framework (RIV) adopted for this study, has, based on literature review, never been applied in IS, therefore a single case study gave an opportunity for the determination of whether what the RIV proposes does actually explain the phenomenon of gender-based power politics in IS or if there are better alternative explanations to this phenomenon.

With a single case study, one can do an in-depth investigation to gain a rich understanding of a phenomenon (Walsham, 1995a). Due to limited research in this area in South Africa, the researcher needed to use a single case study to allow for an in-depth investigation on the issue of gender-based power politics and to address the research questions for this study.

Multiple-case studies are generally used when a researcher intends to do cross-case analysis and comparison, and when a researcher intends to investigate a phenomenon in different settings (Yin, 1994) and this was not the intention of the researcher for this study, thus the use of a single case study.

3.2.4. Site Selection

This research was carried out at a South African Bank called Esona Bank (pseudonym). Esona Bank employs over thirty-five thousand employees, with just over one thousand employees in IS. Esona Bank is therefore considered a large bank in SA. The IS department at Esona is hierarchical in structure, divided into three departments. The first department is responsible for underlying IT physical infrastructure (e.g. management of data centres). The second department is responsible for the IT platforms which host applications, databses etc. The third department is responsible for End-user computer management. Of the one thousand employees in IS, seventy-five percent of these are men, and twenty-five percent are women. Esona Bank has realized that there is a need to address gender inequality in the workplace. This decision was driven by the fact that Esona Bank acknowledged that they have a national obligation towards equal gender representation in the workplace. Secondly, this decision was driven by the fact that Esona Bank noticed that at entry-

level, there are many women but as one climbs up the hierarchal structures in the organisation, there is less representation of women. Thirdly, Esona Bank realized that the more diverse the leadership is, the more likely is the organisation to make sound economic decisions. Esona Bank realized that, because women and men are wired differently in their thinking, if they have a balance between men and women representation in leadership, the more inclusive their decisions will be.

Furthermore, the Esona Bank has identified that there is a need for addressing gender inequality in the workplace and therefore, this study may help the organisation to understand this dynamic of gender-based power politics and may help the organisation in developing their transformation agenda.

The researcher works in the case study organisation. The rationale behind conducting this research at an organisation where the researcher works was to take advantage of the fact that with being an insider, there is the ease of access to information, where otherwise one would be debarred from certain types of information as an outsider and that the participants may feel more comfortable with opening up to one of their own (Walsham, 1995b). The disadvantage of being an insider is that the participants may hold back and not open up to someone who is an insider out of fear of being exposed. To deal with this, the participants were guaranteed and reassured of the confidentiality of the results. The participants were reassured that their identities and interviews would not be shared with the organisation, under any circumstance. In addition, the researcher shared the ethical clearance forms with the participants, which declare that the researcher is not allowed to reveal the participants or share the interviews with the organisation, to reassure the participants that their confidentiality is guaranteed.

3.2.5. Unit of Analysis and Participant Selection

Unit of analysis refers to the targeted person, collective or group for the research or investigation (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The unit of analysis for this study was the individual and the rationale for this was the fact that the study seeks to understand individuals' perceptions regarding gender-based power politics within the organisation. Both male and female participants were interviewed, even though the bulk of the interviews were with the female participants. The decision to interview both male and female participants was to allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon

under study and to offer a more balanced understanding of the phenomenon. It is possible for females to be biased regarding their gender and assume that problems may be perceived to be about gender, even when they are not. It is also possible for men to be biased and downplay gender issues, thus the need to interview both women and men. Men and women in senior leadership roles, middle management, technical roles and those in non-technical roles within IS were interviewed. The technical and non-technical roles refer to non-management, lower-level roles in the organisation. The reason for the selection of participants on different hierarchical levels and in different roles was to allow for a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. Employees who met the categories of the different roles were then targeted and were sent emails, requesting their participation in the study. The participants who responded were interviewed.

3.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection in this study. The rationale behind this data collection method was to take advantage of the fact that, with semi-structured interviews, the researcher can get more depth in terms of responses by probing deeper, which cannot be offered by structured interviews. Unstructured interviews are also not suitable for this study, one would use these to explore a general area in which they are interested and there are no predetermined questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Unstructured interviews would not serve the purpose of this study as there is a risk of gathering information that is not relevant to the framework used for this study. Similarly, questionnaires as a means of collecting the data would not have been appropriate as they would not be able to provide the depth that is required for this study. Questionnaires are usually used for descriptive or explanatory studies (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

The interview questions were shaped by literature and the conceptual framework used for this study. As such, the interview questions focused on eliciting content regrding the different concepts within the conceptual framework and each of the research questions. Refer to Appendix A for the interview questions. The researcher conducted nine interviews on site at Esona Bank and the interviews lasted between thirty to fifty minutes. The method of capturing the interviews was to record the interviews, which were later transcribed. Consent was sought from each participant, before recording the interviews. The reason for the nine interviews was that the researcher felt that

they had reached saturation as no new data was emerging from the interviews. Saturation happens when no new themes, data or coding is emerging from the data collection and the study has reached a point where it can be replicable (Mason, 2010; Fusch and Ness, 2015). Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) argue that for single case studies, the number of interviews should be between fifteen to thirty interviews, however, Guest, et al (2006) further argue the importance of striking a balance between quality and quantity, they argue that one should guard against having a lot of data with no quality or quality data in very small quantities. Therefore, the researcher concluded the interviews, even though they were only nine, on the basis that no new data or themes were coming from the data and there was no need to continue to interview more participants just to increase the quantity.

Table 1 below shows the list of participants that were interviewed. The pseudonyms were defined according to roles.

Participant Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Position**
ITMM1	Female	IT Line Manager
ITMM2	Female	IT Line Manager
ITT1	Female	IT Technical Specialist
ITT2	Female	IT Technical Specialist
ITT3	Female	IT Project Coordinator
ITSM1	Female	IT Senior Manager
ITSM2	Female	IT Senior Manager
ITMM3	Male	IT Line Manager
ITMM4	Male	IT Line Manager

Table 1: List of Participants

3.4. Data Analysis

A researcher can use deductive methods to analyze data, however, this was not suitable for this study as the aim was not to test the boundaries of the theory but rather whether it could be applicable in the IS context and/or whether it needed to be expanded/built upon. Deductive methods are more suitable for theory or hypotheses testing (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

The data collected was analyzed based on the conceptual framework. The middle range coding mechanism was used, where themes were drawn from the literature, and from the data collected

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The rationale for using this method of coding was to capture all the experiences of the participants. The RIV was used to understand the nature of gender-based power politics, how they can be concealed and their impact on women in IS. Using the RIV, the researcher identified five main themes and ten subthemes in which data would be reduced to. The data was analyzed according to the RIV themes and sub-themes such as The Norm (Preservation and Concealment of power), Infiltration, Exposure (Abject, Flaunted, Strategic), Disappearance (withdrawal, Erasure, Incorporation) and Revelation (Overt, Subversive). There were no themes that seemed to emerge from the data collected beyond those of the RIV, however, the coding and interpretation did shed light on how the framework should be revised. Codes were created from the themes and sub-themes. Refer to Appendix B for the list of codes that were created.

The next step in the process was reading the data collected and assigning codes to words, phrases and whole paragraphs. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to this process as data reduction. An excel spreadsheet was used for this process. In this process, the researcher first looked at the data collected for the predefined themes from the framework and assigned codes accordingly. The researcher then looked for themes and sub-themes that were recurring from the data collected. Lastly, the researcher went through the data collected again to make sure that no themes were missed. Below is an extract from the data showing how coding was done. The extract below in figure 2 shows sample responses from the participants, a theme associated with the response and a code assigned to each theme.

You see a lot of ego at play, you see a lot of guys cheering each other on in the room, you do feel singled out as a woman	Norm. Exposure-flaunted	No_PoP Ma_EXP_FL
You feel like your voice is not heard, you actually feel afraid to speak up sometimes to voice your own opinion	Disappearance-Erasure	Ma_DIS_ERS
And this is what I am talking about where the power climbs in the organization, being either here at XXX or any other organization, but the higher you climb, the power struggle are a bit more. And I honestly feel that they don't really make room for women, women are still seen as the paper pushers or the PAs and you see the gender classification playing more on the senior levels of leadership than actually working operationally within the teams.	Norm-Preservation	No_PoP
So that is it, I have experienced it firsthand. It's a very emotional thing to experience as a woman, but I feel they don't make space for you and you have to like demand your space, almost fight to have a sit at the table. I know one of our leaders actually said that men need to become more deliberate in accepting women around the table and you see a lot of power and ego politics at play unfortunately.	Norm-Preservation	No_PoP
That is more interfacing into the senior leaders and here I am running an operational space interfacing into a leader. I must say that my current leader is experiencing that as well. So I don't know whether it's just a political play within the leadership team or maybe it's the times that we are in or the rate of change is so phenomenal, but it's a very difficult state right now		
And being a female makes it even more difficult because you have to try twice as hard, work twice as hard	Norm-Preservation Exposure-flaunted	No_PoP Ma_EXP_FL
I don't know, and I don't experience it so much here, I feel like my male counterparts work just as hard as myself	Norm-Preservation	No_PoP
but I know further up the ladder, you work twice as hard, but your work doesn't get recognized as some of your male counterparts that don't work half as hard as what you do.	Norm-Preservation	No_PoP

Figure 2: Sample Coding

The next step in the process was the grouping of the data according to the themes and sub-themes using the excel spreadsheet so that conclusions regarding the themes and sub-themes could be drawn. This process is referred to as data display by Miles and Huberman (1994). Conclusions were then drawn and verified against the data collected.

