

**Gender Discrimination in the Workplace: An Examination of how Women Confront  
Marginalisation in South Africa.**

**A**

*Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand in Partial  
Fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the field of Critical Diversity Studies.*

**By**

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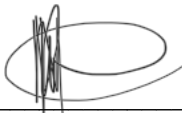
## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, Masechaba Tekana, hereby declare that this research report is my original work. Any ideas in this report that are not my own are acknowledged through proper references and citations. This report is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in the field of Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. No part of this report has been submitted in the past, or is being submitted, or will be submitted in the future for any degree or examination at any other university.

### **I further declare that:**

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**SIGNED AT JOHANNESBURG:**



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**Masechaba Tekana**

**30 October 2020**

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**Date**

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## **Abstract**

The present study delves into an examination of the gender discrimination of women in the workplace in post-apartheid South Africa. The burden of the study is to understand how, in spite of legislation and political rhetoric that commits to the empowerment of women in South Africa; women remain discriminated against at work and in society at large. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 bears a number of statutes that declare the empowerment of women as a human right that is central to the aspirations of democracy and development in the country. Decoloniality as a theoretical framework is deployed to allow the study a critical perspective into how the gender discrimination of women in the workplace is a problem in South Africa that is systematically and structurally connected to the coloniality of gender at a world scale. Methodologically, the study adopts the qualitative approach that, in line with decolonial theory enables the study to understand the life conditions and experiences of women based on their testimonies as interviewees and participants in the research. The positionality of the researcher as a working woman became a decolonial opportunity to speak and think with the women as equals and not to objectify them as objects of research. Decoloniality which is a theory and a philosophy of liberation that seeks to negate the classification of human beings according to race, gender and sexuality amongst other objectives is appropriate to this study. It centered in the discipline of Critical Diversity Studies that critiques power relations, oppression and domination that are based on human differences. Male power and privilege over women are understood as domination and exploitation that are based on systemic and structural constructs that should be challenged. Relevant literature from scholars in gender and feminist studies has been explored to locate the study amongst other studies as intellectual and also social justice work that is academically acceptable. The study notes that some women seek accommodation with male power and privilege to locate themselves in the comfort zone as well as some men elect to be allies of women in their struggle. The study recommends that durable solidarities amongst women should be forged. Training and education programmes that raise awareness to the discrimination of women should be promoted. Men should be sensitised to support and champion the empowerment of women as they are either perpetrators of patriarchy or beneficiaries of its power and privilege. The pieces of legislation that support the cause of women should be known and activism applied to get them to be implemented to their letter and spirit. It is in that way that this study is both academic and social justice work.

**KEY Words: Gender Discrimination, Patriarchy, Decoloniality, Coloniality, Colonial Power Matrix, Feminism**

## **Outline of chapters of the study**

**Chapter One:** This chapter delineates the background and setting of the study. The Problem Statement and Rationale of the study are presented before the explication of Research questions and objectives of the study. Key terms of the study are defined and the Limitations of the study clarified before the outline of the chapters of the study.

**Chapter Two:** This chapter presents the Theoretical Framework and Methodology of the study. This chapter defines the scientific and compliance of the study as academic work that is theoretical and methodological.

**Chapter Three:** This chapter is the Literature Review of the study. It explores relevant literature around women and their discrimination, at a world scale and in post-apartheid South Africa. This chapter permits the study to explore scholars and other studies that have engaged with the present subject.

**Chapter Four:** This is the discussion chapter of the study that engages with and interprets the data that has been gathered in the fieldwork undertaken for the study. The Decoloniality theory and Qualitative Methodology of the study are applied on the data to tease out the observations, arguments and conclusions of the present study. It is also this chapter that establishes the study as a Decolonial academic study in the area of Critical Diversity.

**Chapter Five:** This chapter provides the conclusions of the study and a summation of its propositions. Observations and recommends for future research are made and the study is concluded.

### **Limitations of the study**

There are three limitations that I would like to highlight. The first limitation of this study is that interviews were conducted in one sector, the banking sector, and one organization based in Johannesburg, South Africa. The study has to stretch the observations to refer to South African society by inference, which can be limiting. The research highlighted issues that may only be unique to one geographical area and the head-office environment of one bank. The second limitation is that the study focuses on CIS gender women, which is women that identify as female and heterosexual, which in itself can be construed as a form of discrimination against other gender identities such as lesbians and trans-gender women. This limited focus was influenced by lack of access to other types of gender identities as well as time constraints due to tight timelines set by the university. Masters research can only go so far. Lastly, my ability to collect data and intention to conduct a workshop with participants was impacted negatively, as I had to go through a retrenchment process when I was busy with my research. I aim to mitigate these limitations by conducting further studies in this area, possibly for my PhD qualification or for publications in form of journal papers and book chapters. For many years I have worked in the financial and banking sector of South Africa. My personal experience should enhance rather than hinder my understanding of the experiences of women in the banking workplace.

### **Definition of key terms of the study**

For this study to do justice to its elected topic, research questions and objections, key terms of the study are defined as follows:

**Women:** An adult female person.

**Gender Discrimination:** Unequal or disadvantageous treatment of an individual or group of individuals based on gender.

**Discrimination:** Showing of prejudice or bias. It means “unjust, especially in a racist or sexist way” (Khan, 1986).

**Gender Equality:** Gender equality is understood to mean that the “rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female” ([Warth and Koparanova, 2012](#)).

**Workplace:** A place of employment or a location where someone works for his or her employer.

**Sexuality:** it is about sexual attraction, sexual practices and identity. Just as sex and gender do not always align, neither does gender nor sexuality. People can identify along a wide spectrum of sexualities from heterosexual, to gay or lesbian, to bisexual, to queer, and so on.

**Patriarchy:** A system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990). Men hold the greatest power, leadership roles, privilege, moral authority and access to resources and land, including in the family.

**Post-Apartheid South Africa:** The period after the end of segregation or discrimination based on race in South Africa (post-1994).

## 1. Chapter One

### Background and Setting of the Study

*The dawn of democracy in South Africa (SA) in 1994, i.e. post-apartheid era came with inherent societal gender deficiencies and in all sectors of the SA economy women experienced challenges.*

**Sihaam Van Der Schyff (2017).**

*Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world.*

**UN Secretary-General, António Guterres (2019)**

*In South Africa, existing evidence based on previous work carried out by the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) and other organisations continues to show that despite the existence of various relevant laws to promote gender equality in the workplace, progress continues to be unsatisfactory.*

**Human Rights Equality Report (2012)**

### 1.1 Introduction

This study aims to examine gender discrimination in the workplace in a post-apartheid South African setting. The study pays attention to how women experience and confront systemic and structural marginalisation. Decoloniality is used as a theoretical framework to unmask how behind the legal and political rhetoric on the inclusion and empowerment of women in post-apartheid South Africa, women remain discriminated and marginalised. Paula Moya (2011) reflects on how decolonial thinking helps women to see themselves clearly against societal, systemic and structural marginalisation and oppression. Methodologically, this study assumes a qualitative approach that allows the study to read and interpret the voices of women in the workplace and make sense of their experiences and aspirations. The epigraphs that introduce this chapter are statements that resonate with my personal position in the struggle for women empowerment in South Africa and beyond. These statements together with my lived experience have left me asking myself the following questions, “Why do women continue to confront discrimination, marginalization and exclusion in the workplace, even though equality between men and women stands as a universal international precept, a fundamental human right?”. A question for many years I have not been able to ask, as I was perhaps afraid of the answers I would get. I decided to put my unpleasant experiences of gender discrimination inside a vault due to fear of re-living the unpleasant experience of being subjected to various forms of gender discrimination. Moments when my human rights were repeatedly violated

because of my gender. I knew that asking this question would give me answers such as: “You are a lesser sex and you belong at home and in the kitchen”. An answer that will leave me feeling inadequate as a member of a group the society labeled as “not worthy of being heard”. "Women's issues" have emerged on the political agenda, but often are treated as the manipulable claims of a narrow interest group (Abrams K. 1998)

So, for many years, 25 years to be precise, I never had the courage to ask this question until now when I had to choose a topic for this Masters study in Critical Diversity Studies. Throughout my life, I have seen and indeed have experienced discrimination, marginalization and exclusion as a woman especially in the workplace. The first two decades of my life I faced racial discrimination being born in the apartheid era and starting school in 1976 during the student uprisings. The last three decades I faced blatant gender discrimination and racial bias in the workplace. From being accused of not informing the interview panel that I was pregnant even though they did not ask me at the time (and I did not have to), to being told that if I want to succeed in my new job, I should be at the office at 7am and only leave after 7 pm. This is despite me being a young mother of a 5-year-old boy and having the responsibility to get him to school and pick him up in the afternoons.

The project of greater inclusion, equality, non-discrimination in the workplace therefore makes sense for me to explore given who I am and what I have experienced. As a black woman, I will and I am going to concern myself with gender discrimination issues and will join those who have committed to use their voices to trouble this form of injustice. Regardless of how difficult and complicated it can be. I have been situated on the downside of discriminatory practices, racial injustice, gender discrimination and being voiceless as a child. Paula Moya p.79 (2011) states that “Who we are and from where we speak is highly relevant for the intellectual projects we are likely to pursue”. This statement resonates with me especially when she says that our identities predispose us to see or not see; listen to or not listen to; read or not read; cite or not cite; concern ourselves with specific issues and societal dynamics. My identity has predisposed me to see and experience enough injustice, I have listened and I am prepared to listen to more stories from other women who have had similar experiences to mine. I will continue to engage them on how we can make this world a better place for all as agents of change. For that reason, I have chosen to concern myself with issues of gender equality in the workplace. Together with my research participants, we will explore how we can become agents of change in our own ways and trouble gender discrimination in the workplace.

## 1.2 Background to the study

As the then Vice-President of South Africa, in the *South Africa: Two Nations*, speech, Thabo Mbeki (1998:68) noted that post-apartheid South Africa in spite of the democratic constitution was still divided unequally between prosperous whites and poor blacks. Importantly, Mbeki noted that the poorest of the poor blacks were women. This study departs from that reality where South Africa has a history of the discrimination and impoverishment of black people whose bitter legacy has been born mainly by women in the economy, at home, and in the workplace. The history of South Africa, according to Herman Giliomee (1982) has from the beginning been the ‘parting of the ways’ where people were separated into homelands and racial and ethnic identities. What is not much reflected upon is how women, especially black women, were parted from men inside and outside the homelands, and social and systemic borders were built that left women outside mainstream economic life. This study delves into the way women experience and confront the social and systemic borders that close them out in the workplace, and that keep them in positions of marginality. Decolonial philosopher, Walter D. Mignolo (2008) reflects in depth on how at a world scale coloniality, which is the system of domination of one by the other, has kept women, on the basis of their gender and sexuality, under control and domination.

Gender inequality is one of the important challenges in all modern societies despite the significant advances that have been made in the past century (Quffa, 2016, p143). Historically, in South Africa and globally, women have been marginalized and regarded as unequal compared to their male counterparts in terms of social and power relations (Research brief on gender and equality in SA, 2013, p.6). This challenge of gender discrimination is not new. Understanding where it comes from and how it has developed is critical for my study, as it will provide me with a good context and background on the issues of gender discrimination.

Women’s struggle for equality and the fight against gender discrimination started long ago. Over the last decades, women have battled to become equal with men in all aspects of life and work. In America, with the passing of the 15th amendment in 1865, African-American men were given the right to vote. It a long time (more than 55 years) before women would be allowed that same right. The feminist women’s movement began in 1848, when the first women’s rights convention was organized. Women had very few rights and limited education, as there were not many colleges they were allowed attend in America. Anything women owned did not actually belong to them as they were also considered the property of their husband or father. They fought hard to gain the first step in the journey to equality, which was the right to vote. The signing of the 20th amendment in 1920 gave women the right to vote (Elmuti, Lehman, Harmon, & Lu, 2003). The next significant legislations that affected the incorporation of women in work organization came in the 1960’s with title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination based on

sex and other categories and the 1965 Pay Equity Act and Affirmative Action regulation for women beginning in 1967 (Kalev & Deutsch, 2018, p 258). Anti-discriminatory legislations significantly improved and expanded women's labour force participation especially during the 1970s when it was coupled with vigorous enforcement and an active women's movement. However, given the high levels of inequalities that are still experienced in the workplace, the compliance structures put in place by many employers can be regarded as ceremonial responses, decoupled from everyday activities that merely legitimize and perpetuated inequalities (Edelman, 2016; Acker, 1990).

In the 20th century, women in South Africa also emerged as the primary catalyst for protests that challenged the laws of the apartheid regime. On 9 August 1956, several thousands of SA women of all races marched to Pretoria's Union Buildings to protest against the amendments to the Urban Areas act of 1950, commonly known as the "pass laws". South African History online ([www.sahistory.org.za](http://www.sahistory.org.za)). These laws required black people to carry passes when outside their designated areas. It is evident that the role that women played in ushering in the country's democratic rule speaks of extraordinary resilience, perseverance, community building and triumph (Van Der Schyff, 2017, p16.). This phenomenal spirit is still needed today to champion the continuing struggle of women for gender equality forward.

In South Africa, the apartheid regime not only strictly enforced a racial hierarchy, but also enforced strict notions of gender and sexuality (Craven, 2011; Gevisser, 1995). According to Bernstein (1985), both black and white South African women lived in a society that was not only racist, but was also deeply sexist during the apartheid era. Women could not own land or property, could not vote, and were largely unprotected by the laws of the country. Additionally, there was a distinction of the degree of discrimination towards women of different races, and Black women were much more subjected to the rigidity of the system than white women. They were subordinated, marginalised and disadvantaged through oppression based on race, class and gender and they were prevented from participating in many aspects of the economy and life. According to Bernstein (1985), women in general worked in the services sector, agriculture and manufacturing. Some women managed to work as teachers and nurses (Bernstein, 1985). Black women mostly worked as domestic workers and in the agriculture sector. What is evident and interesting to note in this historical background is that women have been catalysts for change in both America and South Africa. They did not sit back and hope that things would change automatically, they actively initiated change. Now with the persisting challenges of gender discrimination in the workplace affecting women today, it is imperative that they should be in the forefront as agents of change to influence achievement of gender equality in the workplace.

Post 1994, the new democratic government implemented legislation aimed at addressing the past inequities created by the apartheid regime (Mathur-Helm, 2004) including those geared at promoting gender equality.

Over the last century women have made great advances toward equality but other forms of gender discrimination such as total equality in pay, executive positions and high earning positions still elude them as demonstrated in various reports such as the McKinsey & Company's Woman Matter Report (2016). Women often are still channeled into jobs that accord them little respect and few opportunities for advancement. Guy (1993), SADC Gender Protocol (2010) and Patel (2013) note that, although women's access to decision-making positions has increased women are still predominantly clustered in traditional social service areas, such as health, education and hospitality. It is clear that gains such as access to jobs, property, and the political arena that women have historically fought for are not enough to create conditions in which equality for women is possible. Countless stories that participants share in this study provide evidence that hold true to this statement

### **1.3 The Problem Statement**

Just how the discrimination of women is so legally sanctioned and politically condemned but remains in place is a problem that concerns this study. Post-apartheid South Africa has over the past years introduced legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms such as the Employment Equity Act of 1988 and the Labour Relations Act of 1996 to compel companies and employees to embrace diversity and transformation at the workplace. Despite noticeable progress as evidenced by the number of women employed in the formal sector, business remains largely a man's world (The SABPP Women's Report 2017). Women still face a number of barriers and challenges that hinder their advancement and their ability to navigate the workplace. Women's working lives are characterized by high rates of mistreatment throughout their careers in a way that men are not. For instance, a survey conducted by the PEW research Centre study (2017) reveals persistent inequalities between women and men regarding working conditions, wage levels, work time, work environment and limited career advancement opportunities.

My struggles are similar to millions of other women who are struggling to make progress in their careers and lives. Basing on my own experience of marginalization and racial segregation, I would assume that this project that aims at enhancing greater inclusion, gender equality in the workplace therefore makes sense for me to explore. My research is a case study and I explore how different women of different races, ages and status experience obstacles relating to gender discrimination at the workplace in post-apartheid South Africa. I want to find out what forms of discrimination women face in the workplace today despite all the legislation, financial and Human Resource investments made in an effort to eradicate gender discrimination. Most importantly, I would like this study to come up with practical propositions that will empower women to be able to identify all forms of discrimination, and go a step further in taking action as a crucial step in order to trouble gender discrimination. Studies, such as this one should unmask how gender

discrimination is able to remain intact besides legislation, political promises and apparent societal commitment to eradicate it.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

This study comes at a time in South Africa when the social position of women has never been more precarious, perhaps. The problem of femicide, the killing of women by intimate partners, has become a social pandemic in post-apartheid South Africa. This study, which concerns itself with the position of women in the workplace, becomes relevant in that it seeks to observe how women are regarded outside homes and intimate spaces. Pumla Gqola (2016) has written of a ‘rape culture’ in South Africa where the rape and violation of women has been integrated and naturalised into the culture of South African society. Rape culture reduces women to disposable and also dispensable people that can be used and abused in society. This happens after a long liberation struggle in South Africa where the political promise was that liberation would deliver democracy, development and freedom for all. In 1995, Thabo Mbeki noted that “the progress we make towards the attainment of a democratic society can only have full and deeper meaning if it is accompanied by significant progress in the struggle for the emancipation of women,” (Mbeki, 1998:261). This denotes that very early in the democratisation of South Africa the liberation of women was in the agenda. Earlier on, in 1988, African liberation icon, Thomas Sankara (1988: 335) delivered the speech, *The Revolution Cannot Triumph without the Emancipation of Women*. This testifies that in the Pan-African liberation agenda the liberation of women was central in the plans. Both Mbeki and Sankara delivered their important speeches on the occasions of International Women’s Day celebrations. This study may ponder the question, is the liberation of women reduced to ceremonies and rituals of Women’s Day celebrations and not enacted in the daily policies and practices of countries that include post-apartheid South Africa. This study is relevant and important, therefore, because it seeks to ponder the continuity of the discrimination of women in spite of societal awareness, legal and political rhetoric in Africa, and South Africa specifically.

#### **1.5 Research questions**

My research study intends to answer the following questions related to gender discrimination and marginalisation of women in the workplace:

1. What forms of gender discrimination do women experience in the workplace?
2. What are the lived experiences of gender discrimination for women in the workplace?
3. What do women in the workplace say about their experiences and impact of discrimination?
4. What mechanisms can be adopted by women to empower themselves to be able to take action against gender discrimination in the workplace and be agents of change?

## 1.6 Study objectives

The major purpose of the study is to establish why women continue to be confronted with different forms of discrimination in the workplace despite the legal and institutional policy frameworks that advocate for diversity and transformation. The study will be guided by the following specific objectives that derive from the research questions above:

- Find out the different forms of gender discrimination women experience in their workplace.
- Understand the lived experiences of women in terms of gender discrimination in the workplace. An intersectional perspective will deepen my understanding of gender discrimination and inequalities in the workplace. It will also offer insights on how different forms of inequalities interact in the workplace and how rules, norms, beliefs, values and attitudes can create forms of discrimination that can often remain unrecognized in the workplace.
- Understand impact of gender discrimination on women in the workplace (on practices, work commitment, perception of self, sense of belonging and levels of engagement and motivation at work etc.).
- Explore (together with the participants) mechanisms through which women can be empowered to take action against gender discrimination in the workplace. Through this study, participant will discuss and suggest practical solutions that can help to continuously trouble and eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace.

## 2 Chapter Two

### Decoloniality: A Theoretical Framework and Qualitative Methodology

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to flesh out the theoretical framework and methodology of this study. Decoloniality is the elected theoretical framework of the study while the qualitative approach is the methodology that the study deploys in pursuit of the stated objective of examining the discrimination of women in the post-apartheid South African workplace setting. As Paula Moya (2011) states, Decoloniality helps women to understand who they are from where they find themselves in the systems and structures of the world system. According to Lichtman (2010:5), “qualitative research represents the way a researcher collects organises and interprets information that has been acquired from humans, using their eyes and ears as filters.” Clearly, Decoloniality as a theoretical framework and the qualitative approach as methodology are fitting research instruments for such a study that seeks to delve into the existential conditions and experiences of women in the South African workplace as represented by the financial institution. A theoretical framework and methodology are both research instruments and academic tools that give a study scientific and acceptability as intellectual work. This chapter begins by delineating Decoloniality and then proceeds to articulate the qualitative approach as the methodology of the study.