The process was an iterative one as the researcher sought an understanding of the phenomenon and as the researcher wanted all findings to be captured (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Targeted participants, as explained in section 3.2.5, were sent emails requesting their participation in the study, refer to Appendix E for Sample of the participation letter. The participants were made aware that they were not obliged in any way to participate in the research project and if during the research process, they wanted to withdraw their participation, they could withdraw without any consequences. All participants completed and signed a consent form, which clearly stipulated that they were not obliged to participate in the study and they could withdraw at any time during the study(refer to Appendix D for a sample of the consent form). The researcher ensured that the participants remained (Miles and Huberman, 1994) anonymous and that their confidentiality was

protected always. The researcher disclosed to the participants what the research project was about prior to them participating in the study so that the participants could make informed decisions. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, the participants were made aware that counselling from Wits was available, should the need arise. The researcher was truthful and ethical in how she analyzed data and how she reported on it. No findings have been hidden because they are unfavourable to the study and the researcher has not manipulated the data. Furthermore, the study went through the standard approval process by the Ethics Committee of the School of Economic and Business Sciences at the University of Witwatersrand. Protocol number CINFO/1175 and refer to Appendix C for the ethical clearance certificate.

3.6. Evaluation of Research

Rigour is very important and to demonstrate the rigour of this study, the researcher applied the seven principles for evaluating interpretive research which are discussed below.

The fundamental principle of Hermeneutic Circle refers to the fact that researchers should be sensitive to the fact that to gain understanding – it is important to understand the concepts as a part and also understand how that concept forms part of something bigger (Yin, 1994; Klein and Myers, 1999; Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998). I made sure that the small pieces of data I was looking at, formed part of a bigger picture and did not just analyze the pieces individually. Therefore, the researcher ensured that, during data analysis, the themes that emerged from the data collected were always linked back to the research questions. This is demonstrated in the synthesis done in chapter five, where the findings are related back to the research questions. The themes were also related back to the RIV as discussed in chapter four.

The Principle of Interaction between researchers and subjects refers to the fact that in interpretive research, the researcher becomes part of the research and the social interaction between the researcher and the participants becomes critical as this has a direct effect on the research results (Klein and Myers, 1999; Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998). The researcher was sensitive to this during data collection and data analysis. Walsham (1995) addresses this and states that is important for the researcher to not be too passive while conducting interviews, while at the same time the researcher needs to make sure that they do not over-direct the interview, therefore the researcher

adopted this balanced style of conducting the interviews. I was also aware that due to the sensitive nature of the study, and the fact I was an insider, some of the participants may have been reluctant in sharing some of their experiences.

The principle of dialogical Reasoning refers to the fact that researchers will have prejudicial and preconceived ideas about a phenomenon they are doing the research on and this will most probably influence research design. However, they need to be sensitive to the fact that the results may paint a different picture to the theoretical understanding prior to research and should be open to revising the research design if need be – to accommodate the actual finding (Klein and Myers, 1999; Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998). The researcher was aware of his/her own prejudices and pre-conceived ideas about the phenomenon being researched and was also aware that the fact that she worked for the organisation, this could have influenced the results. This is addressed in the reflections section above where the researcher has detailed her reflections about the research.

The principle of multiple interpretations - Fundamental to interpretive research, is the fact that human beings may give different meanings to the same subject – depending on their social and historical background. This principle then refers to the fact that researchers need to be sensitive to the fact that there may be multiple interpretations of the same subject and therefore it becomes critical in interpretive research for the researcher to document the multiple interpretations and the reasons for the multiple interpretations (Klein and Myers, 1999; Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998). The researcher was aware that there may be multiple interpretations of the same subject and was sensitive to this. This was also addressed through the different types of people who were interviewed for this research. This was demonstrated in the findings by how some women in non-management technical roles, middle managers and senior managers who had different perceptions and experiences regarding gender-based power politics.

The principle of suspicion refers to the fact the researchers need to be sensitive to the fact that participants in the study may be biased and have distorted views of things. Participants can make false claims etc. Therefore, this requires that the researcher critically analyses the responses given and their social context (Klein and Myers, 1999; Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998). The researcher is also aware that the participants may give biased responses and may also have distorted views. This was addressed by interviewing people in different positions, from technicians

to senior managers, and through interviewing men as well. It is important to also acknowledge that females may be biased regarding their gender whether knowingly or unknowingly. Problems might be perceived as about gender even if they are not.

The principle of contextualization refers to the fact that each context is unique and therefore social and historical background to the phenomenon being researched should be detailed in the research report. This is one of the things that sets interpretive research apart – that people from different backgrounds give different meanings to the same things. It then becomes very critical to interpretive research that background of people who form part of the research or organisations – be thoroughly reflected in the research paper. This is important for relevance and it is important as each context is believed to be unique in interpretive research (Klein and Myers, 1999). Context is detailed in the analysis and interpretation chapter, which is chapter four.

The principle of abstraction and generalization refers to the fact that interpretive researchers can generalize from abstract situations – where certain concepts can be applied in multiple disciplines. This is based on the logic behind the collection and analysis of results from different cases, and it is not based on results from testing theories or generalizing to the population as it would be with positivist research. In interpretive research, it is all in the logic. Interpretive researchers can then develop theories that can be applied in abstract and unique instances, but the logical reasoning behind the theories must be critically explained, and so the researchers can make conclusions about concepts applied in different concepts where there are similarities in the logical explanation of data collection or analysis (Klein and Myers, 1999; Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998). The initial conceptual framework was used to analyze the data and the process that led to the formulation of the updated framework which is detailed in chapter five.

3.7. Summary and Conclusion of Chapter

In this chapter, the philosophical stance underpinning this study, which is interpretivism was discussed. The research strategy, data collection, and analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and evaluation of research were discussed.

4. CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, the findings from the data collected are presented and discussed. The findings are organised under the themes from the theoretical framework and other themes that emerged from the data. The research questions and how the data related back to them is discussed in Chapter 5. It is important to note that the theoretical framework is an analytical tool but does not map directly to the research questions, however, the framework is all interrelated and sheds light on the different aspects of the research questions holistically. Quotes included in this section are only given examples, not every participant response is quoted.

4.1. Case Context and Background

The general perception from the participants interviewed for this research is that indeed IS is male-dominated and that even the IS leadership is dominated by men. Most of the participants who are not in senior leadership roles, felt like Esona bank is not doing enough to address gender inequalities, there was even a strong comment from one of the participants, about how they feel like the bank is only now being reactionary because they have targets (in terms of numbers and representation of women) they need to meet, as the bank has subscribed to the transformation charter with targets that it must meet. A transformation charter is a formal document issued by an organisation detailing the conditions of which the organisation aims to achieve its transformation targets. Another participant also commented about how this transformation agenda does not seem to be driven as it needs to be at the top, but that it is pushed more at lower levels in the organisations. One of the participants also felt that there is not enough support for women with IS and even across the whole organisation.

On the other hand, the participants who are in senior leadership roles feel that, while the bank is not where it needs to be and particularly in IS, the organisation is heading in the right direction and they are actively working on this gender transformation agenda.

4.2. Theme 1: The Norm – The Circle of Power

According to Lewis and Simpson (2012), at the center of the Vortex, is the male domination – the center of power and privilege.

There seemed to be a general consensus from the participants, both male and female, that IT or IS, is dominated by men, at least in terms of numbers and that this is not just at Esona, but IS in the workplace in general.

> *"Let's be honest, IT has always been a male-dominated space, it is not new to [Esona] and it is not unique to the country or anywhere in the world". - ITMM4*

> *"And all my career, as far as I can remember, I've always been the only female in a meeting room with a bunch of men… think the only time where…where I was not the only female was when I joined [Company A]. Then maybe for a couple of months, there was one or two or three [women] but all my career even when I joined [Company B], there [were] two females there". – ITMM2*

This is consistent with what we have found in IS literature, which is the fact that IS is still a male-dominated field and that this has been the case for decades now (Trauth, 2002; Crump, Logan and Mcilroy, 2007; Hacker, 1981; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004). This is not unique to Esona bank but seems to be a problem globally. Organisations and perhaps education institutions really need to do a deep analysis of this issue in order to address gender inequalities properly.

In the case of Esona bank, there was also a feeling that it is rather difficult to find women to fill in IS roles.

> *"If I see another request for CVs for positions, it comes back for men than women, I do not know why ladies are not stepping up……. I just do not think there has been a rule that says women cannot come into IT, I just think it is something women have not actually pursued". – ITMM4*

One of the managers suggested that maybe the problem starts at basic and tertiary education levels, suggesting that if the numbers are not balanced there, then IS in the workplace will always be dominated by men.

> *"If you are trying to achieve something which is going against the trend of education, of likes of the diplomas, the computer sciences and all this kind of*

stuff, then you are just going to start to fight a losing battle. If you want it to change at this level, you have to change it at the lower levels as well". – ITMM3

One of the female participants related a story about how even at University, it was difficult being a female in IS. So perhaps this is also contributing to the fact that it is difficult to find women to fill IS roles. Further research would need to be done in this area.

"Also studying IT, remember when we used to struggle with coding at the lab, guys would not want to help, and they'd be like this is not a girl's course. That type of thing where you are just like, you have an error and it is not showing you what the issue is, maybe you forgot a semicolon. So you'd be sitting there and you cannot figure it out and you ask a guy, his thing is running and you can see that it is running and you get answers like 'why are girls here, you guys are not supposed to be here'". – ITT3

The current status at Esona bank is reflective of what literature suggests; that IS is a male-dominated field. Reasons for this may vary for different contexts, but it does seem to be the norm that IS is still dominated by men(Trauth, 2002; Crump, Logan and Mcilroy, 2007; Hacker, 1981; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004; Clarke and Teague, 1994). There may be various reasons for this, one being (as alluded to by some of the participants) that it is difficult to find women to fill IS positions. Further research needs to be done to better understand why it is difficult to find women to fill IS roles. Could it be that the problem starts at the tertiary education level, where there are simply more men than women? It is also possible that women are generally lagging behind in terms of experience and human capital as Igbaria and Chidambaram (1997) argued.

The essentialist view argues that there are fewer women in IS than men because men inherently possess better computing capabilities than women (Trauth, 2002; Tapia, Kvasny and Trauth, 2004), When the participants were asked about gender-roles and whether they thought there were roles which were more suitable for men than for women, the general perception from most of the participants was that everyone was capable of doing anything, with the exception of physically intensive roles.

"I mean in the day and age we live in, it is equal opportunities and I mean a woman can do a job just as good as men can. I mean I am a divorced woman and guess what, I am banging all things putting things up, you have to learn to adapt. Like I said in the day and age we live in, you have to adapt to change and we can do any job a man can do, and man can do any job a woman can do". – ITMM2

"I still believe that every single woman is capable of doing anything, we can do what men can do in the bank, I do not see any role that is like specifically, this is for men". – ITT1

"I could argue and actually say that a woman can do what a man can do but those that would require physical strength, like massive physical strength, I mean men are stronger than [women] right, which is genetically that is how we are actually born and designed. So, I would not necessarily like put myself up and say I'd be the best person to be able to push tractors because I'd be setting us back as a business if that's the business that we were in. So, I certainly do think that there are more roles which are suited to men and more roles which are suited to women, but that does not mean that you cannot interchangeably do both, and as much as you do get great help like from men, so men who are like, actually in a lot of our African countries like Nigeria, you do get men who run houses, so you hire them as like help in houses, so I suppose if you at it from a gender-neutral point of view, many roles are becoming gender-neutral."

"I think generally speaking anybody can do anything, I would potentially argue that there might be [fewer] women who would want to go and do heavy lifting jobs all the time than men perhaps. But I do not really see a reason why it would not be as far as I am concerned". – ITMM3

It does not seem like the reasons behind the fact that there are fewer women than men in IS at Esona are related to the essentialist view.

The social construction view – argues that there are fewer women in IS because society has classified IS as men's work (Trauth, 2002), the perception is that technical things are not for women. The social construction view seems to be contributing to why there are fewer women in IS.

> *"I honestly feel that they do not really make room for women, women are still seen as the paper pushers or the PAs". – ITMM1*

> *"Also studying IT, remember when we used to struggle with coding at the lab, guys would not want to help, and they'd be like this is not a girl's course". – ITT3*

Trauth, Quesenberry and Huang (2009) found that mentoring was important to retaining women in IS. The lack of mentorship and support structures within IS at Bank Esona came out from one participant but did not come out strongly from other participants, therefore it does not seem like this is the reason why there are fewer women in IS at Esona Bank.

> *"I think the support structures within tech for women are very poor, not just here in IS but I think across the board". – ITMM1*

From the data collected, the social construction view seems most likely to be the reason why there are fewer women in IS at Esona. It also seems that the perception is that there are fewer women in IS because it is difficult to find women to fill IS roles, and this potentially relates back to the social construction view. There could be other reasons why there are fewer women in IS, but this seems prevalent from the data collected. If this is the case, then Esona bank and other organisations have a bigger problem. This also came out frequently in the IS literature and this is not surprising in a patriarchal society like South Africa. These are belief systems that are entrenched in people.

4.2.1. Preservation of Power

Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that men will do anything to preserve and/or conceal the male privilege. There are differing views or experiences from the participants as far as the preservation of power is concerned. These are discussed in detail below.

There was a feeling from some of the participants that at Esona, gender-based power politics happen at the top. Some of the middle managers felt that as one goes up in the organisation, one is faced with more politics than at the operational level. This seemed to be a perception even from some of the male managers, who are also middle managers, that women are kept out of senior leadership positions or challenged and opposed when they try to enter that space.

> *"...the power climbs in the organisation, being either here at Esona or any other organisation, but the higher you climb, the power struggle [is] a bit more... you see the gender classification playing more on the senior levels of leadership than actually working operationally within the teams". - ITMM1*

One of managers described how men preserve power through being in control.

> *"Yes, here in Esona it is a power struggle, in IS men want to be in control and women cannot come closer". – ITMM2*

Two of managers expressed how this power is preserved through ignoring and not promoting women.

> *"you tend to get, your ideas you have, if you give them, you get ignored, they go more for the men's views and opinions and so let me put it to you this way, if you are male in this thing and your ego doesn't get stroked by a female, you get ignored, so as a female, you need to, if your manager is a male, you need to stroke his ego, if you don't stroke his ego, you are not going anywhere. Ya, ask me, you get rated down on everything". – ITMF2*

> *"Politics at Esona happen at the top. Look at the level, it is very embarrassing, women are virtually non-existent up there, it is still very male-dominated. So there is definitely politics that are happening that are gender-based". - ITMM4*

One of the female participants in middle management even felt that she was discriminated against because of her pregnancy by her male senior manager at the time, to the point of being side-lined and her job promised to someone else (a male).

"Yes, I think discriminated because of pregnancy, I think pregnancy, as much as people tell you maternity leave is good, I still remember that same manager saying, "enjoy your holiday". A lot of ladies within the organisation take offence to that because maternity leave is not a holiday, it is a lot of hard work, it is a life transition and I still told him it is not a holiday. He said, "six months, come-on, it is a holiday". So, he would speak like that a lot, he would refer to people by age, you know which is quite discriminating as well [as]by gender, pregnancy in IT is seen as weakness, the moment you say you are pregnant it is like we do not need you…or it is not for you". – ITMM1

"And that's when I knew something was not right and I confronted him and told him "listen I came back from maternity leave, you want to push me out of my job, what's going on?" and he completely denied everything. And then finally the truth came out, [the guy whom my job was earmarked for] told me that [my manager]had promised him my role and he would do anything in his power to get me out of that role because he deserved it more than me". – ITMM1

McGee's (2018) study showed a similar case of a woman who felt that she was not promoted because she had just given birth and not because she lacked skills. This is an expression of gender-based power politics.

Women who are in more senior management roles at Esona had different experiences. While acknowledging that women in the organisation experience opposition because of their gender, these are not their personal experiences.

"No, I have never felt like that [being unequally treated with men]. I think I've been in a lucky space not to experience that and I know that there are people maybe down there who have experienced it but for me personally no. Yes, there has been you know arising from different areas but specifically from my area I've dealt with quite a few, not a lot. So I've heard very few complaints with regards to that but I mean this has been escalated to the head who is actually doing something about it. It is mostly women". - ITMF4

"No I do not think it is a myth, it is real. There are people who feel it on a daily basis where this is their reality and I am sure even within the IS business there are females who actually feel gender-based politics on a daily basis". - ITMF3

It is interesting to note that these women senior managers did not experience gender-based power politics from their fellow senior managers, whilst the women in lower management positions did feel they had experienced this when interacting with senior managers.

The IT managers in lower management roles at Esona admitted that they do not have such issues with the teams which report into them.

"I think we have a very good maturity level within our team, we treat each other with a lot of respect based on skills not necessarily gender biased or females are suited to do certain PA type of jobs, you know I mean I've been given the same equal opportunities as my male counterparts". - ITMM1

"No, so with both my teams, I have never felt at any stage disrespected". - ITMM2

However, at lower non-management, technical roles, all the women felt that men did not take them seriously as women in IT technical roles, to the point of undermining them.

"So it was more like I need to prove myself at so many things that I used to do because we would go to a meeting and then you cannot voice anything, you cannot say "I've got an idea, I think we can do this, this way" and it came to that point where whatever I used to do was questioned because some people never thought that I would be able to accomplish certain things that they can; because I am a woman". – ITT1

"Yes because if I go with a guy for instance if I would go with [male colleague] there, especially when I was still new. So I would send a mail, because they had given me the team's names right and say this needs to be done, so reach out to these people, they can help you, they see my name or I'd be introduced to a team and they'd be like, okay please help [colleague] and I would send out the mail,

nothing would happen. But if I go there with [male colleague] they'd be like 'no, no problem I'll do it'. So you are just like, why do not you take me as seriously as so and so?...sometimes you would think it is a relationship thing or people undermine you until they know your capabilities. But I feel like if I was a male and I came, it would be different". – ITT3

One of the women felt that there was a sense of community among the men, that they looked out for each other much better than they do for women.

"I think men treat each other better than they treat women. That's what I've seen. I've seen that they treat each other better than they treat women, they are more willing to help other men than a woman. They are less willing to do, and I am not saying it is all [men]". - ITT2

It is also interesting that one of the male managers also felt like IS was an 'old boys' club'.

"it looks like the old boys club and I think it is real". ITMM4

This is consistent with what IS literature revealed, that in IS there are these informal social networks where women are excluded and where men support each other (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; Ragins and Cotton, 1991; Ahuja, 2002; McGee, 2018; Morgan, Quesenberry and Trauth, 2004). This is another expression of gender-based power politics and the perception that men try to preserve the norm and their privilege.

There may also be a perception that salaries were gender-biased as one participant commented that:

"It is simply in the pocket. Where I know I should earn more than I do, but I do not because I feel like I am literally at the bottom of the salary chain. We all know that at the top is the white male and at the very bottom is the black female, everybody else is in between. And you feel it when you cannot afford a decent car that you would like because we are raised, hell I was raised to be independent. I am very independent, as much as I am married but I am independent. I will pay for my own car, put my own petrol in there, pay my own

bond, pay whatever the house needs and at the end of the day, I do not even have a child yet and at the end of the day, I look at what I am left with and I am like, what happens when I do get a child? And you get people that you work with, these guys are [rich] and you are like we are all here doing the same thing". - ITT2

This is consistent with what IS literature suggests, that women tend to get lower salaries than men (Truman and Baroudi, 1994; Lufkin et al., 2008) It is important to note that, in the context of Esona, this is a perception. Whether this is the case or not, it would be difficult to trace this as salary information is kept confidential in many organisations and even individuals will not easily share how much they earn.

Even outside Esona, some of the women faced opposition as they entered the IS space through junior positions.

"Before I came here I was actually at [Company C] as a graduate…So we were hired as…graduates... But on the team, there were quite a few females and guys as well …Like you could see it in the way he would interact with us like he would give all the guys the higher responsibilities and like us, we were like secretaries. [He would say] 'For presentation, I want so and so to present', but it was specifically guys … you could see that there are girls who are better at presenting and they'd want to do it, he would be like no, why do not you give so and so a chance, and he'd be like no, you have a loudmouth. As a graduate you would be like, you are trying to get a job so you do not want to step on too many toes, so you would like back down but like you can feel that okay if I stay long in this team, I am not going to go far". – ITT3

It is interesting that managers who are in lower management positions have different experiences and perceptions about being a woman and being in senior leadership roles, than women who are actually in more senior leadership roles. The women interviewed who are in senior leadership roles, do not experience gender-based power politics, but women who are in lower management positions face opposition from those in power positions when they move up the ranks. The two

women managers in lower management positions do not experience gender-based power politics from those who report into them. It looks like there are concentric circles of power and that the politics happen right on the edges of the concentric circles. This is consistent with that the RIV posits, that the politics happen on the margins of the circle of power (Lewis and Simpson, 2012), however, the RIV speaks of only one circle of power.