#### 2.2 Decoloniality

This section of the chapter delves into Decoloniality as the elected theoretical framework of the present study. Decoloniality is the theory and philosophy of liberation (Dussel, 1985) that seeks to unmask Coloniality as a system and structure of domination that includes the marginalisation and exploitation of women. Paula Moya (2011) notes how in the struggles of women for empowerment and liberation, Decoloniality helps to locate women as who they are and where they are within the countries, systems and power structures of the world. For that reason, Decoloniality becomes a fitting theoretical lens for such a study as it concerns itself with the discrimination of women and their marginalisation. Walter Mignolo (2008), a leading philosopher of Decoloniality observes that one of the key matrices of Coloniality as a system of domination and oppression are the following: the “Control of Gender and Sexuality; Having the Christian and bourgeois secular family as the model and standard of human heterosexual relations; and heterosexuality as the universal model established by God (sixteen to eighteenth century) first and then by nature (from the nineteenth century to the present) (Mignolo, 2008:16). This study is interested in the control and domination of women as a gender and sexual identity that has been constructed, classified systemically as inferior and has been marginalised from mainstream life in the world system. The other matrices of Coloniality that Mignolo (2008) notes are ‘control of the economy,’ ‘control of authority’ and

‘control of knowledge and subjectivity.’ All these stated matrices of Coloniality that Decoloniality unmasks are important to the present study. The control of the economy brings to light how some people in such settings as South Africa have access to mainstream economic life while others such as the majority of women remain peripheralised. As the Vice-President of South Africa, noted in the previous chapter, Thabo Mbeki (1998) noted the economic and social inequality in South Africa that have put mainly women in the very bottom of the social ladder. The control of knowledge and subjectivity that Decoloniality concerns itself with as a form of domination entails that women such as myself that operate in a workplace in South Africa, have to participate in studies such as this to unmask the marginalisation of women and also seek to map out decolonial strategies for women liberation not just in the workplace but in society at large.

Another decolonial philosopher, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) make reference to the ‘coloniality of being’ which is the oppression and marginalisation of one people by another based on such differences as genders, sexuality and race. Studies such as this should ponder the continuity of coloniality of being. In South Africa, coloniality of being proceed also in such societal problems as what Pumla Gqola (2016) has described as structural and systemic ‘rape culture’ where women are left vulnerable and exposed to abuse, harassment and rape in a society where they have been rendered disposable and dispensable beings. When people as an identity group are endangered and left without adequate protection of the law and society, they live in the danger of what Giorgio Agamben (2005:1) called the ‘state of exception.’ The state of exception is a legal and societal condition that is not very far from the state of nature where life is proverbially rough, short and brutish. True to the state of exception and the state of nature, South Africa ( at the time of this study) is generally gripped in a state of what has been called ‘femicide’ where women are prevalently violated and also raped and killed by intimate partners. The marginalisation of women and their discrimination in the workplace looks like a societal pathology that is part of the coloniality of being and that is also connected to a larger and deeper problem of the oppression and violation of women at a society-wide scale.

In his decolonial philosophisation ‘against war’ in the book by the same title; *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) talks about the large scale coloniality of war in the world system where men are made into women and women are turned into objects in a world of violence, evil and cruelty. In its own way, this study is a study of the war on women in the workplace and in society at large. The views that this study will gather from women as participants in the workplace can actually be considered the ‘views from the underside of modernity’ that Maldonado-Torres concerns himself with. Modernity, democracy and legal progress in post-apartheid South Africa have not been able to protect women from marginality and discrimination. This study stands to observe that women remain in the darker and underside of modernity and its democratic dispensation in South Africa.

In using Decoloniality to study the experiences and conditions of women in the workplace, this study joins what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) has called ‘epistemologies of the South.’ Epistemologies of the South are knowledges, theories and methods, which seek to illuminate the truths about the marginalised places and people of the world in the Global South. The women of South Africa are not only in the Global South geographically but they can be observed to be in the south of society experientially and socially. Women have been southerned in the way they have been give left-hand treatment and abused as marginal and negligible people. As represented by the Philosopher of Liberation, Enrique Dussel (1985), Decoloniality is a philosophy of liberation that concerns itself with the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed people of the world such as abused and marginalised women, children, colonised and enslaved individuals and communities. As an epistemology of the south and also a philosophy of liberation, Decoloniality is a fitting theoretical framework for the present study that is not just academic work for the purposes of acquiring a Masters Degree in Critical Diversity Studies but also a work of decolonial activism and a gesture towards the liberation of women.

### **2.2.1 Rationale for Decoloniality**

The section above has demonstrated what Decoloniality is and that it is a fitting theoretical framework for the present study. It has shown the view that Decoloniality has concerns of oppression and domination including that of women at a world scale. This section seeks to directly provide a rationale for the deployment of Decoloniality in the present study. Decoloniality makes this study not only an epistemology of the south but also a gesture for the liberation of women. This involves what the decolonial philosopher Maria Lugones (2003: 16) calls “travelling,” where the researcher such as myself journeys into the lives and experiences of the oppressed, such as women, to discover their true conditions and spell out what can be done to free them. Maria Lugones (2003) wrote of the “coloniality of gender” where women, especially black women as a gender and racial identity live the lives of the conquered, colonised and dominated subjects that need to liberate themselves. Decoloniality, therefore, is not only a fitting theoretical and philosophical framework for the present study but it is also relevant and important. Decoloniality because of its investment in the liberation of the oppressed is what Paulo Freire (1993) called a ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’. It is interested in how knowledge and knowledge production can be employed in working for the liberation of the oppressed and the liberation of the oppressors, perpetrators and beneficiaries of systems such as racism, coloniality, patriarchy and sexism. A system that have kept women at the very bottom of the political and social ladder at a world scale. After providing a rationale for Decoloniality as the theoretical framework of the present study this chapter proceeds to flesh out the qualitative methodology of the study.

## **2.3 Qualitative Research Methodology of the Study**

### **2.3.1 Decolonial Account of Methodology**

A definition of qualitative methodology is due but before that, a decolonial account of methodology should be made. The decolonial theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) in her thesis on ‘decolonising methodologies’ notes that as far as studying indigenous people and their cultures is concerned decolonisation and therefore Decoloniality should be of primary importance. From the perspective of the colonised and those people, like South African women who inhabit post colonies, “the term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” to the extent that “the word itself, research, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith, 1999:1). What Smith suggests here is that research can on its own, if not decolonised, become intrusive and violent on the vulnerable people that are being researched on.

In line with Decoloniality that is the theoretical framework of this study, care has been taken to talk, think and travel with the participants that are interviewed and not treat them as objects but powerful subjects of the study. This has been beyond the ethical requirements of research that the University of the Witwatersrand requires that have been complied with. As defined by Dantker and Hunter (2006:67) “qualitative research is an examination and interpretation of observations as expressed by the researcher’s words rather than by numerical assignments.” This means that qualitative research does not as much base its observations and arguments on statistics and figures but observation, analysis and interpretation of the quality of experience and not the quantity of phenomenon. In this study, I seek to observe the quality of life and experiences of women in the conditions of the workplace in a given but not named financial institution in Johannesburg.

Qualitative research, such as the one that is employed in this study relies on “interviews in order to capture life as participants experience it, the data is mostly in form of written or spoken words or observations, which do not have a direct numerical interpretation” (Schutt, 2011:116). Quantitative studies on the life and experiences of women in the workplace would dwell on statistics on how many women are employed and how many are in management and so on. Such quantitative and therefore statistical studies can serve to conceal than reveal the quality and conditions of life that women experience in the workplace. I believe for these reasons using qualitative research is an appropriate approach as it intends to observe the experiences and conditions of women in a setting.

### **2.3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology of the study**

This section of the chapter examines and also reflects on the qualitative research methodology that this study employs. To start with, “qualitative research takes place in the natural setting, which means that the

researcher will often go to the site where the research takes place and actively participate in the research process” (Venkatesh, 2009:17). This study involved the researcher approaching interviewees in their daily workplace and interviewing them while they are in their offices and on duty. That means that I became a qualitative researcher that was physically present to hear, feel and see the conditions and experiences of the participants in their workplace in the appointed financial institution. “Qualitative researchers actively participate in the research process and seek to build rapport and actively involve the research participants in the research” as such, Marelize Schoeman (2014: 14) notes, “the researchers are sensitive to the rights of participants and make an effort not to disturb the research site.” I approached the participants as fellow women who like I, do work.

Schoeman (2014) notes that qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured, it tends to unfold as the research process progresses. The research develops ‘feet’ and a life of its own that naturally unfolds, unpredictably and not choreographed or stage-managed. The semi-structured interviews that I held became normal and natural frank conversations that people that work and are of the same gender can have concerning the conditions and experiences in the workplace. Qualitative research becomes “fundamentally interpretive” and the researcher “views social phenomenon holistically” (Schoeman, 2014:15). I was in the research site and managed to experience the workplace of the participants with them in real time and used my senses to hear, see, feel and interpret their social lives in veracity. I used my experience to observe relations, human relations, tones and accents of voices and infrastructure to understand the workplace situations and conditions.

## **2.4 Study Design**

True to the qualitative research design that scholars such as Schoeman (2014) have spelt out, I began with the choice of a research topic, formulating of the research problem, data collection, data processing and analysis and report writing in that order. As noted above, in this study, I have employed qualitative research methodology that bears a decolonial posture. Qualitative studies are suitable because they provide a deeper understanding of the situation one is researching in its uniqueness, presenting what respondents perceive about the situation and what their meanings are (Patton, 2002). Put differently, a qualitative study design provides a description of what people experience and how they experience it (Patton, 2002). The study has adopted an exploratory approach that aim at understanding forms of gender discrimination in the workplace and I obtained insights on how different women experiences gender discrimination in the workplace. Participants freely shared their lived experiences in relations to the objectives of the study.

## **2.5 Study Area**

This is a case study based on a financial services company based in Johannesburg. I have limited my study to the experiences of women of different race, age and levels of seniority in their head office. I have chosen to use the Case Study for various reasons but mostly because it is a research methodology that helps explore real-life situations or phenomenon in detail at a specific site (Yin, 1994). It is considered a qualitative analysis (Goode, 1962) and can enable the researcher to accomplish many goals such as exploring and creating new knowledge about the chosen topic. Case studies are used in social sciences and when seeking to understand and gaining knowledge to solve problems e.g. When tackling issues with regard to education (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006), sociology (Grassel & Schirmer, 2006) and community-based problems (Johnson, 2006), such as poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, illiteracy, and in this case, the issue of women discrimination at the work place

## **2.6 Participants**

For this study, I recruited women of different races (black, white, colored and, Indian descent) working at a financial services company. I targeted women serving in executive/senior management, middle management and lower level management positions. This has allowed me to source data that gave me more insights on intersectional experiences of different participants (Crenshaw, 1989). The intersectional lens is a useful approach to understand multifaceted and complex dimensions of gender inequality and discrimination. Crenshaw argues that discrimination that black women experience is more than simply their race, being black or their gender being female. Rather the two identities intersect and coalesce to form a hybrid experience of discrimination and disadvantage, which deserve to be viewed as a separate category in and of itself (Crenshaw, 1989). She further argues that the result of intersectional discrimination is therefore qualitatively different or synergistic.

## **2.7 Ethical Consideration**

When conducting a research study that involves individuals and reflections on their lived experiences, there are many ethical considerations to take into account. This study, considered the following issues of ethics: Confidentiality and anonymity of participant's identities was and continue to be prioritised throughout the research process. All data collected has been stored securely with a protected password. Informed consent was secured from all participants (see Annexure A) upfront through engagements where the research study and its objectives were explained to participants. They also had an opportunity to ask further questions or seek clarity on the research prior to their interviews. Written approval was granted by the company and all the conditions and protocols were followed.

## **2.8 Methods of Data Collection**

Qualitative data collection through interviews. emphasises and demanded listening skills, recording technology, organising information and observation (Schoeman, 2014). I have use semi-structured interviews as my method of data collection techniques in order to have rich data and strengthen the credibility of outcomes of my study. Interviews can be defined as a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Women that participated in my research study have different lived experiences and they shared detailed insights with me in the semi-structured interview process. Using interview technic has thus enable me to collect rich data that has provided me with a deeper understanding of this social phenomenon than I would not have obtained from purely quantitative methods such as questionnaires as stated by Silverman, (2000).

## **2.9 Data Analysis and Interpretation Techniques – Critical Discourse Analysis**

Decolonial thinking as my theoretical lens and Critical Diversity Literacy thinking were at the back and front of my mind as I engaged with, analysed and interpreted the data collected from the participants. Analysis and interpretation of data is where I as the researcher have made sense of data I collected, what I have observed during data collection and what the participants shared with me. I used data that I have gathered from the interviews (using voice recorder) to develop a transcript. I then categorise the transcribed data into themes by looking for fits and recurring patterns in the data. I further researched specific themes for possible meanings and this has made the information more meaningful (Creswell, 1998). To analyse the data collected, I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the respondents are constructing their experiences in relation to the broader social discourses on gender, race and class in South Africa (source). CDA stems from a critical theory of language, which sees the use of language as a form of social practice. It rejects the notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world, and a conviction in the central importance of discourse in constructing social life (Gill, 2000, p172). It recognizes that all social practices are tied to specific historical contexts and are the means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served. Discourse analysis as a tool thus assist in finding underlying power mechanisms at work, which emerge in the ways people narrate their experiences. For women experiencing gender discrimination there needs to be an understanding that their experiences and sense making are not happening in a vacuum. These are constructed and interpreted by and through their individual knowledge and experiences within the broader social world and interaction with various discourses and people. Discourse analysis thus helps with a framework for interpreting the language the respondents use and how their narratives and experiences are shaped by cultural, psychological, political and social factors.

## **2.10 Critical Diversity Literacy and Decoloniality**

As conceptualised by Melissa Steyn (2007) Critical Diversity Literacy under which discipline this study falls pays attention to issues of human difference, the distribution of power and privilege. Decoloniality which is the theoretical framework of this study and that also informs the methodology of the study uses the Colonial Power Matrix. As fleshed out above, it aims to unmask how control and domination impact on people and their identities, such as the gender and sexuality difference that defines the women that are researched in the present study. In that way, this study is relevant and also methodically and theoretically feasible as a decolonial study in Critical Diversity Literacy that examines the experience of women in a post-apartheid South African setting. Decoloniality and Critical Diversity Literacy have a conversation and an agreement in examining the discrimination and marginalisation of women in the workplace as a societal and also systemic problem. Enrique Dussel (1985) observes correctly that theories and philosophies of liberation do not study themselves and their disciplines do not have the privilege and luxury to concentrate on their disciplinarity but have the urgent intellectual and social justice task to engage with domination, oppression and social injustice. It is also in that way that this study, as noted above falls into the category of the pedagogy of the oppressed that Freire defined and the epistemologies of the South that Santos enunciates. After this delineation of the theoretical framework and methodology of the study, the next chapter delves into the literature review of the study that surveys the relevant and available literature in the subject of the discrimination and marginalisation of women in the workplace and beyond. There is also engagement with literature that suggests solutions and propositions to the marginality and discrimination of women. It is in that way in which this study is both academic and social justice work. I, as a woman worker in the I industry upon which this research is based, become both a scholar and an activist that ponders the experience of other women in the setting of the workplace in post-apartheid South Africa. The literature review that follows will also not only be a conversation with other scholars in the subject area of the discrimination of women but also a kind of intellectual solidarity.

### **3 Chapter Three**

#### **Literature Review: The Liberation of Women**

##### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter delved into Decoloniality as the theoretical framework of the present study. The qualitative approach was fleshed out as the methodology of the study. This chapter delineates the literature review of the study that seeks to engage with the liberation of women from discrimination and oppression in a post-colonial and specifically post-apartheid setting of the South African workplace. Such struggles as the emancipation of human beings from racial and gender oppression are struggles that according to Cornel West (1993) require frank thinking and conversation. This study attempts frank decolonial thinking and conversation on the subject of the discrimination of women. Also contributing to the thinking on black struggles of men and women in the context of the United States as West, Angela Davies (2016) notes that the freedom of the marginalised and discriminated people is ‘a constant struggle’ whose results may not be realised in a short period of time but in a long and permanent struggle. This study, in its own humble way, aims to contribute to such long and enduring social justice struggles for the liberation of women that seem not to be protected by even such celebrated pronouncements as the South African democratic Constitution. This literature review is a kind of survey and exploration of literature and some relevant ideas and theories on the oppression, discrimination and liberation of women as both a gender and sexual identity group. As enunciated by Enrique Dussel (1985) liberation of the oppressed is not just a policy matter or a political subject but also a philosophical vocation that demands deep reflection and activism. In engaging with literature on the ideas and theories of liberation of women from discrimination and oppression at large, the study applies the theoretical framework of Decoloniality, especially the Philosophy of Liberation part of it and a qualitative approach to this literature review.

##### **3.2 Efforts to eliminate gender discrimination by various stakeholders**

The oppression of women is such a deep-seated human problem so much so that philosophers of liberation like Dussel (1985) believe that it is central to the liberation of human beings at large. Human beings, otherwise, cannot consider themselves democratic and free in any society if women remain in subjection. Gender inequality remains deeply entrenched in every society and commitment of the broader society is essential for the advancement of women to be achieved especially in the workplace. Implementation of gender equality and eradication of gender discrimination requires the involvement of diverse stakeholders in a society. These stakeholders include communities, non-government organisations, non-profit organisations, private and public sector institutions, as well as political entities

from regional, national, sub-national, and international contexts (Drechsler & Jutting, 2008). Below are some of the efforts by various stakeholders aimed at promoting gender equality and eliminating gender discrimination in the workplace. The workplace is only a representative site and setting from which this study examines the discrimination of women in the wider society and world.

### **3.2.1 Global Organisations: United Nations Instruments**

Discrimination of women as a gender and sexual group is extensive in the world so much that renowned feminists and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014) concluded that ‘we should all be feminists. She calls for the whole of society to pay attention to the oppression and specifically the discrimination and marginalisation of females everywhere. The United Nations (UN) has been committed to driving gender parity specifically through its Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979, and the Beijing Platform for Action which was established at the UN Commission for Africa conference in 1995 (Van Der Schyff, 2017, p24). Women’s rights have also been at the heart of a series of international conferences facilitated by UN Agencies that have produced significant political commitments to women’s human rights and equality.

The year 1975 was declared International Women’s Year and in that same year Mexico City hosted the World Conference on the International Women’s Year. The World Conference in Mexico City resulted in the World Plan of Action and the designation of 1975–1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women. In 1980, another international conference on women was held in Copenhagen and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was opened for signature. The third World Conference on Women was held in Nairobi, in 1982. These three world conferences witnessed extraordinary activism on the part of women from around the world and laid the foundation for the world conferences in the 1990s to address women’s rights, including the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. This gave momentum to the fight against gender discrimination by women.

9<sup>th</sup> March 2020 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the fourth World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing in 1995. In her opening remarks at March 2020 World Conference on Women, the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Nqakula noted that, “25 years after 189 countries adopted The Beijing Platform for Action, not a single country has achieved gender equality and women continue to be squeezed into just one quarter of the space at the table of power.” (UN Women press release, 9 March 2020). Leaders once more pledged to ramp up efforts to fully implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, UN Women press release (9 March 2020). These leaders reaffirmed their political will for action and also recognized, amongst other things, that new challenges have emerged that require

concerted and intensified efforts to be able to achieve the objectives of the Beijing Platform of Action. Focus need to be placed on critical matters such as (amongst others):

- Realizing the right to education for all women and girls, with attention to areas where they are underrepresented such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths);
- Ensuring full, equal and meaningful participation, representation and leadership of women at all levels and in all spheres of society;
- Ensuring women's economic empowerment, for instance access to decent work, equal pay, provision of social security and access to finance;
- Tackling the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work of women and girls;
- Realizing the right to health for women and girls, with emphasis on universal health coverage and addressing hunger and malnutrition among women and girls.