Based on this, it would seem that the circle of power is comfortable with women being in lower IS roles. Lewis and Simpson (2012) argued that as women reveal the privileges of the circle of power by either exposing this privilege or by infiltrating it, gender-based power politics ensue as the circle of power tries to keep the women outside the circle. It could be that women face more opposition as they try to enter the circle of power, but once they are inside the circle of power, then they are accepted and become part of the circle of power. The RIV does not explain this well. Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that the women who manage to enter the circle of power get indoctrinated into the belief system that this is a man's world and become involved in keeping other women outside the circle of power. However, this did not seem to be the case at Esona, and at least not from the data collected. The women in senior leadership roles were not oblivious to the fact that women experience gender-based power politics and they are also not okay with the status quo and are actively working on ensuring that women get opportunities equally with men. What seems to be happening though is infiltration, where women enter the circle of power and try to change it from within (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). On the other hand, women in non-management technical roles reported that they also experienced gender-based power politics, in one way or another. The fact that women in lower non-management roles also experienced gender-based power politics disqualifies the statement above, that men are comfortable with women being in lower IS roles.

My interpretation of this is that gender-based power politics exist in the organisation, at different levels. I think that it is just easy to think that they exist more at the top because people can see that in top management there is less representation of women as far as numbers are concerned. I also think that because almost everyone has a view of what happens at the top, rather than what happens in parallel areas within IS, that whatever happens with top management is easily visible to everyone. It is also interesting that the women at the top do not necessarily experience these

gender-based power politics. This is a perception study and it is really based on people's perceptions and experiences with reference to this particular subject. It is also a very sensitive topic and the fact that I work in the organisation also makes the topic even more sensitive. I think that even if the top women leaders' experiences in the organisation were somewhat different, the participants may be reluctant when sharing their experiences. It is also possible that the women in top leadership do not experience gender-based power politics because maybe people have to behave obsequiously for their own advantage. There were also cases from the literature where women felt that they need to behave like men for them to be recognized as strong leaders and to get into positions of power (McGee, 2018). This is also a possible explanation to the different experiences between senior leaders and other participants, this is however not a sense I got when I was interviewing the senior leaders. It is difficult to understand why the experiences are different for top management and for everyone else in the organisation, and why people's perceptions about gender-based power politics at top management is different from the actual experiences of the women in top leadership, further research needs to be done.

It also seems that it is not all men who try to keep women out of the circle of power. Some of the participants narrated stories of how they had male mentors or just men who supported them, in other words, pulled them into the circle of power, whether at Esona or outside Esona.

> *"But I was fortunate the guys that trained me were very good and they took me under their wing and they taught me a lot, so I was very fortunate on that one". – ITMM2*

> *"And you know my first conversation with [my now manager] where [we] were talking about…[he said] I am going to teach the person everything I know around strategy, about how to run a business, so you can do with it what you want to and I'll make sure that everyone I know, you will know. So I will give access to all of my networks such it becomes up to you with how you grow your own network base, so I would like to use this as a teaching moment… And he kept his word, he literally did teach me a lot… So having the privilege of working for him, with him and learning from him was a huge career highlight for me here within Esona". – ITMF3*

"You get guys who just want to take care of you like a younger sister, you will get guys who really just want you to do well. They want the best for you and they will make time for you. If they are busy, they are generally busy but if they want to help you grow to where you need be, you cannot necessarily grow by yourself, you need a hand here and there. There are those guys". - ITT2

There is another interesting finding, that in certain instances, there were just power-politics at play, and not necessarily gender-based power politics.

"It happens sometimes when you join the organisation, that you are new, what do you know? But I have seen it happen with men as well not just women. So for me, I would say it is we know better, who are you? You do not know this, we have been here long enough. We know how the company works and we know what can go and what cannot go, what do you know, you just walked into the position. So I have seen if often with a lot of different managers not just from a male/female perspective. It is just that you have to just "I know what I am doing and I know what I am talking about", that's why I say, sell yourself a lot better". – ITMM2

"But then again it is happening to men as well. I am one of them, men to men. So it is politics. I think it is in-discriminatory, I do not think it is in particular against women, I just think they get caught in the crossfire". – ITMM4

"I do not think the politics are gender-based, the politics are just politics". – ITMM3

This brings a question of how easy it is to distinguish between a case of pure power politics and gender-based politics. I think that some women would by default assume that politics experienced are gender-based if the politics are being pushed by a male colleague, even when it is not gender inspired, but just a case of pure power politics. The RIV does not explain this phenomenon at all. One of the participants related her experience about how she got the men's respect at a company she worked at before working at Esona. She got the men's respect because she could speak

Afrikaans. One could easily assume this was a gender issue when it looks like it was more like a racial or language issue.

> *"Okay so the fun part for me was when I started my career in IT, I was the only female amongst a lot of [Afrikaans speaking] males. So you walk in there and you see all these real, true Afrikaners and they only speak Afrikaans. And they will not speak to you in any other language. So I remember they spoke to me and I answered them in Afrikaans and they were like [shocked], they asked: "[You can speak Afrikaans?]" and I answered yes I can and I actually won over their respect because of that; because I answered them in their language they actually appreciated that and I won over their respect". – ITMM2*

Sometimes it is difficult to separate the issue of gender from other social ills.

> *"Let me say, here at Esona first. [Gender-based power politics are] there, [they are] existing in certain areas. Because yes, of course, the bank is huge. In my area, I would not say it is there, but in other areas as much as I've also spoken to other women, I still believe that in other areas, it still exists. They are still thinking that women cannot take certain roles and I am not sure whether it is because it is just only the gender, I think it also goes along with race". - ITT1*

This brings me to a phenomenon called intersectionality, which refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of differences in individual lives, where those who are marginalized in society can fall under different groups of minorities (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008). This, for example, means that a black woman can face sexism and racism at the same time. Further research needs to be done to understand in detail, to what extent this is at play in the context of Esona and IS in general. The RIV is lacking in that it does not take this into consideration at all. It would be interesting to see if the RIV applies beyond gender.

There are also instances where gender-based power politics happen against men, where women get into powerful positions and take advantage of men. This came out strongly from one of the senior leaders.

"And those experiences are real, there are men as well being harassed and not being able to talk about it because the view is, [no one would] believe them because men can never go through a situation like this". – ITMF3

"It is not just men, so I think we have this misconception that gender-based politics is one-directional and it is not, it is bidirectional because we do it too. So you find women in powerful positions as well who take advantage of men too, but it is not something that we necessarily talk about or are comfortable talking about either". – ITMF3

The RIV does not explain this dynamic – where women get into the circle of power and are the ones who are discriminating against men. The RIV does not explain this in its explanation of the preservation of power where Lewis and Simpson (2012), argue that it is men who will do anything to preserve the power. The RIV lacks in that it does not explain fully the dynamics which follow when women get into the circle of power.

Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that men would do anything to protect their privilege, but it does not explain the other dynamics where there are men who are actually pulling women into the circle of power, and it does not explain the cases where men are discriminated against by women who have made it into the circle of power.

4.2.2. Concealment of privilege

The concealment of privilege by the circle of power means that privilege is concealed in order to normalize it (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). This is the power that (Lukes, 1974) refers to as Non-Decision Making power, where certain information that is critical for decision-making is not revealed.

There was no evidence of this found. From the literature reviewed, there was also no evidence found. This could be because it would be difficult to trace this as it is unlikely that anyone would admit to not revealing information that is critical for decision-making. The women participants would not know if there was information that was critical for decision making, that is withheld

from them and I do not think the men would admit to hiding information that is critical for decision making from some of their employees. I, therefore, think that ethnography as a methodology would be a more effective way to trace this if it exists. Ethnography is an interpretive research design where the researcher studies a phenomenon in the context of its culture. The researcher becomes immersed in the culture over a period of time and data is collected through observations and interaction with participants (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Therefore I think this phenomenon would be best traced via an ethnographic study.

4.3. Theme 2: The Margins

Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that outside the circle of power – as the women reveal the privileges of the center of power, gender-based power politics ensue, and the gender-based power politics have certain effects on women. Findings concerning these themes are discussed in detail below.

4.3.1. Revelation

Revelation takes place when the women outside the circle of power reveal and challenge the privileges and benefits of the dominant circle and these would generally be the women close to the circle of power (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

4.3.1.1. Overt Revelations

Overt revelations occur when the women outside the circle of power directly confront the privileges of the norm or circle of power (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

Some of the women related their stories of how they had to overtly confront the circle of power and stand their ground in order for things to change and for them to be accepted into this male-dominated field.

> *"Until to that point where I said, no it cannot happen this way, we need to talk about this. And then when I spoke about it…Yes, I had to engage with them because it was at that point where [I asked myself], should I leave something that I love doing or should I confront them? What is the way forward? And I told myself, you know what, each and every organisation has got its pros and cons*

and even though I tried to move to another company, this is what I am going to face if I do not deal with it. So that is what I told myself, I am going to speak to these people, and then we are going to have to iron out what are the issues. After doing that, I saw great improvement. So I've ironed those kinds of things so that even if there is another woman who is going to come into the team, there must be no undermining of anyone in this gender". – ITT1

"You just confront it I guess like if somebody is disrespectful for whatever reason, I believe in confronting issues. So like deal with the elephant in the room so that we are not ignorant to the elephant in the room because like I said around racial discrimination, I cannot change the colour of my skin, I do not have any intention of doing that, I am not, I do not have any like expectation or intention of transitioning into a different sexual orientation, I am happy being female, so it is just a conversation that we are going to have to approach and talk about, so like I said, I do not like shying away from difficult conversations, I will have difficult conversations when I have to have them". – ITMF3

This lends support to what IS literature shows, that there are women who overtly confront the status quo and refuse to conform to the power discourse (Kvasny and Trauth, 2003; Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; McGee, 2018). From the data collected, it is interesting that, consistent with Lewis's and Simpson's (2012) argument that this confrontation happens on the edges of the circle of power. In both stories narrated above, the women had to confront this type of behaviour when they had just started on their roles.