The Declaration also reaffirms that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals, as the UN Decade of Action begins. As much as this is encouraging, the truth is that this is not new. Commitments have been made and renewed by member states annually at this gathering but nothing much changes. What will be different this time around? As the saying goes, we cannot continue to do things the same way and expect different results. Member states that are signatory to the conventions and treaties need to move beyond talking and expressing their good intentions if we are to eradicate gender discrimination in the workplace and society as a whole.

### **3.2.2 Regional Legal Framework**

As noted in the introductory chapter of this study, in Africa, prominent political voices such as that of Thabo Mbeki (1998) in South Africa, and Thomas Sankara (1988) in Burkina Faso have added themselves to the call for the 'emancipation of women.' The trouble with political voices, as noted previously in this study is that while they call for the liberation of women, this call remains at the rhetorical and political level. Their repeated calls do not go down to the actual implementation and practicalisation of the liberation of women in such settings as the workplace in both the public and private sectors. The struggle for the liberation of women therefore that this study joins also involves pondering how good ideas on the liberation of women can be translated into good practices and actions. These calls together with the South African Government's commitments towards achieving gender equality are a good start as they set a foundation that the struggle for the liberation of women can build on.

At a regional level, South Africa has ratified the African Charter on Human and People Rights (the African Charter). This charter contains numerous provisions that are directly relevant for equality and non-discrimination including Article 2 which requires that every individual be entitled to the enjoyment of rights

and freedom without distinction of any kind. South Africa was also instrumental in the drafting the Southern African Development Community's Protocol on Gender and Development, and signed the Protocol in 2008 (Research brief on gender and equality in South Africa, 2013, p8). The Protocol highlights a regional commitment to gender equality and recognises the importance of gender equality for development.

### **3.2.3 National Legal Framework: South African Government**

The South African Constitution of 1996 is celebrated worldwide as one of the most democratic and it clearly states the rights of women as equal to rights of men, in its Bill of Rights. Gender equality is one of the basic rights guaranteed under South Africa's Constitution. It is an integral part of the country's system of fundamental basic human rights intended to guarantee the right to equality for all South Africans. The founding provisions of the SA constitution are based on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights; non-racialism and non-sexism; supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law; and universal adult suffrage, among others (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). Women receive specific protection in section 9 of the Constitution, entitled "Equality" which states the following:

"The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience belief, culture, language and birth". But as Pumla Gqola (2016) has prominently observed, it is also in South Africa that the nightmare of rape and 'rape culture' is real for women. Women are systematically and structurally rendered vulnerable to all forms and manner of violation including physical and other forms of rape. Femicide, the killing of women by intimate partners has also been noted as a catastrophe in South African society. This study is interested, therefore, in how a democratic Constitution such as that of South Africa does not get translated to the democratic treatment and liberation of women in homes, workplaces and in the public sphere. How treaties and policy documents on the liberation of women that have been signed do not actually lead to the concrete and tangible liberation of women that they promise and declare.

South Africa has made commitments to eliminate gender discrimination by signing various international UN treaties and by participating in significant international conferences. International Human Rights law requires state agents to respect, protect and fulfil human rights standards and laws passed. As a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the South African government is obliged to take action against all forms of discrimination against women in order to

protect their human rights and to realise substantive equality (Research brief on gender and equality in South Africa, 2013, p7).

The enjoyment of this constitutional right is enforced through numerous legislation and codes of good practice intended to eliminate unfair discrimination on the basis of a number of grounds as stated in the constitution. The Constitution also mandates a number of state institutions to promote and protect these basic human rights and The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) is one of those institutions. CGE is mandated to protect and promote respect for gender equality in the public and private sectors in South Africa (Human Rights Commission Equality Report, page 21)

***The Bill of Rights:*** The Bill of Rights was introduced in 1993 as part of the country’s interim constitution and it promises legislative and other measures as a means to promote equality. The Bill affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. The introduction of the Bill of Rights enabled women to be recognised as equal citizens in South Africa.”

The South African government has passed various laws and regulations to address the inclusion of women in all sectors of the economy and aims to protect them. There are also well-defined sets of legal, policy and other instruments aimed at institutionalizing and strengthening the course of gender equality and gender transformation in various sectors of South African society. The legal framework developed by the South African government makes companies accountable by compelling them to adhere to these various Acts and sector Charters. Below are some of the laws enacted post-1994 that establish equal rights between women and men and promote gender equality in the country.

***Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998:*** Employment Equity is a South African Act that was passed with the aim of promoting equality in the workplace (Jekwa, 2007). Unfair gender-based discrimination is unlawful in South Africa. This is set out in the EEA, which states that no person may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee in any employment policy or practice, on one or more grounds, including “race, *gender*, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV-status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language or birth” (EEA, RSA, 1998). Affirmative action is an Employment Equity (EE) Act measure that attempts to correct the injustices of the past by giving people from previously disadvantaged groups (i.e. black people) first preference over white people when making appointments (Human, Bluen & Davies, 1999).

***Labour Relations Act 1995 (LRA) and Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 (BCEA):***

One of the milestones of addressing gender imbalance was the development of these acts within which employees and employers would operate. These two Acts have been instrumental in setting out the

parameters under which workers are to be employed and organised to promote fair treatment (Department of Labour, 1996).

***Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination (PEPUDA) Act, 4 of 2000:*** is the national legislation mandated by section 9(4) of the Constitution, and thus enjoys special constitutional status. The act recognizes the need to address systemic discrimination and specifically aims at the eradication of social and economic inequalities. In terms of section 13 of this Act, discrimination based on the prohibited ground of gender is considered unfair, unless it is established that the discrimination is fair. Section 8 stipulates that no person may unfairly discriminate against any person on the ground of gender, and goes on to list various prohibited forms of gender-based discrimination. For the purpose of this research, the following provision are relevant: d). any practice, including traditional, customary or religious practice, which impairs the dignity of women and undermines equality between women and men, including undermining of the dignity and well-being of a child; e). any policy or conduct that unfairly limits access of women to land rights, finance and other resources). Systemic inequality of access to opportunities by women because of the sexual division of labour.

***Commission for Gender Equality (CGE):*** The Commission on Gender Equality is set up in terms of the Constitution and it aims to promote and strengthen democracy and a culture of human rights in the country. Its role is to advance gender equality in all spheres of society and make recommendations on any legislation affecting the status of women. The Commission also reports progress on the countries commitment and treaties signed at international level e.g. both CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Clearly there is a plentitude of legislations and statues that declare and even demand the liberation and empowerment of women as part of democratisation and development of South Africa. What is not clear is how all these otherwise grand and important legal and political instruments for the liberation of women fail to translate into the real existential conditions and experiences of women in South Africa, in the workplace and society at large. It is also in the public domain that women constitute the majority of people in South Africa's total population. Why the many numbers of women do not constitute the political capital to enforce the emancipation of women is a question that bothers this study. It is a question to ask why women, given their potential voting power due to their majority in the population, are not able to utilise their political numbers and leverage to force their emancipation. Women are treated as a minority group whose rights take a backseat when they are actually a majority of the population. Other studies may need to probe if women are not marginalised from voting and from politics itself in South Africa.

#### **3.2.4 Corporate response**

The corporate sector is central in the consideration of the conditions and experiences of women in Africa at large and in South Africa specifically. Decoloniality, as noted in the previous chapter, takes seriously the

problem of Colonial Power Matrix where the ‘the control of the economy’ combined with the ‘control of gender and sexuality’ (Mignolo, 2008) keeps some human beings in a kind of colonial subjection. This study probes how women are marginalised in the economic sector and how their gender and sexual identity subjects them to inferiorisation and discrimination. It is important to this study how business or the corporate sector participates in the oppression or the liberation of women in South Africa.

Companies play a critical role in ensuring gender equality in the workplace. Gender discrimination is recognized as a problem by organizations, all of which are obligated by law to reduce discrimination and many of which believe that doing so will have positive impact on the bottom line of their Businesses. From my experience and observations in the last 25 years of being part of the labour market, there is still significant work that needs to be done to achieve the goal of a discrimination-free workplace. Current organizational practices vary widely for companies and most of them are not evaluated for their effectiveness as established in the investigation conducted by the South African Human Rights Commission report on the status of implementation of EEA that was conducted in 2012.

### **3.3 State of gender discrimination and equality in Corporate South Africa**

#### **3.3.1 A marginal shift towards gender inclusion of women**

This section of this literature review chapter focuses on the state of gender discrimination of women in corporate South Africa. A shift towards greater inclusion for women has been experienced and legislation from around the world has been adopted in order for this to be achieved. South Africa, in particular, has been active in this regard (Morrell, 2001). The African Nobel Laureate and prominent feminist on women’s rights, Wangari Maathai (2009) is one of the writers that have forcefully called for the inclusion and liberation of African women in public sectors and private corporate settings. Her observation has been that women, especially rural women, are neglected in mainstream economies and politics of Africa.

The hegemonic views of masculinity entailing men’s unquestioned rights to more resources and power have been highlighted and scrutinized more publicly (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). Men have responded in varying ways to these changes. Some have attempted to reverse the situation through a variety of formal and informal prejudices, which are aimed at excluding women (Connell, 2005). MacInnes (2001, p.313) confirms the changes in the gender order by stating that “we are living through the final period, or at least the beginning of the final period, of belief in masculinity as a gender identity specific to men which account for their privileged command of power, resources and status”.

The latest statistics according to a =indicates that women make up only 22% of the board of directors in listed companies in South Africa and under 10% of executive directors. Important to note that despite 25 years into democracy, the pace of change in corporate South Africa has been slow. This slow pace makes it seem as if companies embrace diversity grudgingly and view it as a compliance issue. There is still a lot

of work to be done to make significant progress in the fight against different forms of gender discrimination in the workplace. The World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2017 Global Gender Report findings revealed that gender parity is more than 200 years off. This gives one an idea of how far we are from achieving our ideals of a gender fair society if there is no drastic change in current practices.

### **3.3.2 Gaps identified in the fight against gender discrimination**

The area of employment remains one of the key challenges, for both the private and public sectors in South Africa, in terms of the application, implementation and enforcement of relevant laws to promote and protect gender equality (Human Rights Commission Report on Employment Equity implementation, (2012). Gender equality in the workplace seem to remain an elusive goal for many employers in South Africa. As pointed out by Naidoo and Kongolo (2004), legislation such as affirmative action and others mentioned have been used as a key policy instruments that can bring about gender transformation in organisations and broader society but at present have not achieved the intended outcome. It is clear that the key challenge in advancing gender equality and fair treatment is not the lack of relevant laws. Could it be that “gender transformation in the workplace is not receiving the recognition and response required”? Or could the challenge be lack of effective implementation of existing laws, lack of effective monitoring and application of appropriate sanctions in cases of poor compliance or the complete lack thereof?

According to the recent Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) report for 2018 released on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2019, implementation plans to transform the workforce into one that is diverse and representative of South Africa appears stalled. The CEE report depicts a picture of top, senior and professional ranks dominated by whites and men. This is despite employment equity legislation having been in place since 1998. The report demonstrates that there has been little progress achieved over the years and what is disturbing is that across the board, top and senior management remain male dominated, constituting, 76.5% of top and senior positions in 2018, with the number of women top managers increasing by just 1.5% from the 22% recorded in 2016. Among senior managers, 65.5% were male and 34.5% women (18<sup>th</sup> Commission for Employment Equity Report, 2017 - 2018). This clearly demonstrates that despite legislative and institutional mechanisms put in place, women still face the realities of an unequal and discriminatory gender-biased labour market and society in South Africa. Women also remain the victim of a gender pay gap that continues to rise thus seeing them paid less than their male counterparts. This is a global challenge. The Global World Report for 2018/2019 reported that women on average earn 28 percent less than their male counterparts in South Africa.

McKinsey and Company (2016) noted in one of their studies that the invisible barriers women face in the workplace are also poorly understood because companies give considerably less recognition to these

barriers since they are intangible and difficult to articulate. These barriers are possible more dangerous than visible barriers because they are so subtle, negatively impacting women's experiences, performance and undermining the efforts of gender equality within corporates (iol.co.za report, April 29, 2019). Clearly, gender discrimination persists despite efforts by multiple stakeholders. Even though progress has been made in securing women's rights across the world in recent decades; gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. There appears to be a gap between policy intentions with respect to women's empowerment and gender equality on the one hand, and actual implementation of such intentions on the other hand. This gap needs to be closed if we are to succeed.

There is no doubt many crucial problems remain and it is still not business as usual for women in the workplace. "Making women's rights real requires more than just legal reform and the translation of the law into equal outcomes are not automatic" (United Nations Women, Progress of the World's Women Report 2015-2016 - Participant). Laws that establish that women and men have equal rights provide an important basis for demanding and achieving equality in practice but it does not end there if significant progress is to be achieved.

The other challenge with Gender Discrimination is that most of the time it goes unchallenged, it is difficult to detect and those affected by it do not know how to respond to it. This could lead to reasons why it gets perpetuated. Achieving equality between women and men requires a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which women experience discrimination and are denied equality so as to develop appropriate strategies to eliminate such discrimination. (Women's Rights are Human Rights p.1). Calls by such prominent African women as Wangari Maathai (2009) signify that there is still work, politically and economically, to be done to afford women space for empowerment and liberation in society and specifically in the workplace.

### **3.4 Decoloniality and the discrimination of women**

In the argument concerning "Decolonising political economy and postcolonial studies" Ramon Grosfoguel (2008:1) characterises the present world system as modern, colonial, racist, capitalist, patriarchal, sexist, ethnic and systematically structured against the will and the lives of oppressed and marginalised people, such as women. Oppressions of many kinds, in the view of Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) can be understood from a world-systems vantage point that allows power and marginality to be viewed from a structural and systemic vantage point. Decoloniality as the elected theoretical framework of this study allows this literature review to examine theories and ideas that describe the marginalisation and discrimination of women in the South African workplace from a world scale to the local and specific level. This section of the present chapter explores ideas, concepts and some literature that are relevant to the understanding of the problem of the discrimination of women in the South African workplace.

### **3.4.1 Patriarchy and gender social construction**

From the decolonial stand point that Grosfoguel highlights above, patriarchy is a component of coloniality as a world system and structural domination of marginal parts and people of the world of which women are a big part. The philosophy of liberation, at a world scale, that Enrique Dussel (1985) philosophises about also invests much importance on the problems of oppression and domination of women that is under consideration in this study. The concept that is under consideration here is patriarchy and the gender construction of women.

There are multiple reasons that can be cited as to why gender discrimination persists in the workplace. In this section, I look at how the inter related constructs of patriarchy and gender social construction creates, influences and perpetuates discrimination against women in the workplace. With this knowledge, I will be able to make sense of different forms of gender discriminations that still exist in the workplace and have a better understanding of why it is difficult to eliminate them.

Sylvia Walby in “Theorizing Patriarchy” calls Patriarchy “a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990). Patriarchy is based on a system of power relations, which are hierarchal and unequal where men control women’s production, reproduction and sexuality. Masculinity and femininity character stereotypes that we see in society are imposed by patriarchy. The nature of control and subjugation of women created by patriarchy varies from one society to the other and are influenced by differences in class, religion, region, ethnicity and the socio-cultural practice. Control of patriarchy over women has developed historically and ideologies, social practices and institutions such as family, religion, caste, education, media, law, state and society, entrench, institutionalize and legitimize it.

The first lessons of patriarchy are learnt in the family where the head of the family is a man/ father and he is the most respected and feared figure. According to Gerda Lerner, family plays an important role in creating a hierarchal system as it not only mirrors the order in the state and educates its children but also creates and constantly reinforces that order (Lerner, 1986: 127; also see Bhasin, 1993: 10). Family is therefore important for socializing the next generation in patriarchal values and this is true for the researcher as it mirrors how the I was raised and socialized in my home and community. Boys were taught and learn to be dominating and aggressive and girls learnt to be caring, loving and submissive.

I have seen and experienced how the society’s social and cultural meaning for these biological differences results in hierarchical relationships between women and men whereby the distribution of power and rights favours men and disadvantages women. Male norms rule and in a society constituted by male norms, anything female is not only distinguished, but also devalued and this is a form of subordination. (Abrams, 1989, p.1186).

I was brought up in a society that taught me that in a household, women cook and dish up for fathers first as they are heads of households followed by boys. Women and girls will eat last after all the men have been served. I was taught how to cook, clean the house and wash dishes from an early age I despised these chores. Unfortunately, I had no choice but to perform them (as expected of all girls in our community) because they were defined by the society as female chores and roles. My brothers were taught how to manage finances of our family business (a role I found appealing and wanted to do but could not) and taught how to drive at the age of 9. I did not enjoy cooking Sunday lunch after coming back from church and dishing up for everyone. I wanted to sit next to my brothers and also read the Sunday newspaper and get praises for it. I wanted to help in my father's business and learn business skills. However, the culture and tradition did not allow me to do that. Girls were usually not socialised or prepared to develop the characteristics and competencies necessary to pursue a career (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987) and that was my experience too. I had no choice but to perform my assigned gender role or else, I would be punished. It would be a disgrace to my family. It would be shameful for them to have a daughter that could not clean, cook or wash dishes. I was no exception as this practice was performed in every household in our community. According to Ngcongco's (1993) the criteria for a good woman in traditional African culture is one who cooks and does laundry for her husband amongst other things. Clearly, I was primed to be a good wife. The pressure to earn and look after the family is placed on a man by this system and not on a woman. Women are assigned menial and household jobs, expected to take care of their children and even other members of the family. Patriarchal constructions of knowledge perpetuate patriarchal ideology and this is reflected in educational institutions, knowledge system and media which reinforce male dominance and also in the workplace. The social practices constructed by patriarchy are also legitimized by institutions such as religion as most religious practices regard male authority as superior.

A key feature of Patriarchy is the notion of traditional gender roles that cast men as strong, decisive, rational and protective while women are seen as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing and submissive. Gender roles are a set of social and behavioral norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. Gender roles are predominantly considered within a family context as well as within society. The perception of gender roles includes attitudes, actions and personality traits associated with a particular gender within that culture in general and may collectively be referred to as gender stereotypes that are transferred to members during socialization flow inside a cultural context. Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do (West and Zimmerman, (1987). It is something we perform as articulated by Butler, (1999) when she says, the "reality' of gender is it is constituted by the performance of it". Generated by patriarchy, gender roles get passed on from one generation to the other. Gender is continuously 'done' through our actions and words and in a sense, we create our gendered reality. Through a series of investigations Butler (as cited in

Edwards, 2006) attempts to illustrate that the categories of sex and gender are unnatural and artificial constructions that only exist at the level of repeated performance. An added dimension is that gender is performed according to various social sanctions that could lead to punishments such as social ostracism (Edwards, 2006). I have seen (and experienced) how this performance of gender roles perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes in the society and more so in the workplace where women are continuously experience discrimination and inequality.

### **3.4.2 Gender construction biological influence**

According to Parcheta, Kaifi, (2013 p.242), the difference in gender characteristics that has influenced how the society construct gender can on the other hand also be explained in part from biological factors. The biological sexes get redefined, represented, valued and channeled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways (Berger, 1994). Women had the ability to have children and their smaller bodies were considered physically weaker than men hence they were assigned to working the home. Women were viewed as the weaker sex. Men were considered to be more capable to build, hunt, and protect their families due to their large bodies. This continued for hundreds if not thousands of years and as science and technology eased the pressure of gender roles, we as a culture have them ingrained in our society. This can be seen today with the different jobs and degrees men and women seek and pursue. They further substantiate their argument by highlighting that in 2001, 98 percent of childcare workers, 82 percent of elementary school teachers, 91 percent of nurses, 99 percent of secretaries, and 70 percent of social workers in the United States were women (Parcheta, Kaifi, (2013 p.242). In the same year, 87.5 percent of the corporate officers of the 500 largest companies, 90 percent of all engineers, 98 percent of all construction workers, and 70 percent of all financial managers were men.

### **3.5 Gender Stereotype**

Decoloniality, according to Grosfoguel (2008) and others such as Dussel (1985) understands the domination and oppression of women as part of coloniality. As such, women live and work as kinds of colonial subjects in patriarchal societies. The relations of the “coloniser and the colonised” is described much usefully by Albert Memmi (1974) in a book by the same title: *The Coloniser and the Colonised*. Colonisers like other oppressors and exploiters, Memmi (1974) argues, tend to describe the colonised using stereotypes, myths and other prejudiced descriptions. This section of the chapter delves into gender stereotype as a component of the understanding and descriptions of women by those that dominate and oppress them. We will see how stereotypes are main causes of gender discrimination and impact career advancement of women is in the workplace. As will be demonstrated in the analysis of responses received from the participants, the most unfavorable experiences of women in the workplace are due to gender stereotyping.

Stereotypes of men and women have always existed and gender stereotypes have been defined as common culture wide beliefs about how men and women differ in personal qualities and characteristics (Dennis & Kunkel, 2004). Heilman (1997?) describes gender stereotypes as generalizations about groups that are applied to individual group members simply because they belong to that group. Gender stereotypes are generalizations about the attributes of men and women (Research in organisational behaviour, 2012). It is a psychological dynamic driving the expression of discrimination in the workplace related to societal beliefs and thinking (Heilman, 1997). It is important to understand the underlying dynamics of gender stereotypes as they drive the attitudes, behaviors and decisions that disparately affect men and women at work. Stangor (1998) identifies two forms of stereotypes that are said to be behind the social psychology of gender discrimination at work i.e. Descriptive and Prescriptive stereotypes.

***Descriptive Stereotype*** is the constellation of traits and attributes that are thought to uniquely describe men and women according to Heilman & Welle (2005, p.25). These stereotypes are applied to individuals that one encounters in work settings, and become the basis for inferring their internal, stable characteristics. Thus, even in situations in which persons may have very little knowledge about the other he or she will infer a set of characteristics about the other from the general category of man or woman to which a person belongs (Stangor, 1998)

***Prescriptive Stereotypes*** on the other hand, refers to the set of attributes and characteristics that describe how men and women should be (Brugess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman, 2001). Prescriptive stereotypes establish normative expectations for men/s behavior, resulting in the devaluation and derogation of women who directly or indirectly violate gender norms (Heilman, 2001; Heilman& Parks-Stamm, 2007).

Stereotypes have been studied extensively and researchers have identified the attributes that are thought to characterize men and women (Abele, 2003; Bakan, 1966; Boverman, Vogel, Boverman, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Diekman & Eagly, 2000). Agency is often taken to be the defining characteristics of male stereotype and communality as the defining characteristics of the female stereotype.

**Agency** has come to signify achievement orientation (e.g. competent, ambitious, and task-focused), inclination to take charge (assertive, dominant, and forceful), autonomy (e.g. independent, self-reliant, and decisive) and rationality (e.g. analytical, logical, and objective).

**Communality**, on the other hand has come to mean concern for others (e.g. kind, caring, considerate), affiliative tendencies (e.g. warm, friendly, collaborative), deference (e.g. obedient, respectful, self-effacing) and emotional sensitivity (e.g. perceptive, intuitive, understanding) (Heilman, 2012). These widely shared beliefs about men and women have important consequences because stereotypes are widely shared, they are automatically activated, and are very impactful. Descriptive gender stereotypes are highly likely to inform the impressions formed of men and women. Thus, people can be disadvantaged (or advantaged) in

how they are viewed not because of what they are like or what they have done but because of the gender group to which they belong. (Heilman, 2012, p115)

### **3.5.1 Why are gender stereotypes not good for women's career advancement?**

Gender stereotypes (whether descriptively or prescriptively) can unfortunately hinder the career progress of women. From the perspective of the work place, both these two gender stereotypes promote negative expectations about women's performance by creating a perceived lack of fit between the attributes women are thought to possess and the attributes thought necessary for success in traditional male position (Heilman, 2001). The lack of fit has been described in Eagly's role incongruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

**Eagly's role incongruity theory** demonstrates how stereotypes disadvantage and create discrimination for women in the workplace. This theory is used to mean a lack of fit between the prescriptive stereotypes of women and the successful employee. As stated earlier, these prescriptive stereotypes are about what women are like but also about how they should behave (Burgess, Borgida, 1999; Early & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). They function as norms for acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. The theory argues that successfully performing at male gender-type jobs presents a conundrum for women employees. Demonstrating the characteristics presumed to lead to effective performance means violating prescriptive norms for how they ought to behave. There is therefore a lack of fit between the prescriptive stereotypes of women and the characteristics associated with employees who are successful at male gender-typed activities (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Like the violation of any social norm, women's transgression of prescriptive norms by succeeding at male gender typed work stimulates negative response. A recent study by Heilman (2001) and colleagues demonstrated that women who succeed at a male gender-typed job are penalized through negative evaluation of their personal traits. While they were seen as having the agent qualities needed for successful performance, they were described as being downright interpersonally hostile; abrasive, pushy, manipulative and generally unlikeable.

Another investigation demonstrated that women who exhibited stereotypical masculine characteristics were less liked, and less likely to be considered for promotion or job opportunities, even though they were considered as competent as male employees were (Heilman, Walden, Fusch I& Tamkin, 2004). Violating prescriptive norms has also been shown to be associated with more negative evaluation of women leaders. When demonstrating a leadership style that is more consistent with masculine than with feminine characteristics, women are consistently evaluated to be less effective than men who use the same leadership style (Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky 1992).

For these reasons, one can see that both descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes can undermine objective decision-making within the organization. Because of the inability of stereotype to accurately accommodate

employee's true skills attributes and motives, they are likely to create a self-sustaining system that perpetuate unequal treatment of women and men generally and in the workplace. Stereotypes thus impede the accurate assessment of men and women's capabilities to do the job (Martell, Parker, Emrich & Crawford, 1998). As a society, we need to continue to encourage people to go beyond stereotypes and recognize the contributions that each individual, male or female, can make to the workplace. Discussed below are other forms of gender discrimination practices that women encounter in the workplace:

**Motherhood penalty:** is a term that argues that in workplace, working mothers encounter systematic disadvantage in pay, as they are perceived less competent because they may not be able to do or handle the same work as a man or non-mother. There is a bias that triggers assumptions that women are less committed to their careers. Erik et al., (2006) in their research on women discrimination in Sweden, found that women with small children faced the largest gender penalty in careers. The study also found that gender penalty is larger for younger and older women and less for middle-aged women. This is another way that assumptions and stereotyping can hamper career development of women and can cause unfair gender discrimination.

**Gender Pay Gap:** Given the link between performance evaluation and compensation, it comes as no surprise that women are also underpaid relative to equally performing men (Durden & Gaynor). The gender pay gap was demonstrated in a study of over 4000 managers representing hundreds of organizations (Ostroff & Atwater, 2003). Women managers received significantly less compensation than did men and the wage gap was greater at higher organizational levels occupied predominantly by men. Women in workplace research programme at the University of Johannesburg reported that women were paid an estimate 15% -17% less than men are.

Another reason stated as to why women sometimes are paid less than men and do not get what they want for the simple reason of not speaking up or negotiating. According to Babcock and Laschever (2003), women believe that their circumstances are more fixed and less negotiable than they really are. This highlights the assumption made by many women that someone or something else is in control" (Babcock & Laschever, 2003, p.12). This was determined in Babcock & Laschever's Locus of control research. This research measures the extent to which individuals believe that their behavior influences their circumstances. The results coincide with a plausible reason women earn less. They showed that women are more likely to believe that their circumstances are controlled by others (Babcock & Laschever, 2003, p. 23). The study shows that in many ways that the lives of women seem to be controlled by others. Girls are taught to wait for a boy to call, to wait to be asked on a date, to dance, and to get married (Parcheta, Kaifi, 2013, p242). Women have been raised to wait for someone else and not to directly ask for anything. As indicated earlier when I shared my experience of how I was raised, little girls are often raised differently than little

boys are. They are protected and watched over more than boys. The father is in control of the daughter until she gets married (something that parents actively encourage), at which time the control is transferred to the husband. Some of this has changed but much of it has not and can explain some of reasons behind the gender pay gap. “Men are thought to be assertive, dominant, decisive, ambitious, and self-oriented, (Heilman, 2012), they know the importance of asking for what they want and ask with greater frequency than women (Babcock & Laschever, 2003, p. 20). In my case, I learnt earlier on in my career not to negotiate and to just accept what was offered to me. I was frowned upon by the HR Manager when I tried to speak up and negotiate a salary adjustment when I was presented with a senior secondment role offer. She told me that it is good practice to just accept the offer as is and be grateful for the opportunity. Since that experience, I always felt guilty and found it difficult to negotiate salary offered to me. Decoloniality, as noted above, understands women as victims of coloniality as part of the structure and system of power in the world system. As such women are dominated and ruled through controls and dominations that are part of the Colonial Power Matrix (Mignolo, 2008).

**Sexual harassment** has been characterised by the Labour Appeal Court of South Africa as “the most heinous misconduct that plague a workplace (Cliffie Dekker Hoffmeyer, 2019, p1). According to the Thompson Reuters Foundation (2018), 25% of South African working women have been sexually harassed even though it is against the law under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. The biggest challenge is that detecting sexual harassment is not the easiest thing to prove even though it may sound straightforward, especially in the workplace. This has been confirmed by participants when they shared their personal stories as captured in the analysis section of this study.

**Social exclusion:** According to Heilman & Well (2005) not all forms of workplace discrimination generates attention. Gender discrimination can be expressed in less visible ways as well e.g. it can be in a form of social exclusion, which can be a barrier to the career advancement of women. Research indicates that not only do women encounter more difficulty forming social connections at work than men do, but also, they reap fewer benefits from the relationship they do form. Analysis of social networks reveal that men have more extensive social networks that include influential organizational members than do women (Ibarra, 1993).

**Mentorships:** Another example of this less visible bias include a lack of mentoring, being ostracized from informal networks of communication and an inhospitable cooperate culture (Catalyst, 1996). Working women also report more difficulty establishing mentoring relationships with male colleagues than do men (Regins & Cotton, 1991). Even when women find mentors and develop social networks, these relationships

are less strongly associated with positive career outcomes such as promotions and compensations than are men's relationships ( Eddleston, Baldrige & Veiga, 2004).

### 3.6 Intersectionality

Besides the conversation on the 'coloniality of gender,' Lugones (2003) writes of the need for 'travelling' and 'trespassing' of women activists in search for deep solidarities against oppression and domination. Women that are oppressed in one way need to form solidarities with women that are oppressed in other ways. Oppressions are networked and they intersect, and so struggles against oppression should also be networked and intersected. Decoloniality is therefore, alive to the call for intersectional understanding and necessary in the struggle for the liberation of women. Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to explain the specific conditions of oppression affecting women who experience both racist subordination and class exploitation – and at the same time gender injustice (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality has been used to describe bias and violence against black women but it has become more widely used to show how social position and group membership overlap and change the experience of social identity. Crenshaw used it to demonstrate that when it comes to issues of race, black men are prioritised over black women and when it comes to the gender issues, white woman are prioritised over black women. This is what shapes and makes the African American woman's experience different and unique from black men (when it comes to racial issues) and white women (when it comes to gender issues). Thus, Intersectionality matters and is a powerful concept that can be used to demonstrate where privilege and gender intersect as only experienced by black women in many societies. The intersectionality approach recognizes that gender as a category is not just a category of social location but it is a category that also has certain positionality along the axis of power (higher or lower than other). Patricia Hill Collins (1998, p.925) has taken the concept further to illustrate how intersectionality plays out in how black women experience violence in the USA in her article titled "The tie that binds race, gender and US violence". She argues that it is important to understand violence and how it is experienced by African American women by not using only one lense of either gender or race. If one uses the intersectional lenses, it gives a more holistic view and a deeper understanding of how violence is perpetuated, the social constructs enforcing it and it provides a perspective that can help with strategies that can be used to eradicate the problem.

An intersectional approach takes into account the historical, social and political context and recognizes the unique experience of the individual based on the intersection of all relevant grounds,( Aylward, 1999). Different people within the same struggle e.g. gender struggle, have different interconnecting points of oppression and privilege. It challenges the notion of homogeneity e.g. gender is the same and race is the same for those in those categories. The reality of the matter is that we are all located differently in society (our subject positioning) and this influences our individual experiences and identities. Social

struggle needs to take this into account as they will be doomed to fail if they do not fully incorporate intersectionality. It is never a single struggle in a movement as there are multiple identities of race, class, gender etc. within it. There is a need to apply an intersectional lens to develop effective targeted interventions to address any form of oppression.

Therefore, this study also recognizes and will use an intersectional lens to get a deeper and better understanding of how gender discrimination is perpetuated differently for women based on their overlapping social identities. This is important as it will provide insights that will inform possible solutions that participants will propose.

### **3.7 Organisational culture and impact of gender discrimination on women in the workplace**

Organisations, in the understanding of Decoloniality are, like nation-states themselves, small units and a representation of the modern colonial world system that is understood as racist and patriarchal. The world-system is a centrally capitalist and exploitative system that uses racial and gender discrimination as one of its pillars of exploitation (Wallerstein, 2004). The workplace is as such a unit that is not removed but connected from the larger system and structure of nation states and the world system. It is in that way, a smaller representation of larger society. The power relations that are at play in the work place mirror the power relations that are at play in larger society. The workplace is a pivotal arena for shaping societal gender inequalities, and yet it has been said to be an inhospitable place for women due to the multiple forms of gender inequalities (Abrams, 1991). The workplace is also a central arena for reproducing societal gender inequalities and producing new ones (Kalev and Deutch, 2018, p257). What could be causing this challenge especially given most companies understand the importance of fair and equal treatment of employees in the workplace? Corporates subscribed to the concept of being a good corporate citizen but it seems they are turning a blind eye to the challenge of gender discrimination. One expects it to be as simple as, anyone who possesses the talent, ability, and skill to do a job should be hired, and once hired, regardless of their gender, employees should be given the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability. This approach will benefit the company immensely. This is not necessarily the experience for women due to the gender discrimination they encounter in the workplace on a daily basis.

#### **3.7.1 Organisational Culture**

The culture of the workplace needs to be enabling for a gender discrimination free environment to be created. Organisational culture exist and it plays a crucial role in shaping behavior in the organization (Watkins, 2013). Additionally, previous researchers (e.g. Ayman and Dorabik 2010; O'Neil et al.2008) have observed that organizational culture (and even formal staffing structures) tend to be gendered, meaning that assumptions about leaders and the contribution to effective leadership are typically male

normed. It creates an environment in which women often struggle particularly in the formative years of their careers to find and use their voices (Helgesen, 2017, p 4). The societal challenge of gender construction is thus real in the workplace as they are real in society in general.

Helgesen and Johnson (2010) conducted a research focusing on reasons why highly talented women were choosing to leave well-paying jobs in the corporate sector. They observed that over the past two decades, there had been “increasing recognition that the structure of work was designed to reflect the realities of an all-male workforce whose constituents had fewer, if any, domestic responsibilities beyond supporting their families (p.58). This has contributed to a “mental mismatch between what the market place assumes people will value in their work and what women most deeply value’. The perception of mismatch is enhanced, according to Helgesen and Johnson (2010) because organisations still offer reward, recognize achievements, build incentives, and decide promotions using definitions that reflect an all-male industrial leadership culture (p58). It is thus not surprising that the workplace is a central arena for reproducing societal gender inequalities and not an environment that promotes gender equality. As Hofstede et al., (2010) research on cultures around the world documented, patriarchal systems have influenced (and continue to influence) issues of access and equity in all spheres of life, including the workplace culture and its influence on climate (i.e. the environment as experienced by employees).

### **3.7.2 Impact of gender discrimination on women in the workplace**

Gender discrimination in the workplace creates severe negative impact on women and the organization, hampering the organisation’s ability to achieve its full potential. The disadvantages of lower pay, status and opportunities at work and the subjective experiences of being stigmatized , affect women’s psychological and physical stress, mental and physical health (Goldenhar et al., 1998) job satisfaction and organizational commitment ( Hicks-Clarke and Ilse, 2000), and ultimately their performance ( Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001).

**Women can feel excluded:** When they feel excluded, their level of engagement will be impacted. This will in turn decrease their visibility, their capacity to act as role models, and precludes their ability to change the stereotype of who women are and what they can achieve (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). This cycle could therefore perpetuate organizational systems that make success more difficult for women to achieve than men.

**Demotivated:** The presence of gender discrimination causes women to experience work environment as demotivating, exclusive and difficult to navigate (More Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998). The pressure of operating within such a work environment exacts a toll from women beyond the discrimination that they may experience creating less positive attitude towards their jobs and less engagement in their work (Ensher,

Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). This inevitably will affect the organisation's ability to retain talent, the optimal movement of talent between organizational ranks as well as the quality of employees in the organization.

**Low levels of engagement and productivity:** Many women who believe they have experienced discrimination, or have seen colleagues affected by it, show less engagement at work. I am no exception as I am one of those women. They feel less motivated to do their jobs especially if they believe they are less valued. A study by Crosby (1984) demonstrates that a discriminatory work environment can encourage the psychological disengagement of women from their work. They are less satisfied and committed when they believe they or other women have been the victim of discrimination (Crosby, 1984). The full impact of gender discrimination is felt not only by women, but by the organizations as well. They will lose talented and skilled women as they leave at higher rates than they would if discrimination were eliminated. Women are also less likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors when they experience co-worker discrimination (Ensher, Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). If the issue of gender discrimination goes unaddressed, the performance of the teams and groups within the company will continue to decline.

**Staff turnover:** Women who face discrimination are more likely to opt out of the current organization in order to find more hospitable working environments. This can be costly for a company as they will have a high recruitment bill if they lose employees and have to go on a recruitment drive more frequently.

**Perpetual conflict:** gender discrimination can create tension and conflict in the workplace as those who are discriminated against will eventually take action. Their performance will be impacted as they shift the focus on the conflict that might be created by the situation. Inevitably, the morale of all employees will be negatively impacted and will go down and teams can collapse into dysfunction.

**Legal liability:** gender discrimination is illegal under international law as well as regional and national laws in certain countries (certainly in South Africa). Civil Rights Act of 1964 in America and Employment Equity Act (2000) in South Africa are examples of such laws. Any organization that tolerates such unfair treatment is legally liable and aggrieved parties can file a claim resulting in reputational damage.

### **3.8 Strategies to create gender equality in the workplace**

First and foremost, perhaps, the struggle for the empowerment of women and their inclusion in the workplace and outside the workplace is a liberation struggle. As already highlighted, if the domination of women and their marginalisation is coloniality then their liberation is actually decolonisation. What Lugones (2003) calls 'pilgrimages' and 'travelling' and 'trespassing' is the decolonial movement of women

forming solidarities and using their activism to cross social borders and trespass into areas of life that were previously monopolised by men. Decoloniality and liberation therefore, are the definition and therefore also a description of the strategies that women employ to break boundaries and cross border constructions that have been erected against them by society and the world system at large. Companies can and should play an active role in the liberation of women. They can make a positive contribution towards this plight of women and this can help them to create more equal, profitable companies and prosperous societies. According to the UN's Women's Empowerment Principles, business leaders can and should play a key role in exhibiting high-level support for policies concerning gender equality and human rights. They can develop appropriate strategies that will impact women's retention, satisfaction and career advancement. These strategies should look at internal and external factors to be effective. (UN Women Empowerment Principles – Equality Means Business Report 2010 )

**Recruitment and hiring practices:** Organisations should take measures to eliminate discrimination in recruitment and hiring practices. Sexist language in job advertisements as well as potentially discriminatory questions for women should be eliminated (e.g. age, marital status, whether they have children or not etc.) in applications or interviews. Companies can proactively review their processes, policies and procedures to trying to eliminate discrimination.

**Family-friendly workplace policies:** Women cannot be fully present and bring their whole self to work if work places are not family friendly in terms of their policies. This is due to the fact that women are expected to be primarily responsible for caring for the children and/or the elderly within the family. This has been my experience and life would have been easier for me at work had my places of employment had more family friendly policies e.g. offered flexible working hours and opportunities to work from home. Some companies are already in the forefront of this and have family-friendly policies that include maternity, paternity and parental leave, childcare facilities as well as flexible working hours.