4.3.1.2. Subversive Revelations

Subversive revelations occur when women challenge the norm in more subtle ways such as infiltrating the circle or trying to influence the way of thinking of those in the circle of power (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

This theme also was found in the data where a woman stood her ground and in the end influenced the way of thinking of the circle of power, in that women can also do what men can do.

"[E]ventually when they see you can stand your ground and you know what you are doing, then they are like okay fine, they leave you alone. You are doing your job and you know what you are doing, it is not like we have to baby you or anything like that. So for me, it was always, I can do the job just as well as you can and I think that paid off in the end". - ITMM2

4.3.2. Exposure

Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that as women try to reveal the privileges of the norm and the norm is trying to preserve and conceal its privilege, the women can result in attention being drawn to them and being overly exposed.

4.3.2.1. Strategic

Lewisa and Simpson (2012) argue that the women, through being exposed, can strategically influence the circle of power's practices and ways of doing things.

One of the women managers felt that being a woman in IS had its advantages in that one can use the status of being overly exposed strategically to influence the circle of power.

"I think one of the highlights about being a woman in tech is that there are not that many, so when you enter a room, people are uncertain, they look at you, you look very unassuming, you looking very demure but when you address a team of people and you have their attention and you know what you are talking about because you are not coming there to fudge numbers, you are not coming to be fudgy about anything, that commands respect. I have noticed that some people are very respectful of that, they are very receptive of that". - ITFM1

4.3.2.2. Flaunted

On the negative side, women could be flaunted, as "others" and this could put them under immense pressure to always perform, to always deliver (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

It was interesting to find that the male managers were the ones who thought that being a woman in IS, probably puts women under pressure to perform. The male managers thought that, the pressure is not imposed on the women, but that the pressure comes from the women themselves.

The general feeling among these managers was that women put themselves under pressure to perform as a result of being overly exposed in this male-dominated field.

> *"I would think that women would like to stand out, they would want to achieve, they would want to show that they have a right to be here and they can do anything as well if not better than the majority of their male counterparts". - ITMM3*

> *"I think it is not something that is put on them, but I think women put themselves under pressure. I mean the bottom line is, I walk into a company or if I walk into any event socially and it is all women or predominantly women, I feel under pressure. I think that's just the climate, I do not there is anyone who deliberately puts them under pressure, but I think even that is going to change". - ITMM4*

It is also interesting that none of the women felt that they were flaunted, and thus put under pressure to perform.

4.3.2.3. Abject

This exposure can be abject and put them under a lot of scrutiny (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

Some of the women felt that being a woman in a male-dominated field such as IS, put them under a lot of scrutiny. They felt that men are not held to the same standards as women.

> *"The pressure that I would say comes from, work aside right, is when you are a female there is an expectation that, in terms of, I do not know like there is just a supernatural expectation that is then placed on you in terms of how you behave, how you react to certain situations. So if I as an example was to use profanity, I am going to be deemed as vulgar, my partner, however, swears a lot but it is okay. For him he is not judged through the same, I think women are not judged through the same lens as men are, because there seems to be like a higher expectation to like how you behave versus how men behave. So if I [am] assertive, sometimes it may be misinterpreted as aggression when that's not*

what it is, versus when a guy is assertive, that is how he is or he loses his toys once in a while, it is fine because this happens right". – ITMF3

"And assertiveness to them for not attending meetings was being seen as aggressive". - ITMM1

In the context of Esona, all three sub-themes under exposure came out strongly, whereas from the literature reviewed, only strategic exposure came out. The participants were not forthcoming with their experiences outside the context of Esona.

4.3.3. Disappearance

Through the pressures of being exposed, women can then choose to disappear Disappearance can take three forms: Withdrawal, Erasure and Incorporation (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

4.3.3.1. Withdrawal

Withdrawal occurs when women voluntarily exclude themselves from a male-dominated field (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

This did not come out strongly from the data collected except for one comment made by one of the female IT managers, that because of gender issues, women suffer in silence and do not speak about their experiences, to the point of leaving the IS space.

"Within IS I think that, more often than not, these things happen but we are quiet about them and we suffer in silence and not tell someone that this is what is happening and I am extremely uncomfortable and then we choose to leave the business and the organisation because at the end of the day people work for people before they work for Esona". - ITMF3

I think to effectively trace this, one would need to find women who left IS and interview them to find out why they left IS. The women interviewed for this research are of course still in IS, this is probably why this theme did not come out strongly if it is that it really exists.

4.3.3.2. Erasure

Erasure occurs when women are trapped into roles where they are constrained, and because they are overly exposed as a category and not individuals, their individuality disappears and their influence also disappears (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

There were also strong comments from one male IT Manager about how some women were positioned in certain roles and were completely silenced after that.

> *"I believe it does happen, I've heard of it happen. I've seen areas which were run predominantly by females where conversations with those particular females, [after they were positioned in curtained], they were absolutely silenced. They are just tokens now just to keep the headcount, they were given no mandate, no responsibility". – ITMM4*

> *One female IT manager also expressed how it was difficult as a woman to voice one's opinion. "You feel like your voice is not heard, you actually feel afraid to speak up sometimes to voice your own opinion. It is like it is not your place as a woman to talk". – ITMM1*

4.3.3.3. Incorporation

Incorporation occurs when women conform to the standards and practices set by the circle of power. In this way, they are silenced and cannot challenge the status quo, they become part of the status quo (Lewis and Simpson, 2012).

There was definitely a sense, from one of the IT managers that there are women who have conformed and become part of the status quo, in that they too were the ones trying to keep other women from the circle of power.

> *"But it is something men and women are guilty of and it is not necessarily just the men who are actually bad at it. If I look at scenarios where I felt that people were trying to pull me down or bring me down in my career, it was not men, it was women. So that's also a very interesting phenomenon to actually think about, it has not been men, it is actually been the women around me". – ITMF3*

Interestingly, it seems that from the participant's experiences, that they perceive that women are worse than men in opposing other women. Mabokela (2003) in a study done in the higher education sector, found that women do not experience resistance and opposition only from men, but from women too. One of the participants from Mabokela's (2003) study described this phenomenon as the "Pull Her Down" frame of mind, and this means that women are more tolerant and more accepting of male power than they are of women. When it comes to women, they constantly challenge women in positions of power instead of being supportive. Kvasny and Trauth (2003) refer to this as conforming to the power discourse, where they conform to the status and they are indoctrinated into the belief system that certain roles are more suitable for men than they are for women. It is interesting that women seem to become even more hostile to other women than men. One would expect that women would be more supportive of each other since they know first what it is like to be discriminated against because of being in the minority. However, it seems that they can become more hostile towards other women and more accepting to men. Perhaps women behave this way because they feel that they have to behave like men for them to get into positions of power as McGee's (2018) study suggested.

Demaiter and Adams (2009) found that women who conformed to the norm and did not emphasize the gender differences were more successful and survived the power discourse. This seemed to come out from the data collected as well from one of the managers in a more senior role.

> *"So being a girl I suppose, you know like being female has never been the thing that's at the forefront of my mind, which is like a thing I see first before I see myself, I know it is very weird but it is never really been a thing that I use as a hindrance because I believe in fairness in everything that we do; when you get into any situation to me, it is about fairness first before you actually look at gender. And I suppose that could be a blessing or a curse because if I had navigated my career through the lens of I am a girl first before I am a competent person who can excel at whatever job is put in front of me and do it exceptionally well, I have not looked at it through that lens and maybe that's a blessing. Maybe at some point, it will kick in that you are a girl, but it has not yet, I have not looked at it through that lens". – ITMF3*

While this lends support to Demaiter and Adams's (2009) argument, one cannot conclusively say that she has a senior management role because she does not see gender. There could many other factors that have contributed to her success as a woman in IS.

From literature, only incorporation and withdrawal appeared, erasure did now show from the literature. However, in the context of Esona, it was coming out strongly. The participants did not talk about their experiences outside the context of Esona, therefore none of the themes could be traced from the participant's experiences outside the context of Esona.

4.4. Summary and Conclusion of chapter

This chapter aimed to present a summary of the findings from the data collected, using the themes from the conceptual framework and any others that came from the data collected. There were no themes that seemed to come out of the data inductively, beyond the themes from the conceptual framework. There was certainly new information and issues discovered about the framework, but these did not need to be discussed as separate themes. Findings from the data collected were analyzed and interpreted.

5. CHAPTER 5 - SYNTHESIS AND REFLECTIONS

In this chapter, a synthesis of the research findings in relation to the research questions, and a reflection on the conceptual framework is done.

5.1. Synthesis of research findings

5.1.1. Perceptions of gender-based power politics and their existence in IS at Esona Bank

The main aim of this research was to understand people's perceptions of gender-based power politics and their existence at Esona bank.

The perception at Esona, from both male and female colleagues, is that gender-based power politics exist in IS. Women have experienced gender-based power politics at different levels and in different roles in the IS space in the organisation, albeit that this is not all women. Some of the women did not experience gender-based power politics, specifically the women in senior leadership roles. The politics happen at different entry points within IS. Relating this to the RIV, it appears that there are different concentric circles of power and the politics happen at the edges of the concentric circles as women try to enter each circle. It is when women enter IS through junior positions, that they seem to experience gender-based power politics and after they have proven themselves, they are then accepted into the first concentric circle of power. As they progress and go up the ladder, gender-based power politics manifest again as they try to enter senior leadership roles, and as with the first concentric circle, after they have proven themselves, they are then accepted into the second concentric circle of power. It seems like there are multiple glass ceilings. However, it is also important to note that it is not all men who oppose women as they try to enter the circle of power, in fact, some of the men are instrumental in bringing the women into the circle of power.

Interestingly, it is not always the men who are responsible for gender-based power politics, sometimes it is women against other women. This came out so strongly in the case of Esona, to the point that it seems as if women become even more hostile towards other women than men. This a typical expression of the "Pull Her Down" attitude that Mabokela (2003) found, where

women face resistance from other women. This is also not surprising in a patriarchal country like South Africa. In patriarchal societies, women are viewed as inferior to men (Mudau and Obadire, 2017), and this means that women are also indoctrinated into this belief system. Thus you see women opposing other women and being more receptive to men because they have been indoctrinated into the belief that women are inferior, and that men are better.

Sometimes the gender-based politics manifest for men as well. This study shows that there are cases where women get into positions of power and they become hostile towards men.

Sometimes it is not clear if the politics are gender-based or it is just pure politics that happen against both men and women in the workplace. Another layer of complication is the intersectionality of race and gender, where it is not clear what role other social ills such as racism play.

5.1.2. The Manifestation of gender-based power politics in IS at Esona Bank

Gender-based power politics manifests differently in different contexts, the intention of this question was to understand how they manifest in the context of Esona bank.

The interview data revealed that women get opposed when they try to enter IS and when they try to move up the ladder into senior leadership. This opposition takes different forms. One of them is that some of the women felt like their ideas get ignored and men tend to go for ideas that come from other men. Some of the women at lower, technical, and non-management roles shared their stories about how they felt undermined and not taken seriously by men. This is another expression of the preservation of power that Lewis and Simpson (2012) talk about. It is possible that they are not even conscious of what they are doing, but because the norm (that IS, is a men's world) is so embedded in them, they may not even be aware that they are ignoring women's' ideas and going for men's ideas. It is also possible that they are fully aware of what they are doing, and they do it because they are preserving male privilege.

Another way gender-based power politics manifested at Esona was when a woman was discriminated against because she was pregnant to the point of being sidelined.

Another manifestation of gender-based power at Esona was where one of the participants expressed how she feels that men get better salaries. This is also common in IS literature, where there is a significant gap between men's and women's salaries.

There was also a sense of exclusivity – where one of the women felt that there was a sense of community among the men. This is a phenomenon that appears frequently in IS literature and this what some refer to as the 'old boys' club'(Trauth and Howcroft, 2006; Ragins and Cotton, 1991; Ahuja, 2002; McGee, 2018; Morgan, Quesenberry and Trauth, 2004).

It seems that there have been cases of harassment as well, even though the participants did not necessarily go into much detail about such cases, because of their sensitive nature. It is important to note that it is not always the men who are harassing women, but there have been instances where women have harassed men. In the context of Esona, it seems that gender-based power politics are not always one-directional, but there are women who get into senior positions and take advantage of men, as shared by one of the senior leaders.

5.1.3. The impact of gender-based power politics on women at Esona Bank

Findings show that women deal with gender-based politics and are affected by them in different ways. Some of the women related stories about how they overtly confronted the circle of power whenever they saw gender-based power politics at play. Some women stated that one has to continuously stand their ground and continue doing what one needs to do to positively influence the way men view women. They also stated how one can use the status of being exposed as a woman in IS to strategically influence how men view women. However, the men participants in this study felt that being a woman in a male-dominated field like IS puts women under a lot of pressure to always perform. According to the men, this is the pressure that women put themselves under because they probably feel that they have to do more than their male counterparts to prove themselves. None of the female participants mentioned this, however, they stated that being a woman in IS puts one under a lot of pressure and scrutiny, that there are different expectations for men and women as far as behaviour is concerned, i.e. what is acceptable, when done by men, is not necessarily acceptable when done by women. An example of this is that men are allowed to use profanity in meetings and women are not. There was also a sense that some of the women

leave IS because of gender-based politics, but this did not come out strongly. There certainly was a sense that women are sometimes put in certain positions and roles, where they are then silenced and become invisible. Incorporation also came out strongly, where some of the women conform and become part of the status quo, and are the ones who end up keeping other women outside the circle of power. Lukes (1974) defines this as ideological power, where people are influenced into accepting the status quo and never challenge it.

5.2. Reflections on the Conceptual Framework

The aim of this section is to reflect on the conceptual framework used for this study, which is the Revised Invisibility Vortex.

The RIV was developed by Lewis and Simpson (2012), it conceptualizes visible and invisible power held by men, and also conceptualizes the gender-based power politics which unfold as women, who are marginalized, reveal this male power. The main aim for using this framework was to take advantage of the fact that the RIV would allow us to do an in-depth analysis of gender-based power politics in IS and to determine whether it explains the phenomenon under study. To an extent, it does explain the phenomenon of gender-based power politics however it was lacking in that there were dynamics that it could not explain. These are discussed below.

At the center of the Vortex, is the male domination – the center of power or privilege. Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue this is the dominant group (men), which has all the power. They further argue that this male power is not always visible – such that people can think that it does not exist On the Norm, this framework helped the researcher in the analysis of what the norm was at Esona. The framework helped in bringing an understanding that there is a norm in IS and what this norm is. The norm in IS is male-domination as asserted by the RIV.

The center of power will do anything to preserve and conceal its privilege (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). On the preservation of power or privilege, this framework helped in understanding how the preservation of power by the circle of power happens. Lewis and Simpson (2012) argued that men will do anything to preserve their privilege. The data collected from this study does not fully support this statement. While there are gender-based power politics at play as women try to enter the circle of power, there are actually men who are instrumental in pulling women into the circle

of power. The RIV lacks therefore in that it does not show this dynamic. What came strongly as well from the data was that women in non-management technical positions experienced gender-based power politics, while middle managers did not experience gender-based power from their subordinates, but experienced it as they try to engage with senior leadership. On the other hand, the women in senior leadership did not have any personal experiences on gender-based power politics but understood that other women had experienced this. The RIV does not explain this dynamic at all. Therefore, it seems that there are different circles of power, more like a circle within the circle. Entering the IS space at junior levels seems to be the first layer of the circle of power. Once women have proven themselves, they are then accepted into the first circle of power. While you are within the first layer circle of power, entering into senior leadership roles seems to be another circle of power within the circle of power. Women then need to prove themselves again and once they have proven themselves, they are then accepted into the circle within the circle. Lewis and Simpson (2012) further argue that the gender-based power politics happens outside or at the edges of the circle of power, as women try to enter. Findings from this study, show that indeed the politics happen at the edges. It is evident that the gender-based power politics occur on the edges of each of the concentric circles of power.

Another dynamic, which came from the data collected, was the fact that there are actually women, who once they have made it to the circle of power, are the instigators behind gender-based power politics against men. The RIV does not explain the dynamic of women who enter the circle of power and how they then treat men. One would almost argue that the framework seems to be one-sided. The researcher's choice to also interview men helped this research not to be one-sided. The intention of the researcher is not to criticize the framework, but to offer an objective review of the framework. While it is a useful framework for this kind of study, it has gaps that will need to be addressed by future research. Another challenge as far as analyzing the preservation of power is concerned, is the difficulty of distinguishing when politics are gender-based or when it is just a pure case of power politics or when issues such as racism are at play. The RIV completely ignores the concept of intersectionality, which I think it is an important phenomenon to consider when doing gender studies.

On concealment of privilege, it was difficult to trace this from the analysis. What makes the analysis of the concealment of privilege difficult, which is not necessarily a weakness of the framework is that it would generally be difficult to trace concealment through interviews. Maybe a different methodology would have to be adopted, to trace this more effectively.

Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that gender-based power politics happen on the margins of the circle of power as women try to enter the circle of power.

The framework was used to analyze how women confront or reveal the privileges of the circle of power. This stage was pretty straight forward, and through the use of the RIV, it was clear to see the ways in which women confront the privileges of the circle of power. The data collected for this study supports Lewis's and Simpson's (2012) argument that women generally confront the circle of power's privilege through either overt or subversive ways. Lewis and Simpson (2012) further argued that it is women who are in higher positions, but not inside who generally confront the circle of power, however from the data collected, this did not seem to be the case. It seemed that confrontation also happens from women who are not in senior roles but are also on the edges of the circle of power. Meaning that it is not just women in senior positions who confront the circle of power, but even those who are not in higher positions but are on the margins of the concentric circles. Confrontation happens from women outside the concentric circles of power, basically happens on the edges of each concentric circle. My perception is that this could also be personality, some people are naturally confrontational. Further research should be done to investigate the role of personality in this.

The next step was to analyze how women are affected by gender-based power politics using the RIV. The first part of this is that, as women try to reveal the privileges of the circle of power, they can result in attention being drawn to them and being overly exposed. This exposure can either be used strategically to influence the circle of power, or the exposure can be abject and put the women under scrutiny, or the women, through being exposed, can be flaunted and this can put them under a lot of pressure (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). The analysis of exposure using the RIV was relatively straight forward and the data collected supported Lewis's and Simpson's (2012) argument. The second part on the effects of gender-based power politics on women is that, through the exposure, women can disappear through voluntarily leaving the male-dominated space, or through erasure

where their voices are silenced or through incorporation where they conform to the norm and do not question the status quo. All these different effects could be accounted for from the data collected.

Based on the literature and the findings from this study, I propose a redevelopment of the initial framework as depicted in figure 3 below.