**Policies prohibiting sexual harassment:** Companies must actively ensure workplaces and public spaces that are free from any type of female harassment is also a key component. They must implement policies that explicitly condemn sexual harassment in the workplace and declare Zero Tolerance to it. They should also provide gender-transformative, awareness-raising trainings for all staff and management and create an environment in which perpetrators are held accountable. These efforts should be ongoing and not only be done during women's month or when there is a high-profile incident relating to sexual harassment. These policies should be communicated proactively to employees through regular awareness drives. Most companies I have worked for never bothered to make those policies visible. We heard about them only when there was an incident of sexual harassment. Human resources procedures, such as systems for filing

complaints against workplace harassment and consequences for offenses, should be embedded in institutional policies and clearly communicated to all staff. Businesses must consider women's safety both in public spaces and in the workplace as part of their pledge of being a good corporate citizen. Progressive workplaces should also add their voices to efforts to end harassment against women in all spaces. I believe it is the right thing to do and an act of congruency to their claim of being a good corporate citizen.

**Promotion of women into management and executive positions (including thorough retention strategies):** Women continue to experience significant barriers to advancement into leadership positions, due to various factors that can be internal workplace factors or external factors. Programmes and initiatives emphasizing the importance of gender balance in management and those supporting women's career advancement should be developed and accelerated. These can include initiatives such as mentorship and coaching programmes, executive trainings, exposing women to all company operations and functions, staff rotation, making promotion systems and career advancement prospects clear and accessible for women and quotas for women, both in senior management and in executive roles. A critical success factor is ensuring senior management support and champion a gender equality strategy for the company.

**Alliances, organizations and professional networks:** Companies should encourage the development of businesspersons' association to support female leadership and entrepreneurship. In South Africa we have organisations such as National Business Initiative that can facilitate these on behalf of corporates. These networks can provide training, research, networking opportunities and other services and support, both nationally and internationally. Companies and women can derive positive benefits such as breaking down barriers for entry into male-dominated networks and help promote career opportunities. .

**Mandatory trainings on gender, diversity and other topics:** Companies can also institute gender-sensitive diversity trainings to improve work environments by raising awareness of the prevalent stereotyping and all forms of gender discrimination. This can be a stand-alone training programme or modules can be developed and incorporated into the existing mandatory leadership development training. These trainings should be complemented with formalized human resource policies, so that they can bolster equitable recruitment, hiring practices and achieve a gender discrimination free workplace.

**Laws and legislative tools:** Businesses should (through Public Private Partnerships) advocate for more gender-equitable policies and better implementation of those that already exist. They must walk the talk and move beyond good intentions of creating gender discrimination free work environment. Most countries and companies have adopted the principle of gender equality in their constitutions, but in practice women are still marginalised. Men and women are still not getting equal treatment and equal opportunities in the

workplace. Companies should prioritize the implementation of the gender equality regulations issued by states.

**If business can make progress in terms of achieving its** gender equality objectives, significant benefits can accrue to it and its employees. Providing equal opportunities for women in the workplace will lead to a diversification and capitalization of an untapped talent pool. There will be significant cost savings as a result of increased retention and reduced staff turnover. Companies need to develop a clear strategy that will result in sustained change and progress, based on Gender Mainstreaming principles. Leadership plays a critical role in this process and all elements of change management should be incorporated in the strategy. This will ensure that there is a total buy in, commitment and accountability in creating the required transformation.

### **3.9 Gender mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming is a concept of bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society. It was established as a global strategy for promoting gender equality in the Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing (China) in 1995 (UN Women 2010). Gender mainstreaming highlights the necessity to ensure that gender equality is a primary goal in all areas of social and economic development. It promotes gender equality and is a globally accepted strategy by states and other institutions. Mainstreaming approaches require institutions to ensure that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy, dialogue, resource allocation, planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects. In gender mainstreaming women and gender equality will be put at the center and institutions are encouraged to adopt gender mainstreaming strategies as advocated by the UN Women. This approach in practice enables reshaping of the internal institutional patriarchal cultures, rules, ideas, beliefs and practices as well as programmatic responses for the advancement of women throughout the business. If we are to make progress in the eradication of gender discrimination and inequalities especially in the workplace, gender mainstreaming should be aggressively pursued wherever possible.

The following chapter centers on the views of women interviewed for this study and brings to the fore their own conditions and experiences in the work place. Voices of the oppressed talking about themselves are central to decolonial studies and the philosophy of liberation in that they give power and agency to the oppressed that is not spoken for by the researcher or any other observer. Writing about the “souls of black folk” in the struggle for the liberation of black people in post-slavery America E.W. B Dubois (1969: 45) noted the problem of “double consciousness” where black people judged themselves by the standards of the oppressors while also aware that they were themselves the oppressed. This study engages with the

souls of women folk and decolonial research such as that spelt out by Linda Smith (1999) that women as the researched are judged by their own standard based on their experiences and conditions. This study dwells on women in general yet Christi Van der Westhuizen (2017) notes that white women might somehow be ‘sitting pretty’ in post-apartheid South Africa. That suggests that black women might be feeling the greater brunt of the marginality and discrimination that is the subject of this study. One of the observations that this literature review has made is that in as much as the South African democratic dispensation is based on a celebrated constitution, it does not seem to address the marginalisation and discrimination of women. A Pan-Africanist scholar, Horace Campbell (2003) suggests that some African struggles against colonialism and liberation models were already patriarchal and eschewed against the rights of women. This study, therefore, should have its eyes open to the possibility that some democratic and liberatory paradigms are themselves infected with the tendency of sexism and patriarchy. This study should then advance an argument for the liberation of women that does not carry pollutions and infections of patriarchy and sexism, which are ideologies that naturalise and normalise the oppression of women as a gender and sex identity.

## 4 Chapter Four

### Findings, Analysis and Interpretations

#### 4.1 Introduction

Maria Lugones (2003) calls the coloniality of gender is weaponisation against women, especially black women, of gender as a political and social identity. Being a woman, especially a black woman, becomes a systemic and structural liability where social and political life opportunities are systematically and structurally scarce. This study is concerned with how, despite all legislations and political pronouncements of the empowerment of women in South Africa, women remain marginalised in the workplace and other spheres of mainstream life. The objectives of the study focused on identifying forms of gender discrimination in the workplace. The study has sought to understand lived experiences of women, unpack the impact of gender discrimination on women in the workplace and explore various mechanisms that can be put in place to empower women to be agents of change in the fight against gender discrimination in the workplace. The participants were asked four main questions. Various responses were given by the participants and some were further explored during the interviews. The four questions asked were:

- What forms of gender discrimination do women experience in the workplace?
- What are the lived experiences of gender discrimination for women in the workplace?
- How does gender discrimination affect women in the workplace?
- What mechanisms can be adopted by women to empower themselves to be able to take action against gender discrimination at work?

The present chapter delves into a report, analysis and interpretation of the responses that women in the South African banking sector, given on their condition and experiences. In his philosophical meditation of the relationship between men and women in society, concerning sovereignty and freedom, Jacques Derrida (2011:20) used the metaphor of the “beast and the sovereign.” Women were figured in zoological terms as those that remain rightless, close to neglected and marginalised animals. At the same time, men were pictured as the sovereign that enjoyed power, privilege, rights and freedom. While this study is located in the specific sectors of the finance industry in post-apartheid South Africa, decolonial thinking and theory allow the study to make generalisations on the experience of women in societal and world systemic terms. This study may be a small sample that can make wide and extensive reflections on the condition and experience of women at a world scale.

## **4.2 Thematic analysis of qualitative data**

The themes discussed hereunder, reflect the input of the participants identified from the interviews. As far as possible, the language of the participant's has been utilised in the discussions. Their responses could be categorised into recurring themes and concepts which emerged from the interviews based on what they have observed and their lived experiences. The responses in this study identified with that of the literature highlighted in the literature review section above. Most participants confirmed that their organisation and workplace had male norms that influence life and work, and that they have had an experience in the workplace where they had to push back on these expected and oppressive gendered roles.

## **4.3 Different forms of gender discrimination and lived experiences**

True to the postulation of the decolonial scholar, Paula Moya (2011) this study invests in the authentic voices of women speaking for themselves and from themselves where they are located. The study attempts to avoid thinking for the women or thinking about them, which would be to objectify them further. The study is interested in thinking and speaking with the human as active and living agents of their lives. As a woman working in the same sector, my work has been part of what Lugones (2003:77) describes as a “pilgrimage” into the lives of others in alliance and solidarity with them..

### **4.3.1 The Patriarchal mindset in the workplace**

What has been noted first and foremost is the patriarchal mindset. This mindset is notably that carries a sense of entitlement to power and opportunity by men that enjoy privilege in the workplace. That men expect to dominate women in the workplace is a societal construct where women are expected to be subservient regardless of the position they hold in the organisation:

*Participant Two: “I think there is a huge cultural influence in the organisation where men expect to be respected in a way that says we as women can't be the boss of others because we are women. So, it is almost like the feeling of, you are just a woman and you don't have a say. I have been feeling that happens with the older generations, older men as opposed to the younger ones.”*

What is referred to here is an extension of societal and cultural norms which dictate that women should submit to men. The best analogy that describes this, is one where men are the customarily and traditionally the heads of the family and women merely the bodies that follow commands of the male mind. It may also be biblical and religious suggestions of men as rulers and women as followers:

**Participant Three:** *What I often see is men thinking that women are subservient to men. You can't challenge their minds as they will call you names. They will ask you to do things for them because they have been brought up to believe that women are there to serve them. They won't like it if you refuse to obey them.*

What is notable here is a product of socialisation that is connected to traditions and customs where men are 'brought up' to have a sense of superiority and privilege as noted by Participant Three. Women tend to experience condemnation, isolation and hatred for resisting male power. The men 'won't like you,' as a woman that is stubborn and resistant. Women must struggle to be accepted and liked in the workplace. There is a price to be paid for being assertive and strong:

**Participant Six:** *I think certainly assertive women are frowned upon and are called "bitches" in corporates because they are not afraid to speak up about who they are, what they want and what they need. There is a preference that they should rather not speak. Biases that generally operate in society are prevalent and we tend to overlook them in the workplace. Being in HR, as a woman, I am expected to be a care giver."*

Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) refers to the times of conquest where women that were knowledgeable and powerful were called 'witches', sorcerers and were burnt at the stakes. If not treated as a witch in the workplace, the assertive and ambitious women are handled as a 'bitch,'- a female dog and a woman of unsalutary morals as this participant suggests. There are social penalties and moral judgements to women that try to stand their ground. There is also a judgmental tendency to look at women as weak and unable beings:

**Participant Eight:** *People believe because you are a woman you can't do certain things. This blocks opportunity for you and you have to work harder to get the same thing that a guy would get in a heartbeat. What causes it? It is how people have been raised. Sometimes its unconscious bias where some people do not even realise they are doing it. We come from a Patriarchal society, where men are labeled "heads of households". Aman is the head of his household and in the workplace they report to a woman! They do not take that kindly.*

I note with participant Number Eight the disabling of women. There is a patriarchal belief that women are unable as if they ‘can’t do certain things’. This is used to exclude them not only from specific tasks that are considered hard but also from life opportunities. A woman is reduced to the weaker sex or the fairer sex. This may appear as if men are being chivalrous, kind, loving and want to ‘honour ladies’ when it is to cover discrimination and form of exclusion. Women are defined at times as too beautiful too soft or too weak to do certain jobs. This is just a mask to cover the true face of exclusion and discrimination.

A woman defined as beautiful and soft might look like a complement on the outside but inside that discourse is a determination and societal attempt to reduce women to flowers and fruits. Metaphorically, in language and in performance, women are promoted to beauty and elegance in order to demote them from mainstream life under that pretext:

***Participant Nine:** women have always been seen as not being technically enough and not being hard enough. This is changing slowly because now you have more women in leadership positions than they were previously. Everything I have achieved has not been easy. I never lose sight of that fact. If a woman asks me how my journey has been, I have to be clear that you will get there but it is not an easy journey. You have to have tenacity and perseverance.*

Out of political correctness, men sound like they are motivational and promotional, ‘encouraging’ women to be hard and to persevere at work. Some women may receive these ‘motivational messages’ as encouragement and care when they are loaded with conservative discourses of exclusion and demotion of women. Women are systematically pushed into what looks like a soft and comfortable corner, when it is an unsafe and exploitative space of marginality:

***Participant Ten:** “It is more subtle experiences of being put into that bracket of work wife. Of being that safe pair of hands that will fix everything, run the household when dad goes to make money. It is a version of that.”*

At work, a woman is “wived”, reduced by male colleagues to a kind of housewife that does menial tasks while men do the real work. This is the reduction of women to caretakers, nurses, cleaners and entertainers in the workplace. This might be the systemic and structural definition that permits further exploitations and violations like sexual harassment and the flirting with women at work.

### 4.3.2 The suppression of women voices in the boardroom

One of the notable philosophers of social justice and the social contract, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1968:1) made the telling observation of humans and freedom that “ man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains.” Rousseau used the word “man” to refer to humanity, I presume. I put it forward in this study that it is actually the female category of humanity that is presented everywhere as free and empowered when it is chained and gagged. This talks to the idea that men are the dominant ‘sex- class’. The tendency in many organisations to have procedures and criteria that favour men has given men greater access to resources and thus power. Foucault (as cited in Connell, 2002) states that power also operates discursively- in the way we talk. Women might populate boardrooms in the workplace and occupy positions but systematically and structurally, their voices are suffocated:

***Participant Three:** “You are not given a voice in the boardroom. When you speak in a male-dominated boardroom people kind of look at you and carry on when you try to make a contribution.*

***Participant Four:** there are some more subtle things that still takes place. It is like when you are in meetings, you see who gets the voice, who is courageous and brave enough to take their voice. A woman’s voice is looked down upon. It does not have to be overt so much as sometimes you get ignored. e.g. when you make a comment then it gets ignored and people move on.*

Feminists have written and spoken of the invisibility and invisibilization of women. What these participants here talk about is the inaudibility and inaudibilisation of women, I note. Women can be so many and speak so loudly in the boardroom but their voices get passed over and are not given recognition and consideration. Their points are not noted, or are noted and ignored as inconsequential:

***Participant Five:** “women almost sometimes don’t get heard. You find that men speak over them. A woman might have to repeat herself twice or three times before she is heard. Or she may be completely ignored. But when a man picks up that point and makes it as if it is theirs, the other men agree with him and think oh, that’s a great point.”*

***Participant Nine:** “Another example is that, I could have a male colleague that could have said something that I said. He will be listened to before they listen to me or he will be more believable than me as a woman. That’s is unconscious bias because this is a person that other me relate to, therefore in their minds a man is credible.”*

What can be noted here is the denial of weight of what women say and what they represent. The voices and messages of women are treated lightly and not given the weight that those of men are given. Men and women might say the same thing and that thing will be respected and weighted if it comes from men. Women are made to speak into the air, ignored as invisible and inaudible. This, perhaps, is another way of disabling women in order to neglect them in a systematically and structurally. Women in the workplace then spend their time and lives working, repeating themselves or screaming physically and metaphorically for attention. This may lead to some women looking and working for male support, fawning at men to back their voices and give weight to their messages. In that way, women become the biblical ribs of men. In the workplace we see that women have to struggle to get male champions and promoters that will magnify their voices and amplify their visibility. This renders women exploitable and available for male abuse. For that reason, even what looks like solidarity between men and women at work may be concealing power relations of dependence and exploitation. In decolonial terms, a voice is the closest if not the same thing as being itself. Those whose voices are ignored and have their very being taken away. And as Jean-Paul Sartre (2008) suggests, in the world of human beings there is either being or nothingness. Women that have their voices ignored have their being taken away and nothingness awarded to them. The nothingness of women is perhaps the highest and most violent form of their marginalisation and oppression.

#### **4.3.3 Women and the denial of leadership roles**

Friedrich Nietzsche (1968) forcefully presented power as the world and as life. The will to power is the will to life and to being in the world. Those that have no power have no life and are expelled from the world of the living and the free. I note women in the workplace experience that powerlessness and that expulsion from the world of the free and the living. In the corporate world the other name for power, influence and privilege is leadership. In the workplace men, become the Machiavellian princes that must seek, find and keep power by any means necessary, using deception, cunning and at times violence (Machiavelli, 2003). Machiavelli reminds this study of how the game of power involves social and political technologies and strategies of control through coercion and consent. Participants noted that:

***Participant Five:** it is glaringly obvious when you look around in management levels that there are more male managers than there are women. Especially as you get to senior levels like executives. Admin clerks are women. Why are women not getting to executive positions and why are women not growing into those senior positions?*

***Participant Ten:** Again, if I just talk of senior levels, we are still outnumbered. We are put into the work wife type of roles. There is a sense of powerlessness. I can see us heading for an iceberg and I feel it. You have kids I am sure. You have seen the movie Shrek where donkey is jumping up and down saying pick me, pick me. I think there are women still in that space. They feel frustrated and we try and raise our voices, make suggestions or challenge a few things but it does not land.*

The above section looked at how the voices of women are ignored, which is terrible. Even the very bodies of women are marginalised and excluded. Men dominate boardrooms and offices in the workplace. Women are systematically and structurally managed out of management and leadership position. Lack of voice and lack of power reduces women to wives, children and even donkeys of burden in the workplace. The metaphor of ‘kids’ and ‘donkey’ reflect the reduction and also burdening of women as unequal people that also tend to carry the burden of the workplace without getting promotion and achieving leadership and power. Women are rendered powerless and in the Nietzschean sense, lifeless. The workplace becomes a Machiavellian space where women are politically and systematically schemed and managed out of power and life.

#### **4.3.4 The Patronisation of women**

The political war against women and upon women at work is not overt warfare but it can be subtle and covert. The participants noted that:

***Participant Three:** my earlier career when I was a young woman, you go into a male office to discuss a topic, their tone would be patronizing, or their comment on what you are wearing.*

***Participant Six:** a term I have learnt recently is micro-aggression which is the little comments made when you are female. Might seem harmless, gets laughed-*

*off and considered to be normal but are quite damaging to a person. I heard a comment where a young lady was told by her boss that now you are making a bit more money buy yourself some heels so that you can be take a bit more seriously in this office. And that's micro-aggression right. This conversation would not be happening with a young man to say this is how you need to dress if you want to be taken seriously.*

Instead of being taken for who they are and what they can do, women tend to be reduced to their bodies and their looks. So, the women whose voices are ignored and whose bodies are marginalised suddenly become visible and audible, as sexual objects and not equal human beings. Women get recognised but for the wrong and exploitative reasons that reflect the power and privilege of male colleagues. Excluded and ignored from leadership roles, women are reduced to the furniture and the flowers that decorate the offices and boardrooms. They must dress and look right for the male gaze. This patronisation of women, giving them the wrong recognition and wrong attention that collapses into their sexualization, harassment and violation in covert and also overt ways. Women, otherwise, are told to dress, behave and work for male approval in the workplace. The women that resist patronization and reject being reduced to flowers and furniture are labelled, this time not just as witches and bitches but as aggressive and violent themselves:

***Participant Five:*** *“You find that even when women have a performance discussion with their line managers, they are told to tone it down and that they are aggressive. People think you are difficult to work with. I think it is discrimination because men on the other hand are hardly ever called aggressive. They may speak to people in a tone that one would find aggressive but you just hear people saying “that one wants work to be done and he is quite tough”. He will never be labeled as aggressive or difficult to work with.*

It appears that there are a systemic and structural demands for women to be docile, submissive, shy and nice. The naturalisation and normalisation of a woman as soft, fragile, compliant and obedient might be another way of disabling and disarming women of power in the workplace. Using their facility of power and privilege, men compress themselves to victims of aggressive and difficult women that are impossible to work with. Some women might blame themselves or feel inadequate or unequal when they are the real victims of power and privilege.

#### 4.3.5 Men using foul language / swearing

To celebrate and own the voice that they are privileged to have at work, men resort to linguistic freedom and license. They express their power and freedom by taking linguistic liberties in excesses:

*Participant Five: "I think another form of discrimination women experience in the workplace is men swearing in the boardrooms. You find that lots of men feel they have the right to speak however and swear whenever they want in a meeting. It is very disrespectful and it discriminates against women because women cannot act in that way. It almost makes them feel like they have to keep quiet if a man uses that kind of language. People then just say, he is just being a man. Imagine if it was a woman in a boardroom using that language? Men would find it very unacceptable. Men get away with unacceptable behavior because the excuse is that " he is just being a man". It is just normal. I think it is one of those unspoken rules. It is a Power thing used mostly by men. There should be ground rules in every organization that say people should treat each other with respect even in the language that they use.*

Vulgarity and foul language, it seems, becomes part of the expulsion of women from conversations. It is part of taking away the voice of women by resorting to an excess of use of language and extreme performance of communication that criminalizes women. Any woman that might start being foul and crude in language might be judged harshly or ostracized as a bad example and a negative influence. Vulgarity and excess are a male license and privilege in a space where women are demanded and condemned to be polite and pleasant. It is also verbal and psychological violation meant to make women afraid or careful around free and excessively speaking male colleagues. Some women may join in the vulgarity and foulness, trying to belong and fit in, but it works out to mark them as trying too hard or being 'honorary' men.

#### 4.3.6 The material gender gap

If women were patronized and their voices and bodies ignored, but they were paid fairly and equally for their work, the story of women in the workplace would be different from what it is. But there is a material penalty to being a woman at work.

Women are underpaid relative to equally performing men (Durden & Gaynor, 1998). Participants stated this as one of the common forms of gender discrimination in the workplace. They stated various reasons that have confirms arguments made in the literature review of this study. Some of the reasons includes the

following. Women managers received significantly less compensation than did men and the wage gap was greater at higher organizational levels occupied predominantly by men.

**Participant Ten:** *“an analysis of pay was conducted internally and it revealed that the more senior you are the bigger the pay gap is. Particular when it came to bonuses.*

Another reason stated is because women are raised to believe that nice girls do not ask. They do not get what they want for the simple reason of not speaking up or negotiating. Men know the importance of asking for what they want and overall men ask for what they want with greater frequency than women (Babcock & Laschever, 2003, p. 20).

**Participant Four:** *You regularly find that men are paid more for the same level and quality of work to female counterparts. It is often how women view themselves. I might have gone for an interview and not fought as hard for a salary because of having a certain stance like, maybe I should be grateful, maybe I should just take what is given to me. I just need a job. This is as opposed to men walking and saying hey, you need me, I am an asset to you so pay me this much or I will walk.*

**Participant Six:** *I think it is also in terms of pay. The difference is men negotiate. They tend to come from a higher base. For women it is not an easy conversation to have but when we do, then you are frowned upon. So, you walk away with a feeling of, “would the conversation be the same if I was male?” Would I have had to justify as much as I did? Would it have been an easier conversation if I was a man?*

**Participant Seven:** *If you look at pay packages, they are not the same for men and women doing the same job. I think it could be because we do not negotiate that much compared to how men push back. When it comes to bonus, the guy driving technical projects will get more money than women. There is justification for him to get it because he drove technical projects. Those driving significant projects, mostly men get big pay.”*

The sentiment is also that it is difficult to prove gender pay gap so women end up not being able to challenge it. Some women blame themselves for not asking, for not demanding higher pay as men do. Men have the power to demand and the privilege to negotiate. Women are reduced to being grateful for what they get. It is, in my view a question of power that is covered up as a difference of attitude to money between men and women. What is notable is that there is a material meaning and significance to the marginalisation and suppression of female voices and bodies in the workplace. Men are made leaders not only symbolically but materially. In addition, that makes male power is a power that matters and that makes a difference in the material world.

Men do not only have power and privilege. They also perform and live power and privilege. In that way they make their power and privilege in the workplace look normal and natural to them when it is constructed and manipulated; when it is social injustice and not a right:

***Participant Three:** There are some subtle things like your male peers are paid more than you and you can see from their life styles. You do not have a data to prove but you can see it around you. The men will say don't give her good projects, make sure she manages the bulk of hard work that make men shine. I do not think it is a consciously made decisions. I think it is just the way things have been done.*

***Participant Five:** There is also gender discrimination that we know about in the pay gap. I think the Gender pay gap is a big one. You find that people who are doing exactly the same role and when you compare men and women, you find that men get paid more. When women find out and question the line managers, quite often, you are told that men have more experience or higher qualification than women do. There are always excuses given.*

Men achieve more work experience and get paid better because they are given leading roles and trusted with work. They get paid more because they are men not because they are better workers. They are given success opportunities that women hardly get. This is covered up with appearances and rendered unconscious when it is a construct. It is a societal system and structure that positions men and women differently in symbolic and material terms in the workplace. Male power and privilege have been naturalised in a social and psychological manner.

#### 4.3.7 Sexual harassment

Not only in financial terms but in social and political terms the power and privilege that men have in the workplace get celebrated and also abused. Men become conquerors that enjoy excess and license of social behaviour. That excess and license is not only verbal as noted above but it is also behavioural. Men cross lines and trespass well into women's personal spaces and bodies. Sexual harassment at work is used for "doing masculinity" by men demonstrating their power to other men, and as a tool for policing "appropriate" gender behavior among non-conforming women (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2012). Six participants reported having experienced or observed sexual harassment in the workplace in one form or the other. They have also expressed how overt forms of sexual harassment have changed overtime where now it is done in a subtle way making it difficult to police or report it. The change could be due to strict laws put in place by the government.

There is abuse of power by senior managers and it is not easy to call it out. It is now done subtly. None of the participants demonstrated that they reported these sexual harassment incidents. They think it will go away. The fact that it was a senior manager also makes it harder to report. The fear of the organization not believing women over senior managers that bring revenue to the company prevents them from reporting these incidents. So, sexual harassment incidents get swept under the carpet.

***Participant Three:** I have had an experience in my past job where every time when I was alone in a boardroom prior to a meeting if the chairman walked in, he would say, "come sit on my lap and tell me your story". You know women in banking, do have a lot of that experience.*

***Participant Ten:** That sort of stuff I don't notice. Maybe I have been around for so long that it does not fess me or whatever. You do not see bad behavior like when I first started working and joined the trading floor in my 20s. We had a company breakaway on a Saturday afternoon after the market closed. We were doing river rafting where we got two people in a raft. They drew names of people and I was put on a boat with the Head of markets. On Friday afternoon he said to me, you must get there early and then you can give me a blowjob before we go. So that sort of stuff that was perfectly common back then you do not see today at all anymore. I think that shift in society has dramatically taken effect. So, I think it is more subtly now.*

**Participant 4:** *I think that there is also something that I have experienced personally and not overt sexual harassment. Subtlety, our male counterparts think it's all right to cross the boundary and be a little bit more handsy. One came to say hello and then rub my shoulders subtly, a bit too long.*

There is pressure on women not to take offence and to be normal about language and gestures that are violent, bodily and sexually. This grows to suggestions, touches and can degenerate to violation. This appears to be part of the ownership and control of the lives and bodies of women in the workplace. It is also part of the way male power, privilege, license and excess are performed and celebrated. The challenge is that instead of challenging this, women may normalise this and play or work along, making those women that resists and challenge this power appear as dissenters that are bad humoured.

**Participant 5:** *Male colleagues feel they should comment about how a women dresses, how a woman looks and smell. This can make women feel uncomfortable because how they are dressed, look or smell has nothing to do with their performance at work and what they have to deliver. It makes a lot of women feel uncomfortable but often women keep quiet about it.*

**Participant Six:** *People have been experiencing forms of sexual harassment in the workplace. What is interesting is that this generally happens in the society and it is not spoken about. We need to say, it is not okay. We keep sweeping it under the carpet. We must make people accountable, certainly.*

**Participate Eight:** *Based on my experience, there is sexual harassment in the workplace. Its men thinking they have power or exerting power on women. They might have gotten away with it for so long, so they think it's okay. Sometimes people do not understand what sexual harassment is. In other instances, they are in positions of power and you are a subordinate. I was able to tell him to go to "hell". I tried to avoid him as much as possible. I realise that women do not talk about it thinking they are the ones experiencing it. I realised that he was also doing it to his PA. It was something very difficult to deal with. I was worried that it was going to affect my performance bonus. I was lucky that he lost his job and was taken care of by the system.*

From what the participants have said sexual harassment is a reality in the workplace. It might present itself otherwise e.g. as recognising and complementing women for their dresses and scents. There might be a systemic conspiracy by men and women to pretend it does not exist and ‘sweep in under the carpet’ or women keeping ‘quiet’ about it. For men it may become a hobby that they try on every woman in the workplace. It might appear as normal, natural and harmless for some women living with it. Others might be keeping ‘quiet’ due to fear of losing jobs and promotions. There is a social and material penalty for women that challenge male power, privilege and license. The participants correctly note that this is not about the workplace. However, it is a society wide problem where harm to women is treated as a negligible problem when it is a sickness in the world. Noteworthy is the observation that some women do not notice or are unable to name sexual harassment as sexual violence. There is a way in which this violence does not name or announce itself but flows along as life and work itself.

#### **4.3.8 Multiple roles a woman has to play**

Most participants reported that they are regarded as not being committed to their jobs because of the multiple roles they are expected to play as working mothers and wives. The ideology of the ideal worker norm and ideal worker’s time do not acknowledge the fact that women bear most of the responsibilities for domestic care and having to play that dual role. The ideal worker norm portrays a worker fully devoted to the workplace and to work with no competing demands, year-round (Williams, 2000, page 259). Time spent at work (physically or online) is also seen as a symbol of productivity and devotion of workers. Majority of participants feel that organisations are not accommodating of the dual role assigned to women by society. The structure of work was designed to reflect the realities of an all-male workforce whose citizens had fewer, if any, domestic responsibilities beyond supporting their families financially. A significant hindrance to women’s participation in the workforce is a lack of family-friendly workplace policies and flexible working hours as articulated by participants. Work environments are not accommodative of the realities of women will definitely impact and hamper their ability to function optimally.

***Participant One:** If I wanted to take time out of work to go and see my kids do ballet or play soccer, I would be told to take leave. But my male colleague would receive a different treatment. He would want to go on training for mindfulness or whatever ritual that were not work related at all and would not be asked to take leave. I asked myself if A). Is it because I am female or B), is it because he is white?*

**Participant Four:** *A woman who has just come from maternity leave still has to manage things like breastfeeding and come into an environment where they have to perform like men. At the same time they have to run to the toilet as there are no facilities to express milk and be fully engage in what is going on at work all the time. This is a basic example but it speaks to practicalities around the work environment that can hinder a woman's ability to do things. They are little things but it just makes it a little bit more difficult for you to try and reach your goals as a woman.*

**Participant Five:** *"My other experience is when you have to take a child to a dentist and quiet often it is the mother that has to do this. You then have to explain why you can't make it to a meeting and then you are looked at as if you do not prioritise your work. It does not mean that you will not log on later and do the work. People just focus on you leaving the office at 3 o'clock to take your child to the dentist and do not notice the work you do late in the night to catch up.*

**Participant Six:** *When it comes to career opportunities, motherhood does tend to stifle women's career progression because they have opted to go into parenting. They are the ones who carry the child and have to carry certain responsibilities e.g. taking care of children. If they are not able to do that, I am not sure how they are able to fully function in the workplace.*

Women as mothers are made to appear as those people that would rather not be at work but at home tending families. Mothering is made to appear like an inconvenience and hindrance to normal work. The workplace is family and motherhood unfriendly. Race also appears by not appearing as the giving of leave and opportunity to be away from work is selective and culturally discriminatory. Race and gender are constructed to conspire against women. Like menstruating, the breastfeeding of children is reduced to a nuisance if not a ritual that must be consigned to the toilet and secrecy. Women's bodies and their natural functions are systematically and structurally criminalised in the workplace. The woman is made to feel lacking and disabled. Women's bodies are rendered limited bodies that are alright to be marginalized, violated and excluded from mainstream work and life.

Not only race, but also age comes in as a classifier and marker of women in the workplace. For participants that are in more senior roles, it is easier to manage their time than the junior ones. They set the tone and lead by example. They also have the power to challenge those opposing them as can be seen in this comment:

***Participant Ten:*** *I have gotten older and more senior. I still try to walk out of here before 6 o'clock every night. It is brave because, everyone is still sitting at their desk. I just stand up and put my bag on my shoulder and walk out of the office. If they say anything, this is my response "You tell me where I have dropped the ball and where I have let the firm down and let's have that conversation". But as long as I am running a good ship, don't judge me.*

The importance and power of age concretises the impression that women are primarily treated as children in the workplace. They gain some voice and authority with age. The other sentiment shared by participants is that they have had to work harder to prove themselves in their roles as they are seen to be less committed due to the dual role they have to play as women. Women are regarded as busy on other things but work. So, they have to work hard to prove themselves as workers that are committed:

***Participant Five:***

*You see it in working hours. You find that men tend to have more flexibility than women. They are able to work longer days and ore hours. They are able to come in earlier because you find that it is the wife or partner who drops off kids at school in the morning. So quiet often the women in this organization are the ones that does school drop offs. They have to cook, help children with homework. Men are seen to be more dedicated as they work longer hours. Which is not necessarily true. Even the women who are sitting in executive roles have to work so hard to prove themselves to an extent that they have to work ridiculously long hours. They will tell you they are working 16/18 hours a day and it is a reality, as they have to work harder to proof that they can do the job. Men can play golf on a Fridays and have drinks on a Saturday with friends. But you find women in senior position are busy working to proof themselves on a Friday or on a Saturday and sacrificing their families. They always say it is very difficult to strike a work/life balance. When you are a woman juggling motherhood, work sometimes a husband or a partner. It is quite difficult balancing those areas of your life.*

**Participant Seven:** *Women will work more to prove themselves. Work double because they do not want to be seen as failures. They work harder to achieve the same as men.*

**Participant Nine:** *I am in a new role and was appointed May this year. The question that I was asked repeatedly was, be careful what you ask for, do you know it's an 11hr day job, will you cope with your young kids? I told them that it is my career, it is my personal choice that I do knowing my lifestyle and I can handle. Ahead of the process, people were already thinking that I might not handle it. So, I think that people make decisions for you or think of you in terms of where you are personally in your life. That can disadvantage you. You should always be judged on what you bring to the table and what you have delivered.*

Women that are willing to take on new and more challenging work roles are warned and threatened that they will not carry the load. The role of women in households as child minders overlaps into the workplace and subtracts from their punctuality and performance. Their lack of punctuality and performance is not understood as proof that they are burdened with multiple roles but as the proof that they are women and unable. There is a systemic and structural denialism that seeks to construct and normalise women as limited and suffering deficit at work. Women find themselves trying rather too hard to prove themselves and justify their existence in the workplace. Instead of blaming systemic and structural marginalisation and oppression, women tend to blame themselves. Oppression is at its most successful when the victim does not blame the oppressor but the self. Women begin to believe as true the construction of themselves as people with lacks and deficits.

#### **4.3.9 Promotions and development of women**

For the reasons of male privilege and power the promotion of women becomes a contentious issue instead of being normal and regular like any other promotion. This is so even when the woman to be promoted is talented and exceptional:

**Participant Two:** *“So I was supposed to be promoted. I think that my colleague had a strong feeling that I shouldn't get the promotion. I was a high performer and I was considered to be talent in the organization. There were very strong views expressed by my colleagues. I think gender had a role to play because the*

*person I was working with was male. The 4 males I was working with also had a contribution to make.*

***Participant Three:*** *“Its subtle things such as being overlooked for promotions for a male peer. Where your qualifications are better but a more junior male peer will be promoted ahead of you or alongside you.”*

***Participant Seven:*** *men get more promoted in certain roles compared to women. Even driving certain project, most technical ones are given to men. It is always like that. It is as if men will do better at technical projects compared to women regardless of their qualifications and levels.*

***Participant Nine:*** *I have been through various restructures throughout this organization. I survived them. Women have mostly been impacted and men are just given opportunities. There will be a succession planning and they get a role. Women however, need to apply for it or prove that they deserve it. I have been through that. Whereas my male counterparts will just get a role.*

The Promotion of a man becomes normal and natural while that of a woman is turned into an event. Promoting a man comes more naturally than the promotion of a woman, and frequently the approval of male colleagues and the permission is sought before a woman is promoted. A woman has to be exceptional and extraordinary to achieve a regular promotion. In other words, a woman has to be spectacular to lead a normal life in the workplace. This adds to the stereotype of a successful woman as a miracle and wonder worker which works to makes success unreachable for women. Successful women are made to look abnormal or like extremists that a normal and regular woman should not emulate.

#### **4.3.10 Glass ceiling**

From what the participants shared with me, it is clear that the path to the top is not easy for women. There seem to be challenges at every step. The participants in more senior roles see their success as essential to pave the way and build a legacy so that no other women would have to bear their challenges. They had to break the glass ceiling through their determination and eagerness to transform the organization. Wirth's (1998) research acknowledges the existence of the glass ceiling and advocates that in order for women to break the glass ceiling, significant transformation is needed for the organisation itself, its work structures and management approaches. The value of jobs is tightly connected to their gender composition. Jobs

become institutionalized as masculine or feminine, and are accordingly viewed as valuable or marginal to the bottom-line and can significantly hurt women's pay (England, 2010). Women's jobs offer fewer formal opportunities and they often have short job ladders (Kalev & Deutsch (2018) p. 263. Taken together, segregated jobs can be viewed as "glass cages," posing invisible relational barriers to advancement (Kalev, 2009). The participant acknowledges that gender roles or sex segregation is a product of gender bias and it perpetuates inequality between men and women in the workplace.

#### **4.3.11 Boys clubs that exclude women**

As beneficiaries of power and privilege, men work and function much like clubs or associations with unwritten codes and regulations. Power and privilege are not declared but are used in an everyday and regular but systematic and structural way:

***Participant Three:** My current boss calls all the men in the team with a certain "tittle"; they greet each other using it. You know, that is not okay. It is excluding. It is creating a boys club. I told them I find it offensive when you do that because it excludes me as a woman. Then they laugh and say no it is an old way of greeting each other. There is a real boys comrade that comes out in the boardroom and kind of exclusive. It is lots of little things like that.*

***Participant Five:** But women's voices are sometimes not heard in boardrooms because you find these boys clubs. You find men become friends and they have a way of working together and they have a way of excluding others. Quiet often they have drinks together after hours, they social together, they play golf together and you hear as woman that deals are concluded on the golf course. By the time they come to the office, things have already been discussed, they are all aligned in terms of the outcomes. They have all agreed to support the outcome that they all desire.*

***Participant Ten:** The boys club is all gathering around each other and looking after each other.*

Dominant groups and privileged communities almost always operate like secret societies that have agreed on objectives and ends. They work like conspirators against excluded, marginalised groups and individuals. Formal meetings become a formality as most agreements and deals are struck in informal meeting over

drinks and other social gatherings outside work. The informal shapes the formal. Men create a universe in the workplace and outside that, women might never know nor understand but can feel it every day. This universe of men is glued together by power and it is not acknowledged but is real.

#### 4.3.12 Gender discrimination from other women

Instead of finding the power and agency to challenge the universe of men; some women do the easy thing of joining the ‘boys club’ by turning around to seek accommodation with men and turn against other women. It is easier for the oppressed to look for their place in the universe of the oppressor than to challenge oppression. Oppression at its worst turns the oppressed against themselves. Participants shared their views on experiencing gender discrimination from other females. They indicated that gender discrimination is not something that only men do:

***Participant Five:** There are women in senior positions who quite often treat people reporting to them in that way. They often unknowingly perpetuate gender discrimination as soon as they get to senior roles. They might feel that they almost have to prove themselves in a male dominated environment where their counterparts in those executive committees are men. You find those women find themselves being under pressure to deliver. The people reporting to them feel it too because they are put under as much pressure as they find themselves in.*

***Participant Six:** Some people work for a women boss and find that she is horrible. I have heard you can work for someone that has gone through the experience of having children but not connected to challenges of motherhood. If your child is not well, they do not understand that you need to leave the office.*

***Participant Seven:** Gender discrimination is not only done by men. Female leaders also do it. She will have two subordinates, female and male and will favour a man over a woman. Just like a man would have done. In a team you can find that the leader gives all projects to men and not the female member. I once asked, how will she grow if you don't give her the opportunity? Then the excuse was, I can't give more work to her because she is pregnant. But pregnancy is not a disease. She can still do the job. We as women are quick to say it is men but we do it to other women too.*

**Participant Nine:** *I have not personally felt gender discrimination being done by a woman. What always pains me is that there are women in senior positions that also do not give back and do not take people on their journey. It is not that they don't want to. It's that they get so stuck in their own careers and that's what they focus on. They don't want to rock the boat in any way. They are too focused and get too busy to realise that they have to at least take one person with them on this journey. I think that's where women come short in terms of standing together as they uplift themselves and ensure that the network is continually expanding and building.*

Out of fear of freedom and ignorance, some women may start mimicking men and their power at work. Paulo Freire (1993) described how out of 'fear of freedom' and co-optation the oppressed may become imbricated in the world of the oppressor. Unconsciously, some women might think being a true leader in the workplace is behaving and treating others the way men do. The only world of leadership that they have come to know, internalise, and then perform is that of male supremacy. Some women tend to reproduce manliness and its power against other women. It is that way in which patriarchy can be understood as a system and a structure of power that even women can deploy against other women in the workplace and in society.

#### **4.3.13 Intersectionality**

Participants have acknowledged that the forms of discrimination that exist and what they have experienced are not the same based on race, level of seniority, class and age. They recognized that women are located differently in society and that has influenced their personal experiences:

**Participant One:** *So, it was that type of stuff that A) Is it because he is white? or B) Is it because I am female? So, it played so much in the female and gender space but I was not the first and only female she did this to. Other females were white so I assume it was a female thing and not a race thing. So it was that type of stuff.. There is also the issue of age, potentially because I was much younger and much more outspoken. Maybe age also contributed as I was not allowed to ask questions. I was not allowed to have a solution because apparently it was not my place to think."*

**Participant Two:** *I don't think it is only gender. I do not think it is restricted to gender. Its age as well. So, I think it's lot of politics, it's also a legacy in the organization. There are always individuals who have been here longer who tend to like things done in a certain way. I think it is also colour, it is based on color. I think it is also the thing of experience, the fact that they have been here longer than others. So, they know how to sort of pivot things in their favor. I think for me it has also been along the racial lines I think it stems from the feeling of... I would rather collaborate with white females or white males as opposed to the other way around. I have been noticing a strong leaning towards collaboration with women who are not black. It is also a case of trust. I have noticed a lack of respect in terms of how I collaborate with blacks as opposed to a white female. Therefore, there is also that dynamic and it is like a dual discrimination it is not just one type of discrimination that happens.*

**Participant Three:** *I think it must be so much more complex for a black woman than a white woman. Because you don't just have that, you have a racial undertone as well. I think what is happening at this stage of my career, we are as white women experiencing quite a lot... you are a white woman you don't count. I am also aware that where I am right now, it is probably where I will stay because I am a senior level; I do not think there is a room to grow. I am a specialist and will move between portfolios within the company. The system will not allow me to move up. If you look at where we are as a business and the diagnostics, we are in real big trouble in terms of our transformation agenda - with the target we need to achieve and the strategy we need to drive. I think that it is not possible for the bank to backup promotion behind any white people. It is a reality of where we are and not a personal thing. So, it is not about me. It is really difficult for women to respond in a moment because you also have cultural things where you are taught to respect men in your culture. E.g. or elders. There is a lot of cultural things that come into play within the work environment. In fact, if you are of a certain age, certain culture, it will be going against certain things you have been brought up to believe and think, not to challenge a man.*

**Participant Six:** *I think there is also a difference when it comes to race...as much as there is women discrimination, there is another layer that adds a race lens, which unfortunately does play out. There are things considered acceptable when*

*a woman of a certain colour does them. There are so many layers to cut through, standards and double standards other things that tend to play in the society.*

***Participant Eight:*** *The other thing is related to ageism as well as gender where I was overlooked for roles and where each and every person who was hired I had to train. They kept on hiring men to be the heads.*

***Participant Nine:*** *Everyone has a strength, whether you are male or female. We should focus on diversity to grow organisations. Women are good at certain things and men are good at certain things, by pulling it together you get better results. We forget that it is the same thing with race.*

*You have white people that are feeling intimidated because they have been crowded. Transformation is critical.*

What the participants are expressing and alluding to is how their race and age shapes their experiences as women. There is no experience of gender that is outside of an experience of race. Participant 3 acknowledges that her experience is different due to her racial privileges. The gender discrimination challenges that she is facing, are different and unique from other women due to their race. The injustices experienced by black women in particular, could be worse than what she is experiencing. It is never a single struggle for women. Understanding and applying an intersectional lens is necessary in order to develop effective targeted interventions to address gender inequalities experience by women in the workplace.

Oppression comes in layers and intersections. Racism may conspire and intersect with sexism and ageism may also network with racism or all of them get combined. Oppressors, I may observe, form formidable solidarities and alliances of their own to preserve privilege and advantage. It is for that reason that Lugones (2003) argues that the oppressed should form even stronger alliances and privileges in order to effectively confront oppression by journeying and pilgrimaging into each other's worlds and experiences. Networks of power and privilege cannot only be disrupted through networks of the struggle for freedom and inclusion by the oppressed and the marginalised. Without meaningful alliances and solidarities, the oppressed are isolated and divided. It is important to also note that an oppressed person on the grounds of race may be an oppressor on the grounds of gender and both may be ageists. The struggle also has to look inside ourselves to check where we also, as women, become oppressors and dominators.

#### **4.4 Impact of gender discrimination on women**

Gender discrimination in the workplace creates a severe negative impact on women and this in turn hampers a company's ability to achieve its full potential and strategic objectives. The disadvantages of lower pay,

status and opportunities at work and the subjective experiences of being stigmatized , affect women's psychological and physical stress, mental and physical health (Goldenhar et al., 1998; Alder et al.), job satisfaction and organizational commitment ( Hicks-Clarke and Ilse, 2000), and ultimately their performance ( Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001). The negative impact of gender discrimination is confirmed by participants in their lived experience. Two of the participants left the organization as they felt it was more than they could endure. They felt that the culture and what they had experienced was not worth the stress they were experiencing. The excerpts below reflect this:

***Participant One:*** *You know I went into a really dark place for a long time. You know self-doubt, self-pity, feeling of worthlessness because. Then you start thinking maybe I should not be thinking differently and maybe I am the problem. Is there something wrong with me? Maybe I am not good enough. You know, I went into that space starting to even bring up your own personal issues.*

***Participant Two:*** *It has been very tough; I have been okay because I still do what I do and I love what I do regardless of where I am placed. I have been feeling it though I need to just put my head down because I have to support my family. But it got into a point where I am not prepared to do it anymore. I am not prepared to play these games with those individuals that are doing these things. I am not willing to do it anymore. I have resigned from the company.*

***Participant Three:*** *And if you are a person that has lots of emotional connection to your work, you have pride in what you do, and you want to do a good job, you have a lot of stress, you show that stress and live that stress. When the stress shows up, they often perceive that as weakness. So, you always have to contain yourself as a woman. If you can say anything, they will say you are an emotional woman.*

***Participant Four:*** *Some woman become harder through the process especially women at executive level. They end up not being approachable. They do not seem to care for people around them. They drive an agenda of self. Only care about how they are climbing the corporate ladder, increasing their own profile. I think it is a coping mechanism for them and I don't think that it is necessarily started that way. I think it is a reality of by virtue of being female and having to work*

*extra hard to be recognized and reach the same level of the male counterpart. I think that there is that hardening that takes place and it is a product of the environment.*

**Participant Five:** *It can be demoralizing. It can leave women feeling quite disengaged because you are feeling that you are putting in so much and you are giving a lot more than 100% effort. You are doing everything that you can just to ensure that your team succeeds; that you meet your objectives and that you deliver. Yet you are told to tone it down and even if you are doing it in a way that is respectful to your colleagues, sometimes men expect women to behave in a certain way, and speak in a certain way.*

**Participant Six:** *In terms of engagement – I think it has a big impact on engagement on whether you feel that you are fulfilled in your work or not.*

**Participant Seven:** *Sometimes it kills confidence and people become quiet in meetings and do not want to talk in meetings. Those that are strong fight for themselves e.g. when it comes to performance ratings. They are pushing back. You have to keep records of everything all the time as evidence, all the time. It makes us behave like you have to cover your back all the time. Men do not do that because they engage at a different level. It affects your behavior. You have to think about what you say, how you say it – even your actions. It was not going to be the same if you had that freedom. It also affects your confidence.*

**Participant Eight:** *Pretend that it did not happen, can convince themselves to drinking alcohol and adopt other habits in order to cope. What worked for me was to pretend that it did not happen. Kept on thinking I misread what happened, doubting myself.*

**Participant Nine:** *My personal experience in terms of how I relate and the challenges that I face because I am passionate, I am going to continue to fight the battle. It is something that actually stimulated me. I am going to show them and prove them wrong. But sometimes it is very hard. I have also had a lot of feedback ... female senior counterparts that have left the organisation because it*

*is so hard to work in this organization. To be recognized you have to fight. The impact is that if we do not fix that, we are going to continue to lose female talent. As much as it is not the intention, we do make it hard for women.*

***Participant Ten:*** *I think there is quite a deep sense of helplessness. People do not want to hear you which leads to disengagement. A sense of frustration and helplessness. Then you overlay that with awareness around you being underpaid and then there is proper “fuckedoffness”– another technical term.”*

The women, as the above noted participants note, may react differently to domination and the discrimination that comes with it. Self-pity and desperation may be one reaction. There may also be selfishness were one woman seeks to look out for herself to gain entry into privilege and accommodation within the system and structure of power led by men. There may be demoralization and giving up as if nothing can be done to change the order of things. Lack of confidence is a frequent quality of the oppressed. There may also be escapism, pretending that the worst is not happening and life is normal. What is needed, however, is the confidence and courage to face the truth and condition of oppression rather than avoid it or pretend that it was not there. Most women in the workplace and outside have resigned to a position and condition of marginality as if it was natural when it is a social and political construct that can be undone. The knowledge that oppression can be undone and that it is not the natural order of things may be the first step towards change for the better.

#### **4.5 Mechanisms to eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace**

Women have the ability to become agents of change in the fight against gender discrimination. Participants shared their thoughts in terms of what can work to trouble gender discrimination in the workplace. Freire (1993) argued for the oppressed owning their condition and not only observing the world but working to transform it. Enrique Dussel (1985) wrote of the oppressed using their condition as the oppressed to dedicate themselves to freedom and change.

##### **4.5.1 Speaking up and calling things out**

The ability to perceive and name oppression and call it out as such is part of the agency of the oppressed of the oppressed dedicating themselves to changing the order of things. To speak, Freire (2003) notes is a step towards changing the world:

**Participant One:** *Speak up. There is no amount of time that is going to pass that is going to make it go. Put up your boundaries as soon as possible. If there is a disagreement let us talk about it as adults. Don't come and parent me I am not your child. I have my own mother and I have my own kids. The bullies, the abusers the baddies are getting away with it if we keep quiet. Because everybody is so scared to speak up. The more we name the behaviors the more the baddies will realize they cannot continue that way. I just feel that we need to speak up more about it and not be fearful."*

**Participant Two:** *I have gone to HR for HR person to report it. It was quite challenging to make that stand. But I did. We need to talk. As principled as I was I did it and it was the best thing I could have done for myself. You know. It takes courage.*

**Participant Three:** *But I do think that where we have power as women is to call it out when we see it. It does not mean it is going to change the behaviours, but it says I am aware that you are doing this and my other female colleagues are aware that you are doing this. So, you therefore need to think about it. So therefore, calling out the things you observe is very important and not calling them out to other women and calling them out to the men.*

**Participant Four:** *So, I think for myself I am quite happy to speak my mind when needed so you know in terms of personal boundaries. I will be frank and have a conversation with you and say I am not comfortable with this can we manage it.*

**Participant Five:** *Women should call things out as they happen even if a person is more senior, they should be able to say that is not acceptable behavior the way you spoke to me and treated me. So, women have to call it out when they see behaviours that are unacceptable. You have to be able to say, I do not appreciate that kind of behaviour.*

**Participant Six:** *So, I think one is to talk about biases. I don't think we effectively make them known.*

**Participant Seven:** *I believe in is a theory called speak sharks. Comes from the nemo movie. You have to call it out immediately. Right there talk about it and not keep quiet. If there are issues, talk about them immediately. Fight and support others. I encourage others to speak out. Keep on trying and addressing issues*

*even if decisions are made. Get involved in a respectful way when others are discriminated against even if it is not in your space. Bring those kinds of dialogues even in society. So just speak your truth in a respectful way and that is all we can do and we can be consistent in the way we do it. You can sensitize them and influence positively*

**Participant Eight:** *Sometimes the ability to speak without someone putting a face to you is important and needed. I think having to come out ... causes fear. It is more difficult. In addition, after that, it was talking about it because then it gets lifted and at least you can share in the pain. Especially when you realise that there are other people that have experienced the same thing.*

**Participant Nine:** *To tackle topics that are tough, one of the things we need to do is to work with HR on through programmes like “Banking on women”, we must run workshops around unconscious bias. Bring actors that role play these situations (scenarios) that happen. People will realize, “bugger, I did that without thinking about it”. We talk about sexual harassment. If woman walks past with a short skirt, male colleagues give a second look and make a comment. They don’t realise that it is sexual harassment. People must be proactive and not just sit there and keep quiet. They must point these things out. It does not matter... it has nothing to do with corporate grades. It is just disrespectful and you call someone out on it. Because people have mothers, sisters, daughters, nieces, friends. Would you like any of those people to be treated like that? So, don’t treat someone like that.*

Thinking about and speaking out on oppression is what Freire (1993) called reflective and communicative action. This can also grow into advocacy and campaigns that Freire (2013) called ‘education for critical consciousness’ that awakens society to oppression and demands change. Conscientisation, the spreading of consciousness is revolutionary action (Freire, 1993). After Edward Said, Cornel West (1993:1) referred to speaking out against oppressions as “speaking truth to power” and holding “frank conversations” to confront domination without pretending that life was normal. Change begins with thought and speech.

#### **4.5.2 Training and networks**

Education for critical consciousness (Freire, 2013) also refers to training and rehearsing of change. Participants felt that creating awareness of gender discrimination might be a useful tool to sensitize males to the problems women face. They feel that this might create an environment that men can be part of the solution and this will make initiatives sustainable. Programmes like gender-sensitive diversity trainings to

improve dealing with topics such as stereotyping, gender discrimination and social exclusion. These trainings, when complemented by formalized human resource policies, will also bolster processes to encourage equitable recruitment and hiring practices as well. Furthermore, businesses should provide all employees with equal access to company-supported education and training programs as well as formal and informal networking and mentoring.

**Participant Four:** *I think it is important that we are aware, educated and empower ourselves to access things that are in place. Important so that we can take the conversation forward. If you want to make sure that there is commitment that make a shift, you need to drive conversations that enable both men and women to have conversations.*

**Participant Six:** *We also have biases that we hold against each other as females so I think that awareness is a good place to start. How do you deal with something that you are not even aware of? We need a trigger so that we bring things to the surface.*

**Participant Eight:** *Education, more education on what constitutes sexual harassment because people are not clear. Or gender discrimination and in general.”*

**Participant Nine:** *We have launched programmes that allow women to be more self-aware and to focus on their brand. Women can come together to share knowledge and experiences to build a network. I think more importantly working together and not being isolated is important. There is force in numbers and people become more aware of what is going on. I think personally I am doing everything I can. The next thing we are planning next year is to further uplift programme with male sponsors and male partnerships to help drive that. We need to include men to create awareness on ways of working together.*

Communities that can forge the solidarities and alliances that Maria Lugones (2003) describes can only arise out of training and education for critical consciousness that can be produced by conscientisation. Communication and frank conversations connect the oppressed and form them into a formidable force

against domination and marginality. While the oppressors use the words of power and privilege to oppress and dominate, the oppressed deploy the power of words to liberate themselves.

### 4.5.3 Role-modeling

Role modeling by leaders is a critical success factor to create gender equality in the workplace. Wrong models use peer pressure and their own networks to influence and reinforce domination. Role models may as well use their own good examples and leadership to promote change:

***Participant Six:** Women in senior positions need to role model it. We need to see how we should treat each other as women. Notice how men treat each other versus how females treat each other as well. Also, the people who have been led should treat female bosses as they would treat male bosses. Why don't you get similar response from those people?*

### 4.5.4 Policies and procedures

Ensuring workplaces spaces that are free from gender discrimination and any type of female harassment is also a key component. Businesses should implement policies that explicitly condemn sexual harassment in the workplace, provide gender-transformative, awareness-raising training for all staff and management and create an environment in which perpetrators are held accountable. Human resources procedures, such as systems for filing complaints against workplace harassment and consequences for offenses, should be embedded in institutional policies and clearly communicated to all staff. Some participants felt that this is another way that could help eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace especially those dealing with sexual harassment.

***Participant Four:** I think it is important that as a woman you are aware of the policies that exist within the business that you are in. You know what recourse you have should there be sexual harassment, sexual gender-based violence in the workplace or any an uncomfortable situation e.g. when you feel like your boss is not giving you the right treatment. I also think that what is required is a review of major fundamental structures such as HR policies and should be reformed when necessary.*

***Participant Six:** If I think of it, it is also about generally putting policies in place... sexual harassment which goes both ways. Also, put in place processes*

*and policies to guard against any form of discrimination that may occur. When those processes and policies are there you need to think about how these matters will be dealt with to make people account for their behaviour and actions.*

The education, training and communication that are discussed above helps women outside and inside the workplace to know their rights and freedoms. That knowledge helps women to get policy makers and leaders to enforce and implement the policies that promise change. Some policies and legislation may remain frozen in policy documents and constitutions because the women are ignorant of those provisions.

#### **4.5.5 Men's role in fighting gender discrimination**

Most of participants echoed the need for men to be part of the conversation to address gender inequalities and discrimination in the workplace. Without their involvement, efforts will not be effective and we need to shift the whole ecosystem. The argument by Adichie cited before that 'We should all be feminists' entails that the discrimination of women is a human problem that cannot be left only for women. Men have a critical role in confronting other men and also challenging the structure and system of patriarchy:

***Participant One:** Absolutely, Gender Equality is everyone's problem and solution. I think if we do not bring men into the dialogue and into the thinking pattern, they are not going to understand the problem fully. For as long as we teach woman separately how to better themselves outside of men being part of that brainstorming and experience, were are always going to show up with one foot behind. This is because men were not part of the diagnosis, they were not part of co-creation and solutioning. It cannot be a once off thing. It cannot just be during Woman's month when men stand up with women. It must be every day, include all situation and not only about woman abuse. It is also, about celebrating each other, celebrating humanity, celebrating success.*

***Participant Four:** What is critical for me in this system is conversation. I mean yes, it is important that women are empowered to take action but the truth is it is always about a woman having to take action to fight for their rights to manage discrimination. They have to find another policy around sexual harassment or to manage the environment and fight other agendas. I think there is a need to for taking up these conversations around these matters with our male counterparts as well.. In the last week we have been focusing on sexual and gender-based violence campaign and have rolled out the HeForShe movement on Wednesday.*

*What are some of the other inclusive initiatives that can be done like that? I think that it is important that women are being bold and are aware of our rights. We need to do things that shift the entire ecosystem since we exist in a system that is both men and women. We need to be looking at how some of those fundamental changes can take place.*

**Participant Five:** *I engage men when I feel they are discriminating against me. Where male counterpart might decide to have a meeting at 7:30am, I let them know that I have children I drop off at school. I can be in the office at 8h15 after dropping off my child so let's start our meeting at 8h30. It is the man that should start speaking out that discrimination is wrong and it is something that our organization should not accept for us to make sure that there is gender parity when it comes to pay, working hours, also when it comes to recognition at work - promotions, equal opportunities.*

**Participant Six:** *Absolutely! Men play the biggest role because they are in positions of power...the power dynamics are shifted towards them in terms of society being patriarchal. They tend to have lots of positional power and they have a big responsibility in changing the narrative. It is part of what they need to own. Sometimes in a room, men think it is okay to say things like, 'look at this one, she always has something to say and she is such a bitch'. No one stops them and says, "Guys, you shouldn't be saying things like that, why are we quick to make this comment or this judgement?'. They play a big role in terms of fixing this and being part of the solution and not in continually perpetuating the problem. The issues run deep.*

Men, the participants note, cannot be left out of the equation of the struggle against the discrimination of women because they are involved either as perpetrators or beneficiaries of the structure and system of power that oppresses women in the workplace and beyond. Two senior participants strongly believe that we need to go the extra mile to ensure that we create an emotional connection with men for a meaningful shift to happen. Talk to the heart to be able to get their full support and get them to champion the course:

**Participant Nine:** *The next step is to include our male counterparts in that journey and to make sure that they become aware of what they need to protect*

*against. The stereotypes, unconscious biases. I have made sure that with the senior women in this organization to pull them as close as I can. So that we can make sure that gender is important at every discussion. People must be proactive and not just sit there and keep quiet. It does not matter; it has nothing to do with your corporate grade.. It is just disrespectful and you call someone out on it and if you think of your mothers, sisters, daughters, nieces, friends -would you like any of those people to be treated like that? So, don't treat someone like that. You have to always go to the core of humanity and when you point that out to someone, they can all relate. It's all about calling it out in a constructive way so that they all understand.*

**Participant Ten** *I think it is an extremely complex and it goes back to my point about the fact that until men understand the need to go home to help your wife. You can put all policies you like in place, you can have all the right processes, charters. Until they feel it in here (in the heart), they won't get it. There is nothing women can do to help themselves until men really understand it. We can jump up and down, we can sing songs, we can write right policies blah blah blah ...but actually, men are the ones with the power. Until we can shift that power, we have no chance. It has to start with infiltration into the male camp and converting some of the men to start seeing the light in order for them to become champions. Move away from just developing campaigns and policies and move toward it being a lived experience. Then you get a shift. They put women into the infrastructure roles for the quota and they tick that box and carry on with what they want to do. So, it is not solving this thing... (the heart). It goes back to how your grandfather treats your grandmother, how you brother treats your sister. It is not just a South Africa problem it is a global problem. I strongly believe without strong male champions we are on to nothing. We need to speak to men who have daughters and tap into that personal experience. Do you want your daughter to experience this? Men have a soft spot for their daughters. If you don't want this for your daughter, you need to help me today. To make a difference for your daughter. If you can ignite that, you will start to shift people.*

To confront patriarchy without engaging with men might be a mistake that leaves perpetrators and beneficiaries of patriarchy out of an important conversation involving their power and privilege. More

importantly as well is that women solidify their solidarities. Women have a critical role to play. They should also set boundaries and not sweep things under the carpet. Participants feel that there is a need for alliances, organizations and professional networks that encourage the development and support of females. These networks should provide training, research, networking opportunities and other services and support, both nationally and internationally. Topics such as breaking down barriers for entry into male-dominated networks, expanding business relationships with women-owned enterprises, and creating online portals for women to help promote career opportunities should be included:

***Participant Two:*** *Women sell themselves short. Women need to stick together and be stronger together and stand up for one another too. Sometimes you know women let other women down in many ways. We put each other down because we are not looking at the bigger picture here. We should be trying to understand about one another across culture. We have similar challenges regardless of what race we are... regardless of our background. I think we need to have an openness about things we are experiencing and in our similarity of challenge. We tend to keep things and struggle on our own and because we want to be seen as independent strong woman. There is also beauty in the collective and I think society. I have been involved with a yoga. There is a women group and we have conversations about these topics. I think the conversations about gender discrimination need to feature not only in the organization but in society in general. I think it starts with us, every woman as an individual needs to start changing things you know. We can share our light as strong women in so many ways and it can be purposeful you know.*

***Participant Four:*** *It is about creating networks. I think it is important that women have networks that they engage with because you realise that you are not on your own on the journey. And you know that you kind of have a mentor and that you drive that ecosystem.*

***Participant 2:*** *Things are normalized and it is an issue. We as women have to start understanding ourselves too. I am a very strong advocate of restoring the self. Self-awareness; self-mastery and dealing with things that have hurt us, traumatized us, and reflecting on the self as a woman. Having a firm understanding of who I am because when you do, you are able to have*

*boundaries. When you have them in place, you are able to say no this does not work for me. Be able to recognize and say I do not like the way I was treated. If you have an understanding of yourself.*

The unity of women in struggle against the discrimination of women and engagement with men as allies, or as beneficiaries and perpetrators of patriarchy are central in feminist activism. Men are socialised into patriarchy and that makes it important that de-socialisation takes place. For women to know and understand themselves as victims collectively is also an important starting point in the struggle for the systemic and structural liberation of women.

#### **4.6 General analysis of the findings**

Participants recognized that gender discrimination is now done subtly and not as blatant as it was in the past (refer to the three examples of sexual harassment) and that is what make it difficult for them to engage on it. There is recognition that it is not only caused by men in the workplace but other female leaders are also a source of gender discrimination in the workplace. This is either by choice or it can be as a result of a response forced due to pressure put on them by their own experiences of gender discrimination. They concurred that working in a male dominated environment they constantly have to prove themselves as capable and that they are not treated the same as men. They stay in control by working even harder often to the detriment of their personal lives. They also strongly believe that men are a critical part of the solution and need to be brought on board. Most importantly, they realise that they have a major role to play and need to become active and effective agents of change.

When it comes to impact that gender discrimination is having on them, they recognize the importance of applying an intersectional lens to fully understand their lived experiences. Their experiences of gender discrimination are not just about their gender. They are impacted differently as their experiences differ based on their identities and location so there is no one size fits all solution for them.

What is interesting is that not many spoke about their own agency beyond a few that said that they spoke up when they experienced gender discrimination. They experienced it but almost sound like they felt powerless and they did not know how to respond and felt a sense of helplessness, as they did not believe that they could influence to correct it. They saw acts of gender discrimination as being normalized and the task of undoing it is as beyond them as it is systematic then why should they bother. Salaries are considered confidential information in organisations and there are even policies in prohibiting employees to share or disclose such information with their colleagues. They see this as a barrier to challenging gender pay gap

but they have a strong sense that it exists due to the studies they read and looking at the lifestyles of their male counterparts.

The burning question that this study is seeking to answer which I pose is why do women still experiencing gender discrimination, marginalization and equalities despite centuries of activism, national and international legislation, policy initiatives, education reform, government interventions as well as attempts by various stakeholders to eradicate it. In the literature review section, I have clearly demonstrated through the sighted literature and this is confirmed by the participants through sharing their lived experiences that Modernity, secularism and democracy have not ushered the reign of equality they promised, at least not when it comes to gender ( or for that matter, class or race), Schott, 2018. US feminist Vivian Gornics expressed her despair at the lack of progress and how slowly ( how grudgingly) American cultures has not actually moved over the past hundred years to treat women fairly and address this persisting challenge of gender inequalities. This is not only an American culture. There is evidence from all over the world that confirm that the project of gender equality remains unrealized despite concerted efforts to achieve it.

Based on the lived experiences of the participant, the theoretical framework as well as the literature review it is clear that gender inequalities still persist. These inequalities are deeply rooted in our cultures, in our psyches and politics (Scott, 2018). They are visible and continue to persist through the system of patriarchy, male self-interest, capitalism, misogyny, religion among other societal constructs.

## 5 Chapter Five: Conclusion

The present chapter aims to flesh out the conclusion of the study. For me this study has been an attempt to understand society and my own personal life experience and journey as a black woman. The women that I interviewed as part of this study were not just fellow women and people that work as I do, but they are fellow travelers in the struggle for the liberation of women from systemic and structural patriarchy and sexism.

The burden of the present study has been the paradox of a celebrated democratic Constitution of South Africa and the discrimination of women in South Africa where femicide and other forms of violence against women have become a culture. The discrimination of women is so legally sanctioned and politically condemned and yet remains in place which is a problem that this study is concerned with. Post-apartheid South Africa has over the past years introduced legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms to compel companies and employees to embrace diversity and transformation in the workplace. Although some progress has been made with regard to gender equality, men's powerful position in relation to women has been upheld to a large extent and business remains largely a man's world (The SABPP Women's Report 2017). Women still face a number of barriers and challenges that hinder their advancement and their ability to navigate the workplace. Women's working lives are characterized by high rates of mistreatment throughout their careers in a way that men are not. If anything, amongst many observations, this study has confirmed the claim that the workplace is a man's place and that the world after all might truly be a man's world. Besides the engagement with scholars and theorists, and indulgence in methodology, this study allowed me to talk to women about their condition and experiences in the workplace.

If we have to genuinely address the issue of gender inequalities that are so widespread in our cultures, society and in the workplace, we have to do things differently. We have to try different approaches. I am suggesting the following mechanisms to be deployed in order to empower women and advance gender equality in the workplace and in the society. Women have to play their role in economic, social, political, and environmental areas if countries want to achieve sustainable development.

The one mechanism that participants felt is critical for women to be empowered to become agents of change so that they can trouble gender discrimination in the workplace. Empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important" (Page and Czuba, 1999). The issue of discrimination, marginalization and inequalities requires them to gain power they can use to act on societal norms that violates their human rights. They must demand their spaces and insist that their voices should be heard. They must sensitize and educate those excluding them whenever they feel that their rights are being

violated. The system of patriarchy is deeply rooted in all institutions and will not correct itself. If women are not empowered to recognize it, know how to trouble it ( starting with speaking up), gender inequalities will persist. Thus, women cannot continue to keep quiet when they see or experience discriminatory acts in the workplace and think that it will go away. Women cannot keep quiet and sweep cases of sexual harassment under the carpet and hope they will go away. This is a role they will need to play in the workplace and in the society as a whole. They will need to use opportunities that exist and the role that society assigned to them to influence positively. They will have to use the structures that created and institutionalise gender inequalities to reverse this phenomenon and dismantle them.

In engaging with women using Decoloniality as a theory and the qualitative methodology as an analytical tool, this study became real as a study in Critical Diversity Literacy that seeks to negate power at its toxicity. The workplace is a critical arena for producing change in gender relations at work and in society at large. Women need to utilize it and leverage the opportunities that exist to remediate gender inequalities and influence change.

The UN Women has called on companies to endorse and adopt the seven Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs) that offer guidance to business on how to promote gender equality and women empowerment in the workplace (UN Women, Equality Means Business Report). There is recognition that corporates are critical stakeholders and have a responsibility to end gender discrimination. These principles offer guidance on how organizations can promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, market place and community. Companies need to move beyond declaring their good intentions and walk alongside women to effectively eradicate gender discrimination by implementing these principles. They offer suggested actions, supporting tools and resources signatories can access to implement their commitments.

1. **Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.** Leaders cannot delegate the role of leading gender equality and women's empowerment to HR or Diversity and inclusion functions. They have to make gender equality a top priority and lead by example. Leadership team has to align, develop a compelling business case and ensure that everyone in the organization fully understand the gender equality business for their organization. Leaders have to ensure that company-wide goals are established with clear targets and make managers accountable for results against those goals. Lack of leadership support, their involvement and role modelling has stalled efforts of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace. If leaders can effectively play their role, gender equality will become a reality.
2. **Treat all women and men fairly at work.** This is about upholding international human rights principles. Companies that adopt these principles are expected to identify and remove all forms of gender-based discrimination in their policies, strategies, culture and practices as part of their

commitment. Discriminatory practices such as gender pay gap and gender stereotypes must be addressed.

3. **Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.** When committing to these principles, companies are expected to establish policies and procedures preventing all forms of violence and sexual harassment. They commit to implementing practices that respect women and men workers' rights to equal access to health insurance, provide safe working conditions, protect them from exposure to hazardous materials and address women's safety and security concerns.
4. **Promote education, training and professional development for women.** Signatories are expected to develop and implement effective education and training programmes to support women's career advancement. They need to invest in policies and programmes that will open avenues for women's advancement at all levels and across all business areas, encourage women to enter nontraditional job fields and revenue generating roles. Most importantly, they are encouraged to conduct unconscious bias training and awareness raising on the corporate gender equality policies and action plans.
5. **Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.** This principle requires signatories to establish supplier diversity programmes that actively seek to expand business relationships with women owned enterprises. They are expected to remove harmful gender-based stereotypes in all the media and advertising they do so that they do not perpetuate discriminatory practices against women and girls. Women and men have to be depicted as empowered actors with progressive, intelligent and multi-dimensional personalities.
6. **Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.** This principle encourages companies to become advocates of gender equality in communities through investing in community development programmes that supports women and girls. It is critical that they work with community stakeholders to eliminate discrimination and exploitation against women and girls and open opportunities for them.
7. **Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.** What gets measured gets done. Signatories are encouraged to be transparent and accountable when implementing their gender equality and women's empowerment commitments. They are expected to develop measuring and reporting mechanisms to monitor and track performance and progress they are making on their commitments. Collecting, analysing and using gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data is encouraged in order to understand and address all forms of gender discrimination. Companies are encouraged to share their stories so that they can inspire more companies join the WEPs network of companies and advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Countless initiatives can be taken by business to bring these UN Women Empowerment Principles to life. These include developing and heightening oversight of women empowerment policies and procedures

though a fulltime diversity manager; Promotion of succession planning; performance evaluation processes; Special recruitment of women to managerial jobs; and Mentoring programs and diversity taskforces. Organizational initiatives that engage managers as leaders of change should also be initiated, as they can be more effective. Leaders play a crucial role in creating this desired change by virtue of their positional power so they should champion this course and create enabling environment for employees. Organization of work that emphasize teamwork and networking should be encouraged as it can break traditional sex segregation and women can benefit from it. Kelly, Moen, and Tranby (2011) have shown that in results-oriented work environments, where teamwork is emphasised, parents experience an improved work-family fit and wellbeing, primarily due to schedule control.

That we must “be the change you want to see in the world” is an aphorism of Mahatma Gandhi. The aphorism means a lot to the oppressed community groups such as women. It also means a lot to decolonial activists and students of Critical Diversity Literacy that need to embody and live the ideas of liberation that they want to advance. The temptation for most women is to seek accommodation and find comfort zone within structures of power instead of laboring for change. There is power in numbers to influence change so women need to play a role to start a change chain reaction. This starts with each and every individual in an effort to reduce and resist it. They cannot be passive actors given the severity of this problem and the power they have to effect change. Kanter’s (1977) classic theory on power in numbers is perhaps the only attempt to theorize women’s agency. Women cannot see themselves or be treated as passive actors. They need to use the insights and tools that have proved to be successful in the remediation and producing change in their effort to trouble gender discrimination in the workplace. Women should use their positions effectively (as mothers, sisters, daughters) and take their activism outside the organization as well. It is, for instance, a real opportunity that women are a majority in South Africa. That majority should be translated to the political stamina that can cause change that matters.

Those few women that are in management positions should actively advocate and implement gender integration (mainstream) in their environments and organisation as a whole. Women must use their discretion in the positions they hold to advance women in management. They should be vocal and influence the reduction of gender pay gaps and not wait for men or other manages to start the conversation. They should advocate for gender diversity programmes to be implemented in a sustainable way. They need to play an active role in the design of those programmes so that they are effective and produce the desired changes.

The feminization of Human Resources (HR) management has also provided an opportunity (which women have not fully leveraged in my view) to challenge and dismantle policies, structures and procedures that creates gender inequalities in the workplace. They should change the agenda of HR management toward programs addressing workers’ work-family needs, such as introducing dependent care assistance and

programs for schedule control and parental leaves. They should actively promote cultural changes in organizations that challenge existing and entrenched male norms that dictate how things are done in organisations.

All women should be critically gender diversity literate so that they are able to identify all forms of gender discrimination (even the subtle ones) and know how to respond to them in any situation they find themselves in. Women should actively find opportunities to influence reforms in all the spaces they find themselves including at home (in how the children are raised and socialized) and in communities they live.

Educating women on their discrimination and need for liberation should take the shape of a ‘pedagogy of the oppressed,’ (Freire, 1993). This education should not wait for girls to reach university level and the Masters level that I have arrived at. It should start at home and in pre-school. And not only women should be educated but also boys and men. Social Justice should be taught in schools as a subject.

I strongly believe that men should be engaged as allies to advance gender equality. Effectively engaging men as part of broader, intersectional approaches to creating more inclusive workplaces will give businesses the opportunity to tackle entrenched power relations and create long-term, systemic change. Lately we are seeing initiatives across the world that mobilises men as champions for gender equality using campaigns like the United Nation’s [#HeforShe](#) solidarity movement, which has mobilized 2 million men, and the [MenCare global fatherhood campaign](#), which aims to accelerate men’s uptake of caring roles. More focus should be on how business can contribute towards shifting individual behaviour, commit to an inclusive organisation and using their external influence to shape new social norms.

It should be recognized and acknowledged that many men support gender equality but some may feel threatened by it or even actively oppose it. Research by the US nonprofit Catalyst suggests three reasons why some men may not engage with the issue: 1) “apathy,” or feeling like gender equality isn’t business-critical, 2) “ignorance,” or the perception that gender bias doesn’t exist in the workplace, and 3) “fear,” of saying the wrong thing or losing out. Business can address these challenges through a combination of different programmes such as unconscious bias training to reduce apathy by raising awareness about the business case for gender equality; reciprocal mentoring programmes to make employees understand inequalities they might not otherwise see and build a culture that reward inclusive behaviour to help build confidence and help men overcome fear they might have. Creating space for open conversations through these initiatives will allow employees to reflect on their own personal reasons for engaging with gender equality and the role they can play to advance it positively. Workshops focused on exploring men’s privilege and power needs to be facilitated as they will effectively increase employees’ understanding and awareness of gender bias, and help change attitudes.

Further research needs to be done on the impact of change management on making gender equality efforts successful. I feel that initiatives taken by various stakeholders to eliminate gender discrimination are good but more can be done to make them more effective. There should be increased collaboration amongst stakeholders (i.e. government, corporates, civil society organisations, global institutions) leverage resources available to influence change sustainably. The same networks and social systems that are used to reinforce patriarchy should be infiltrated by decolonial critical diversity consciousness for the liberation of women. I would like to deepen and expand the efforts of this study at such a level as a doctoral study and such studies as for publications in books, journal papers and other media of large-scale circulation and communication.

### **Budget:**

No expenses were incurred as the case study focuses on participants based in one local location in Johannesburg. Some of the interviews were done telephonically and others were done face to face with no additional costs incurred.

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**Annexure A: Consent Form**

Gender Discrimination in the workplace research project

Researcher: Masechaba Tekana

Consent to take part in research

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that participation involves me being interviewed and participating in a facilitated workshop with other research participants.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.

This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview, which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the Master's Thesis final report.

I understand that if I inform the researcher that I or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in the researcher's password protected computer until the exam board has confirmed the results of the researchers thesis.

I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the board assessment of the researcher's thesis.

I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

*Signature of research participant*

-----

Signature of research participant

-----

Date

*Signature of researcher*

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

-----

Signature of researcher

-----

Date

**Annexure B: Interview sheet**

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

Kindly respond to all questions

The interview schedule consists of five sections.

Mark with an “X” where relevant

NB: All information gathered will be kept confidential.

**SECTION 1: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

<b>Age</b>		<input type="text"/>
<b>Race</b>		<input type="text"/>
<b>Educational level</b>	Grade 12	<input type="text"/>
	College	<input type="text"/>
	University	<input type="text"/>
	Other, speci	<input type="text"/>
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	<input type="text"/>
	Married	<input type="text"/>
	Never marri	<input type="text"/>
	Divorced	<input type="text"/>
	Widowed	<input type="text"/>
	Other, speci	<input type="text"/>
<b>Level of position</b>	MP	<input type="text"/>
	P	<input type="text"/>
	VP	<input type="text"/>
	AVP	<input type="text"/>

## SECTION 2: Interview Questions:

What forms of gender discrimination do women experience in the workplace?	Do you think gender inequality exists in the workplace and do you think that women are treated fairly in the workplace? Gender discrimination comes in many forms- What are the various forms of Gender discrimination that exist in the work place? What types of gender-based discrimination are most common? What are the most common stereotypes you hear about women? What are the possible causes of gender discrimination in the workplace problem? Is gender equality a concern for men? At your workplace, do you feel that men and women are treated equally
What are the lived experiences of gender discrimination for women in the workplace?	Have you ever experienced gender inequality/gender discrimination in the workplace? What problems / challenges have you experienced because of your gender in the workplace: Do you feel you are treated equally within the workplace by your employer compared with male colleagues
How does gender discrimination affect women in the workplace?	How does gender discrimination in the workplace affect/impact you personally and how you show at work? What are the implications of gender discrimination in the workplace?
What mechanisms can be adopted by women to empower themselves to be able to take action against gender discrimination at work?	How do you think these inequalities could be improved? What have you found to be the most effective way to address gender issues in a workplace? What do you recommend for women to do in order to resist gender discrimination in the workplace? How do we encourage the development of a work environment that is conducive to not only the proper treatment of women, but also a place where they are given the opportunity to excel? What are some steps that companies/employers could take to equal out the ground and prevent gender inequality?