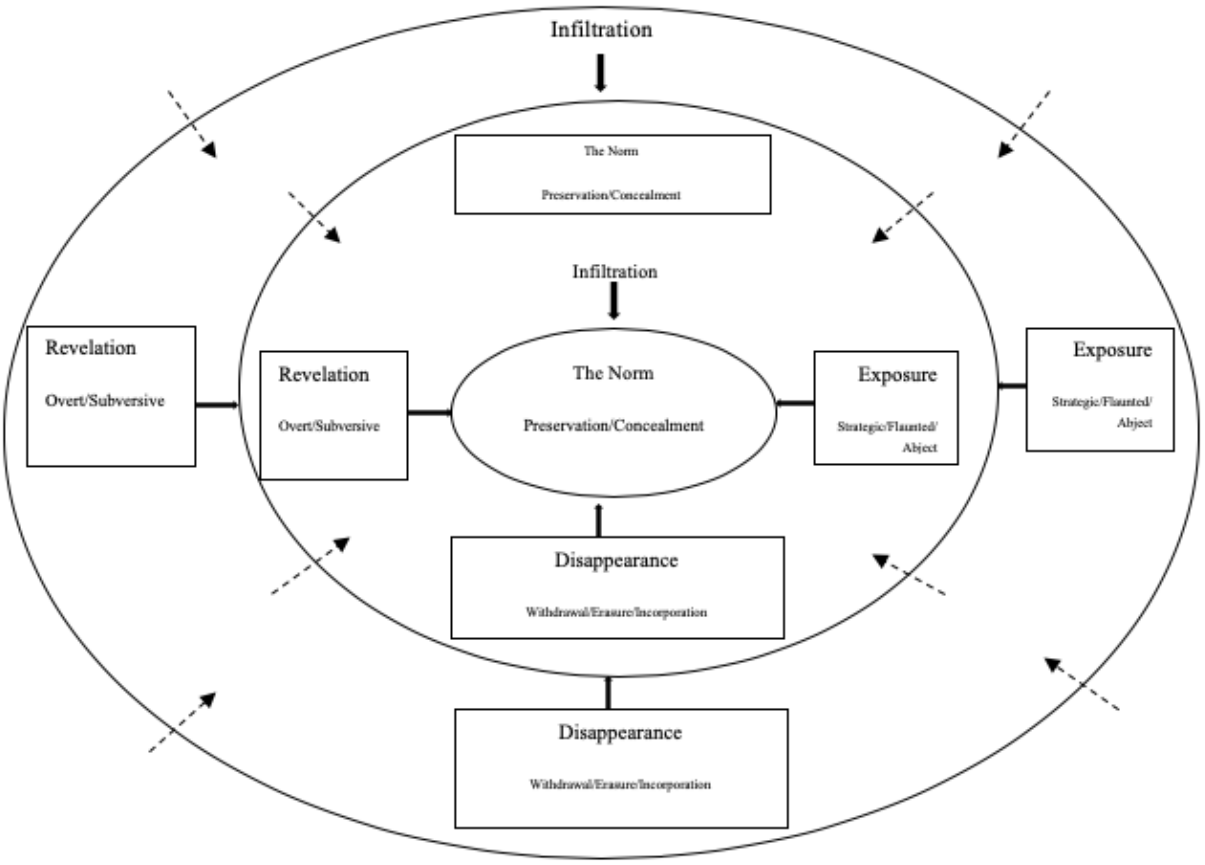

Figure 3: The Updated - Revised Invisibility Vortex

In the Updated RIV, there are different concentric circles of power. In the context of the bank, the first concentric circle is, IS in general, the second concentric circle is IS leadership. In other disciplines or other contexts, there could be more concentric circles. In both circles, there is preservation and concealment of privilege. I argue, and this argument is supported by the findings from this study, that it is not only men who are responsible for the preservation of privilege, but that women too sometimes play a role. Findings from this study have also shown, that at each

circle of power, there are men and possibly women who are instrumental in bringing the women into the different circles of power. It is not clear how close to the inside of the margins are the men who bring the women in, from the edges, further research would have to be done to determine this.

The margins are common across the concentric circles. As women try to enter each of the concentric circles and as they reveal the privileges of each concentric circle of power, gender-based power politics ensue. Consistent with the initial framework, the revelation of privilege can take two forms, and that is, the revelation can be either done overtly through confrontation or subversively through infiltration and positively influencing how the circle of power views women. Also consistent with the initial frameworks, women outside the margins of the circles of power are affected by the gender-based power politics, through either being overly exposed or through disappearance.

5.3. Summary and Conclusion of Chapter

In this chapter, a synthesis of the findings was done. The findings were related back to the research questions. A reflection on the initial conceptual framework was done and a new framework was proposed.

6. CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to study the impact of gender-based power politics on women in IS in South Africa, and specifically women in the workplace, as opposed to academia. This study focused on people's perceptions of gender-based power politics, the different ways in which gender-based politics manifest themselves, and how women in IS are affected by gender-based power politics.

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study, its theoretical and practical contributions, its limitations, and suggestions for future research.

6.1. Summary of research

This study was conducted through a case study at a South African bank. The research paradigm underpinning the study was interpretive. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Data collection and analysis were guided by Lewis and Simpson's (2012) Revised Invisibility Vortex (RIV) framework.

Chapter four presents an analysis and interpretation of the findings, based on the themes from the initial conceptual framework. The analysis and interpretation confirm that indeed there is visible and invisible power held by men, and this is what is referred to as the circle of power. The findings suggest that, it is not just one big circle of power, as posited by Lewis and Simpson (2012), but that there are concentric circles of power, and seems that the glass ceiling keeps on shifting or that there are multiples ones. On the preservation of power, findings show that men will do anything to protect their power, however, it is not all men who do this, some men are instrumental in bringing the women into the circle of power. We see through this study that it is sometimes women who are responsible for preserving male privilege as they oppose women who try to enter the circle of power. Findings also show that gender-based power politics ensue, as women reveal this male power. The politics happen at the edges of the concentric circles, as women try to enter and as they confront the privileges of the circles of power. Consistent with the RIV, outside the circle of power, as politics happen, women are affected. Lewis and Simpson (2012) posited that on the edges of the circle of power, women can either overtly or subversively confront the privileges of the circle of power. The findings from this study support this argument, further show that this

revelation happens on the edges of all the concentric circles. The study further shows that, consistent with Lewis and Simpson's (2012) argument, as revelation takes place, gender-based power politics ensue and women are affected by these politics by either being overly exposed or through disappearance.

Chapter five synthesized the findings of the case in relation to the research questions, and also presented a reflection on the initial conceptual framework. The first research question is related to people's perceptions of gender-based power politics and their existence. The perception at Esona, from both male and female colleagues, is that gender-based power politics exist in IS. Women have experienced gender-based power politics at different levels and in different roles in the IS space in the organisation, albeit that this is not all women. It is not always the men who are responsible for gender-based power politics, sometimes it is women against other women. Gender-based politics manifest for men as well. This study shows that there are cases where women get into positions of power and they become hostile towards men. Sometimes it is not clear if the politics are gender-based or it is just pure politics that happen against both men and women in the workplace. Despite the redeveloped framework, this is still an issue and it is difficult to address. Even if someone thinks it's just politics and not about someone's gender, they could be being gender-biased through unconscious bias rather than conscious bias. Another layer of complication is the intersectionality of race and gender, where it is not clear, what role other social ills such as racism play.

The second research dealt with how gender-based power politics manifest in IS, at Esona bank. Both women in middle management and women in technical roles felt like their ideas get ignored and men tend to go for ideas that come from other men. Another way gender-based power politics manifested at Esona was when a woman was discriminated against because she was pregnant to the point of being sidelined. One of the participants expressed how she feels that men get better salaries. There was also a sense of exclusivity – where one of the women felt that there was a sense of community among the men. It seems that have been cases of harassment as well, not just against women, but against men too.

The third research question dealt with how women are impacted by gender-based power politics. This study shows that women deal with and are affected by gender-based power politics

differently. Some deal with it by confronting it directly and others by influencing how men view women. They are affected by it differently, some strategically use the status of being the minority to positively influence the circle of power. Others felt that being in the minority in a male-dominated space put them under a lot of pressure and scrutiny. There was a sense that some women were strategically silenced and lastly, some women become part of the status quo and are indoctrinated into the belief system that men are better than women.

Lastly, a reflection on the initial conceptual framework was done and a new framework, "The Updated RIV" was proposed.

6.2. Contributions

6.2.1. Theoretical Contributions

One of the theoretical contributions of this study is that it contributes to the existing literature as far as gender-based power politics in IS are concerned. This study brought about an understanding of what people's perceptions are regarding gender-based power politics, how gender-based power politics manifest themselves, and how women are affected by gender-based power politics in IS and in the South African context.

Another theoretical contribution of this study was the application of the Revised Invisibility Vortex in the IS context. To the researcher's knowledge, Lewis and Simpson's (2012) RIV framework has never been used as a lens to study gender-based power politics in IS. The use of the RIV Framework in IS has extended the literature on the phenomenon under study.

Another theoretical contribution is the proposed new framework – The Updated RIV. Through this study, the conceptual framework was extended, and it shows that, there is not a single circle of power, but that there are concentric circles of power, each with its margins. The extension of the RIV contributes to the existing literature and offers researchers a framework that can be used to further study gender-based power politics in IS.

Another theoretical contribution of this study relates to methodology. The researcher chose to interview both men and women for this research, which helped the research not to be one-sided. Future gender studies should take this into account. However, we have seen through this study that

for studies of this nature, it would be best to do ethnographic studies to effectively investigate the phenomenon.

The research may also contribute to the field of gender studies and not just IS. This is particularly because the issue of gender-based power politics in not unique to IS.

6.2.2. Practical Contributions

The practical contribution of this study is that it may help South African organisations to understand the phenomenon of gender-based power politics and the impact it has on both men and women. It may also help organisations to define their gender transformation strategies. This would be particularly useful for countries like South Africa – that have a deep root in patriarchal belief systems and a history of oppression. Particularly in the context of Esona bank, it may help the organisation to address the challenge of having women representation only at entry levels and not enough representation as one moves up the hierarchy. This study has shown that shown gender-based power politics do exist at Esona bank and further has shown how these are at play. It has shown than there are concentric circles of power in IS and politics take place at the edges of the concentric circles as women try to enter. This speaks directly to the challenges Esona Bank finds itself with – which is the fact that there is less representation of women as one climbs up the hierachal structures in organisation.

6.3. Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study revolves around the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under study, which is gender-based power politics. The first challenge with studying gender-based power politics is that politics are not always visible, and it is deeply held in people's emotions. Studying any kind of norm of behaviour is always difficult, as the norms are entrenched, and it becomes difficult for the participants to notice and articulate them. Another difficulty is that political behaviour is not desirable as it often causes division and conflict in organisations (Mintzberg, 1985), and therefore no one wants to be associated with it. Another challenge in studying this phenomenon in a country like South Africa is the intersectionality of gender and race, it is not always easy to distinguish when discrimination is gender related, and when it is racially influenced.

The second limitation related to the manner in which data was collected, which was through semi-structured interviews. This means that the study relied entirely on people's accounts of events and their perceptions. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, it is possible that people may tell that which they think you want to hear and not necessarily the reality. To alleviate this limitation, people in different roles and different genders were interviewed to get different perspectives.

The third limitation is related to the fact that the researcher works for the case study organisation. The disadvantage of being an insider is that the participants may hold back and not open up to someone who is an insider out of fear of being exposed, especially with a phenomenon of a sensitive nature, such as gender-based power politics. This was also alleviated by interviewing different groups of people to get different perspectives and ethical assurances.

Another limitation was the number of interviews conducted. Additional interviews may have added more richness to the study, however, the researcher stopped at nine interviews because no new themes seemed to be emerging from the data and saturation appeared to have been reached and there was no need to continue with the interviews just to increase the quantity. This was discussed in detail in section 3.3.

Lastly, another limitation is related to the research design for this study. Ethnography could have been more beneficial; however, ethnography was not feasible for this level of study, the researcher would not have had enough time required for an ethnographic study, and this research needed to be completed within a short period.

6.4. Suggestions for Future Research

The first suggestion for future research is to study the role that the intersectionality of race and gender, plays when studying the issue of gender-based power politics.

The second suggestion speaks to the manner in which data was collected for this study. Research of this sensitive nature and any study of behaviour and norms may be best done through an ethnographic study, where data is collected through observations. A suggestion for future research is for researchers to do this kind of study through observations.

The third suggestion for further research is related to the Updated Revised Invisibility Vortex for IS. Researchers could use the Updated RIV to further study gender-based power politics in IS.

Another suggestion for further research is related to the Updated RIV. Findings from this study showed that there are men who are instrumental in bringing women into the circles of power, however, is not clear close to the margins are the men who bring the women in, from the edges, further research would have to done to determine this.

It would be very interesting to see if the RIV applies beyond gender. Future research may need to apply the RIV to study the circle of power and what happens in the margins when black men try to get promoted. Thus, removing the gender aspect altogether, and applying the RIV to other marginalized groups.

Findings from this study also show that it is difficult to find women to fill IS roles, future research may need to investigate why this is the case, specifically in the South African context.

Another suggestion for future research is that, when doing gender studies, researchers should look into collecting data from both male and female participants to get a balanced view of the phenomenon.

Lastly, the findings from this study show that the confrontation of the circle of power happens at the margins of each concentric circle. I argue that personality could also be playing a part in this confrontation and future research could investigate the role that personality plays in this.

6.5. Researcher's reflections

6.5.1. Overall Comments

This has been an interesting study. Gender-based power politics are a complex phenomenon to study. This study was conducted at a South African bank, which I work for. I am an IS middle manager and have worked for the bank for about two years. I started off as a technical specialist and have recently assumed the management role. At the time of the data collection, I was a technical specialist. I have my own experiences regarding the phenomenon under study, and I cannot say whether I have personally experienced gender-based power politics. For me what

makes this complicated is that I never know if problems are gender-related, or if it is normal politics in the workplace and when the issue of racism plays part. I believe as a female, I am most likely to be biased regarding my gender, especially in a male-dominated space like IS. I am also most likely to be biased about my race, especially in a country with a history like South Africa's.

However, I believe that I did not let my own prejudices and preconceived ideas cloud my judgment when interpreting the findings for this study. I am however aware that being an insider could have influenced what information the participants shared.

Overall it has been an interesting journey, I did not struggle with access. My access request was approved quite swiftly, and I also did not struggle with the participants, they were all quite willing to participate and share their experiences.

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8. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Questions

This interview protocol was adapted from a study on gender issues in IS (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006).

	Interview Questions - For Women	
1	Please tell me about yourself? Who you are without mentioning your name, just a brief background into who you are?	General
2	Can you describe your work environment?	General
3	What inspired your decision to take up a career in IS?	General
4	Was the decision to go the IS route something you always wanted as a child? If yes, why? And if not, why not?	General
5	Did you get any gendered messages about being a female or about your future growing up or at any given part of your life or was gender never an issue?	General
6	Can you please describe your role and position in the organisation?	RIV (Revelation)
7	What has been your experience as a woman in IS? Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	RIV (The Norm)
8	In your opinion, are there IS roles that you feel are more suitable for women than others, or do you believe women are suited for all roles in IS? Please elaborate on your answer. You can answer that from a general perspective and also as it pertains to this organisation.	RIV (The Norm, Disappearance)
9	Have you experienced any form of pressure for being a woman in a male-dominated field like IS? If so, how do you cope with such pressure? Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R3/RIV (The Norm, Revelation, Exposure, Disappearance)
10	How do you deal with gender stereotyping?	R3/RIV (The Norm, Revelation, Exposure, Disappearance)
11	Being a woman in IS, have you ever felt like you were unequally treated with your male counterparts? If so, please take me through that experience and, how you dealt/deal with such? Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R3/RIV (The Norm, Revelation, Exposure, Disappearance)
12	Have you ever felt like you were discriminated against because of your gender? And if so, how did/do you deal with that? Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R3/RIV (The Norm, Revelation, Exposure, Disappearance)
13	What are your perceptions on gender-based power politics in IS? Do you think this is a myth or is it something that exists? Please elaborate on your answer. Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R2/R1
14	If you think gender-based power politics exist, do you think the organisation is doing enough to address this?	RIV (The Norm)
15	What have been some of the highlights and challenges of being a woman in IS? Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R3/RIV (The Norm, Revelation, Exposure, Disappearance)
16	Do you think your family status (whether you are married, single, have children or do not) has influenced how you are treated at work? Please elaborate on your answer. Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	RIV (The Norm)

Interview Protocol for female participants

	Interview Questions - For Men	
1	Please tell me about yourself? Who you are without mentioning your name, just a brief background into who you are?	General
2	Can you describe your work environment?	General
3	What inspired your decision to take up a career in IS?	General
4	Was the decision to go the IS route something you always wanted as a child? If yes, why? And if not, why not?	General
5	Did you get any gendered messages about being a male or about your future growing up or at any given part of your life or was gender never an issue?	General
6	In your opinion, are there IS roles that you feel are more suitable for women than others, or do you believe women are suited for all roles in IS? Please elaborate on your answer. Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	RIV (The Norm)
7	Do you think women in IS are under pressure being in a male-dominated field like IS? If so, how do you think they cope with such pressure? Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R3/RIV (The Norm, Revelation, Exposure, Disappearance)
8	Being a man in IS, have you ever felt like women were/are unequally treated with their male counterparts? Please elaborate on your answer. Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R3/RIV (The Norm)
9	Have you ever felt like women were discriminated against because of their gender? Please elaborate. Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R3/RIV (The Norm)
10	What are your perceptions on gender-based power politics in IS? Do you think this is a myth or is it something that exists? Please elaborate on your answer. Both in your previous jobs and at this organisation in particular	R2/R1/RIV (The Norm)
11	If you think gender-based power politics exist, do you think the organisation is doing enough to address this?	RIV (The Norm)
12	In your opinion, why do you think IS is dominated by men? Both in general and at this organisation in particular	RIV (The Norm)
13	Do you think women's family status (whether they are married, single, have children or do not) influences how they are treated at work? Please elaborate on your answer	RIV (The Norm)

Interview Protocol for Male participants

Appendix B – List of codes

MAIN THEME	SUBTHEMES	CODES/SUBCODES
Theme 1: The Norm	Preservation of Power	No_PoP
	Concealment of Power	No_CoP
Theme 2: The Margins	Revelation	
	- Overt	Ma_REV_O
	- Subversive	Ma_REV_S
	Exposure	
	- Flaunted	Ma_EXP_FL
	- Abject	Ma_EXP_AB
	- Strategic	Ma_EXP_ST
	Disappearance	
	- Withdrawal	Ma_DIS_WDL
	- Erasure	Ma_DIS_ERS
	- Incorporation	Ma_DIS_INC
Context		CNXT

Appendix C – Ethical Clearance Certificate



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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: CINFO/1175

PROJECT: IS EMPLOYEES PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER-BASED POWER POLITICS AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN IN IS: A CASE OF A SOUTH AFRICAN BANK

INVESTIGATOR: Chumisa Kelepu

STUDENT NUMBER: 1588671

SCHOOL: SEBS

DATE CONSIDERED: 26 July 2018

DECISION OF THE ETHICS COMMITTEE: Approved

NOTE

Unless otherwise specified this ethics clearance is valid for 1 year and may be renewed upon application.
Please remember to include the protocol number above to your participation letter.

DATE: 01/08/2018

CHAIRPERSON: Jean-Marie Bancilhon

cc: Supervisor:

Dr Emma Coleman

SCHOOL OF ECONOMIC & BUSINESS SCIENCES

Appendix D – Participant Consent Form

Consent Form for Interview Recording (SCIR)



Title of research project: IS employees Perceptions of Gender-Based Power Politics and its Impact on Women in IS: A Case of a South African Bank

Name/s of principal researcher/s: Chumisa Kelepu

Department/research group address:

Telephone: 079 693 4779

Email: 1588671@students.wits.co.za

Name of participant:

Nature of the research: Academic

Participant's involvement: Interviewee

What's involved?

The researcher will ask questions relating to the interviewee's perceptions of Gender-based power politics and its impact on women in IS. The aim of the interview is to understand the interviewee's perceptions on the subject matter

Risks: None

Benefits: None

I acknowledge the following:

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I agree that the interview will be recorded
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about them.
- I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition that my privacy is respected, subject to the following:

- I understand that my personal details will not be included in the research.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.
-

Signature of Participant:

Name of Participant:

Signature of person who sought consent:

Name of person who sought consent: Chumisa Kelepu

Date:

Appendix E – Sample Participation Letter



Date:

Good Day

My name is Chumisa Kelepu and I am a Masters student in the Information Systems Division at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am conducting research on the issue of gender-based power politics and its impact on women in IS. The aim of this research is to understand IS employees' perceptions on gender-based power politics and its impact on women in IS.

As an employee in IS, you are **invited** to take part in the research interviews.

Your response is important and there are no right or wrong answers. The interview is both confidential and anonymous. Anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed by not needing to mention your name in the interview. Your participation is completely voluntary and involves no risk, penalty, or loss of benefits whether or not you participate. You may withdraw from the interview at any stage.

The interview should take about an hour to complete. The interview questions were approved by the SEBS Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), Protocol Number: CINFO/1175

Thank you for considering participating. Should you have any questions, please contact me on 079 693 4779 or at 1588671@students.wits.ac.za

My contact details: 1588671@students.wits.ac.za – Cell number: 079 693 4779

My supervisor's name and email are: Dr. Emma Coleman – emma.coleman@wits.ac.za

Kind regards
Chumisa Kelepu

Masters Student: Division of Information Systems
School of Economic and Business Sciences
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg