

Young Black Women's Experiences of Negotiating Dominant Cultures in Corporate South Africa

Mpho Makube

0316301E

Supervised by Prof. Jill Bradbury



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Declaration:

I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at the University of the Witwatersrand or any other university.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mpho Mamokgethi Makube', followed by a period.

Mpho Mamokgethi Makube

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Abstract

This study was interested in understanding how young Black African women, through their subjective experiences and the stories they tell about themselves have developed particular (professional) identities and how they negotiate or resist the raced, gendered and class identities. It also aimed to understand their experiences of marginalisation in the corporate/private sector. A qualitative study was conducted where five Black African women between the ages of 25 and 40 from Johannesburg, South Africa, participated in narrative interviews. An adaptation of Wengraf's (2011) Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) as well as thematic analysis were used to understand the stories of the women's career journeys. The key findings of the study were that assimilating the values and norms of the dominant class during their schooling years facilitated their transition into tertiary institutions and the workplace. During the recruitment process and once employed, participants felt the assimilative pressure to conform to the dominant culture or risk being excluded or unemployed. Internships and graduate programmes were seen as crucial stepping stones into the workplace. Participants oscillated between feelings of belonging and alienation throughout their career journeys but reported that having supportive managers increased their sense of inclusion and belonging. They also experienced a sense of precarity due to the gendered wage gap and a pervasive sense of job insecurity. There is a need for organisations to understand how women are differently included in the workplace, to provide greater mentorship to those who are starting out, and to have an appreciation of the subtle ways in which the dominant culture works to leave some young women behind.

Key words: Alienation, belonging, Black African women, corporate sector, gender, marginalisation, microaggression, precarity, race, young professionals

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Chapter 1 – Introduction, Rationale and Research Aim

1.1 Introduction – Education and Work Context

Thirty years following the end of legalised apartheid many Black women are still socially and economically disempowered owing largely to the remnants of colonialism and apartheid's investment in blatant discriminatory policies that are still being deeply felt in all spheres of post-apartheid South Africa. In particular, there are legacy effects of the differential education systems for South Africans of different racial groups which was an important mechanism that the apartheid government used to limit Black people's access to educational and economic opportunities.

The Bantu Education Act, passed in 1953 by the apartheid government, introduced inferior education for Black children in schools and later the Extension of University Education Act of 1959 restricted Black students' entry into the predominantly White universities and paved the way for tertiary institutions that were separated according to race and ethnicity (Khunou, 2015; Soudien, 2008; Wilson, 2011). These acts legitimized and elevated English and Afrikaans as the languages of power and dominance and resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous African languages. Alexander (2013) highlights the importance of languages as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) or assets that can be used to gain educational qualifications that are then converted into economic capital (employment and salaries). Thus, the barriers to entry into well-resourced and elite institutions had the effect of limiting the socioeconomic opportunities of many Black children and ensured that they would grow up to occupy the lowest positions in a racist capitalist political economy (Alexander, 2013; Wilson, 2011).

Schooling thus mirrored, and reinscribed for future generations, the structural conditions of workplaces that were highly raced and gendered. Patriarchal policies ensured that White men

(‘breadwinners’) received higher ‘civilised’ wages than Black men, while women were largely excluded from participating in the labour market because of the belief that they were the home makers. The most dangerous, unskilled and menial jobs were reserved for the majority of Black African men, and Black African women were mostly employed as domestic workers in urban areas. Only a few Black men and women were permitted to train and work as lawyers, doctors, dentists, teachers and social workers, and Black professionals and entrepreneurs who set up their own establishments were prohibited from renting certain premises in urban areas and from having White clients (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Espi et al., 2019; Mosomi, 2019; Wilson, 2011). Even though the deracialisation of educational institutions in the democratic dispensation has increased Black people’s educational and economic opportunities (Southall, 2014), the negative impact of the apartheid government’s education policies are still being felt by many and Black African children are still being socialised into normalising the ‘cheap black labour’ trope (Motimele, 2019, p.208). However, the democratic government has introduced policies and laws to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to reduce the gross levels of inequality.

The Employment Equity Act of 1998 (EEA) which aims to eliminate the racial and gender inequality that characterised the apartheid era, and the National Policy for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality have since been introduced to ensure that all forms of discrimination against women in the public sphere are eliminated (Boninelli, 2015; Coetzee, 2017; Espi et al., 2019). However, women continue to experience little more than artificial integration in terms of gender equality and exist in ‘crooked rooms’ where men are still the leaders and decision makers and where Black African women, in particular, continue to be marginalised in certain work spaces (Maluleke, 2020; Segalo, 2015). According to statistics South Africa South Africa (www.statssa.gov.za) women are the majority demographic (31.9 million of 62 million) and make up 51.5% of the population, their labour force

participation rate stood at 54.3% compared to 64.9% of men in quarter two of 2023. According to the Inequality Trends Report women who are employed earn approximately 30% less than their male colleagues and White men are the top earners compared to all other population groups (Black African, Coloured, Indian/Asian) (Maluleke, 2019). According to the quarterly labour force's (Q1: 2024) official unemployment rate, Black African women remained the most economically vulnerable with an unemployment rate of 39.2% compared to 23.5% for Coloured women, 19.0% of Indian women and 9.7% for White women and Espi et al.'s (2019) study found that there are less than 1% of Black women in executive positions in data analysed for 2015 and 2016.

1.2 Rationale

South African women's participation in the workforce has increased in post-apartheid South Africa owing to the legislation and implementation of various anti-discrimination policies such as the Employment Equity Act of 1998 (Espi et al., 2019; Mosomi, 2019). Despite this improvement, however, gender discrimination persists. Women not only experience overt forms of discrimination in the gender wage gap and the gendered segregation of labour, but also through subtler less visible forms of marginalisation such as microaggressions, bullying and sexual harassment (Van De Griend & Hilfinger Messias, 2014).

The dominant liberal feminist narratives of White women that focus on gender as an analytical lens for understanding workplace discrimination continue to be privileged in organisational research and not enough attention has been given to the intersections of race, class and gender for understanding the diverse experiences of all women (Acker, 2009; Holvino, 2010; Flores Garrido, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Although Black women and other women of colour globally predominate in the junior to middle management and lower paid positions in the

workplace, research has tended to focus on exceptional and seasoned women who occupy senior and executive management positions and not enough attention has been given to women who occupy the lower echelons of organisations (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Holvino, 2010; Lawthom, 1999).

It is estimated that approximately 42% of South African households are headed by single women who are raising children and taking care of extended family members and that the burden of care falls disproportionately on women aged between 18-45 years old. Therefore, because young Black African women earn the least of all racial and gender categories, wage discrimination makes them more vulnerable to poverty (Mosomi, 2019; Nomvele, 2021). Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley (2019) also indicate that young-adult middle class Black African professionals between the ages of 20 and 40 typically have the added responsibility of Black tax (intra-family financial support) which reduces their ability to save and invest. Thus their emerging middle class position is precarious (Khunou, 2015; Khunou et al., 2020).

Southall (2014) observes that the levels of intra-racial inequality between the Black African upper-class (senior civil servants in the public sector, and executives and senior managers in the corporate sector), and Black African middle-class (middle managers and Black African professionals in the private and public sectors) has been increasing in the democratic dispensation. South Africa's income inequality, which is among the highest in the world, has resulted in a thin nascent middle class that is mostly asset poor and that is comprised of 19.4% of individuals in the emerging middle class category who are vulnerable of falling to poverty from one year to the next. Therefore, the differences in wages between men and women and between the different racial categories, is a great driver of inequality that curtails the life possibilities and quality of life of young Black African women who are at the start of their careers (Leibbrandt, 2021). The failure to take these factors into

consideration when formulating solutions to organisational practices risks nullifying the effectiveness of diversity and anti-discrimination initiatives in the workplace.

1.3 Research Aim

The purpose of this study was to understand young Black African¹ women professionals' experiences of marginalisation in corporate South Africa and was interested in understanding how young Black African women, through their subjective experiences and the stories they tell about themselves have developed particular (professional) identities and how they negotiate or resist the raced, gendered and class identities.

This introductory chapter is followed by examining the literature reviewed and presenting the theoretical framework of the study. This will then be followed by the methods chapter. The analysis of the data is then presented in two chapters. First, a vertical analysis is presented of two participants' narratives of experience, followed by a deductive approach to thematic analysis across all participants, utilising Bourdieu's theory to frame the analysis. Finally, the conclusion chapter will be presented.

¹ This study will be focusing on the experiences of Black African women and will refer to them as such in the rest of the paper for clarity purposes. The term Black when used on its own, will be to indicate that it includes people classified as African, Coloured and Indian/Asian as stipulated in the Employment Equity Act of South Africa.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The literature review presents studies that have been conducted to understand the overt and subtle nature of discrimination and marginalisation in the corporate sector as well as Black African women's experiences of negotiating their identities in dominant organisational cultures. The experiences of women in the global North and then those of young Black/African American women in the corporate sector in United States of America (U.S.A.) will be presented first. This will be followed by an examination of Black African women's experiences of marginalisation in corporate South Africa. The experiences of a young Black African professional who has written a story about her time at a South African bank will then be presented. Finally, additional barriers that prevent young women from being empowered and reaching their full potential will be examined.

2.2 Women's Experiences of Discrimination and Marginalisation in Corporate America and Europe

While there has been an increase in the number of women attaining tertiary education and entering workplaces that were previously reserved for White males globally, only a few have broken the 'glass ceiling' and are occupying the top echelons of corporate organisations owing largely to the persistent gender wage gap and the gendered segregation of occupations. Even more concerning is that the gender wage gap seems to widen for women who have advanced degrees compared to women who are less educated (Acker, 2009; Holvino, 2010; Kim & Carter, 2016). In addition to the discrimination that they face with regards to wages and segregated occupations, women sometimes encounter pushback from their male and female colleagues when they avail themselves for career advancement opportunities.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has been used by some researchers to explain the relative discrimination that women encounter in the workplace. According to this theory people tend to align themselves with groups with which they share a common social identity (gender and/or race) and a sense of belonging (in-group), and to distance themselves from people who are different from them (out-groups) in one way or another. Prejudice and discrimination are seen to stem from people's membership in a particular group (Derks et al., 2016; Kim & Carter, 2016). In the U.S.A. Kim and Carter (2016) state that some men experience social identity threat (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), where they feel threatened by women advancing in their careers, particularly those who hold sexist views about a woman's place being in the home, and state that this could trigger social and sexual harassment behaviours in men as a response to the perceived threat to their male identity. This controlling behaviour psychologically enhances men's identities and performance in the workplace as they attempt to re-assert their power. This may lead to some women declining offers for promotions and discourage them from pursuing other career advancement opportunities if they feel these would expose them to increased harassment.

Further, (or In addition,) Derks et al.'s (2016) European study examined the "queen bee phenomenon"; where some senior and executive women tend to be less supportive of younger women's careers and therefore, perhaps often unconsciously, reproduce and entrench existing gender hierarchies. They argue that the queen bee phenomenon occurs through a gradual process where women assimilate into male dominated organisations and begin to internalise negative stereotypes about women in the workplace, such as not being tough, committed or ambitious enough. In seeking to progress in their careers, senior and executive women then distance themselves from younger women at the start of their careers, who are seen as not possessing the necessary characteristics required to succeed in a male-led organisation because it threatens their

own identity. Derks et al. (2016) argue that these women tend to be less supportive of gender diversity initiatives and tend to overlook women in junior and middle management positions in favour of promoting men.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, contemporary critical approaches to understanding psychology de-emphasize cognition and personality-based explanations such as those employed in the SIT, and focus more on how language and power influence how individuals and groups identify or position themselves in relation to others and how they are perceived by others. Intersectional identity approaches also view social identities as multidimensional and contextual rather than unidimensional and universal as posited by the SIT (Bowleg, 2017).

Clance and Imes (1978) carried out a study with 150 highly successful White middle-to-upper class women between the ages of 20 and 45 at higher educational institutions and various working environments to examine the phenomenon that has popularly come to be known as the 'imposter syndrome', which occurs when high achieving women doubt their abilities and come to believe that they are not intelligent despite evidence to the contrary. These women are said to have an underlying fear that others will find out that they are intellectual frauds. One of the main root cause of the imposter syndrome, which is said to occur less frequently in men, is thought to stem from the societal stereotype that views women as less intelligent than men that women internalise from a young age. It is further said that because of the imposter phenomenon, women may deliberately avoid success for a fear of rejection or being considered less feminine.

Over the years, this phenomenon has gained universal momentum and has been used to explain why women in general are less successful in their careers than their male counterparts. However, Tulshyan and Burey (2021) argue that the imposter syndrome pathologizes women, particularly women of colour and those of different gender identities who were not included in the

original study. They argue that context is important and rather than blaming and trying to fix individuals, organisation should rather focus on finding solutions for the systemic bias and racism that causes women to feel marginalised, disillusioned and excluded in institutions and corporations that are still largely dominated by 'old boys clubs'. They argue that organisations need to foster an environment where different ways of being and styles of leadership, other than those that are "Eurocentric, masculine, and heteronormative" (n.p.) can thrive.

According to Essed's (2012) concept of "cultural cloning", women employees who do not perform or embody professionalism, characterised by Western and masculine values of competence, rationality, confidence, detachment and control, would be less likely to be considered for promotions. Cultural cloning defined as, "choosing automatically for likeness" (2012, p.135) is usually employed by senior and executive members in the name of maintaining meritocracy, productivity and efficiency. This, according to Essed, explains how White males in particular and a few women approximating male norms tend to be privileged for senior/executive positions. She argues that this is how racial and gendered inequalities are sustained in White male dominated institutions (Essed, 2002; Essed, 2012). Young Black American professionals' experiences of negotiating identity and resisting dominant cultures will now be examined.

2.3 Young Black Women's Experiences of Identity Negotiation and Resisting Dominant Cultures in Corporate America

Dickens and Chavez (2018) conducted a study exploring the costs and benefits of shifting identities in Black/African American women who were just beginning their career journeys and exploring their intersectional identities in predominantly White U.S.A. workplaces. Overall, they found that their participants had mixed feelings with regards to negotiating their identities. On the

one hand, they viewed identity shifting (code-switching or behavioural change) as crucial for their early career development process and for building professional relationships. Refusing to assimilate was viewed as a risky career strategy that could potentially end a career before it even starts. They also felt that they could use their marginal status to their advantage by developing a 'double consciousness' that could help them to navigate the workplace. Du Bois (2007) defines double consciousness as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p.8). Du Bois argued that, although the gaze of the other may be wounding, having a double consciousness could paradoxically be seen as a 'gift' that allows Black people to have an awareness ('second sight') of how racializing social practices operate, and that this knowledge can be used to resist and challenge racism.

Dickens and Chavez (2018) state that there are, however, also costs to this process of identity shifting: 1) it could force one to remain silent about or turn a blind eye to discriminatory workplace practices; 2) could leave one feeling inauthentic; 3) could lead to stress due to the inability to counteract negative racial stereotypes about Black women being overly sexualised, angry and aggressive; 4) pressurise one into performing the 'model black citizen' for the Black community and 5) could create cognitive dissonance because of holding contradictory beliefs and values about how to behave in a professional environment. Dickens and Chavez (2018) and Davis (2018) argue that because identity shifting can deplete psychological resources, this could reduce overall wellbeing and work performance. It is therefore crucial for organisations to address the subtle forms of marginalising practices and microaggressions and not to leave it up to young black professionals to modify their behaviours on their own.

In his study investigating how young Black Canadian professionals resisted dominant cultural narratives in the workplace, Hasford (2016), found that they employed “reframing” and “transcendence” strategies that involved deconstructing and challenging racism and refusing to accept and internalise negative stereotypes (pp.166-167). Some also saw quitting as a valid form of resistance, particularly when subjected to unfair and condescending treatment.

Boulton (2016) conducted focus groups with majority Black women interns at an advertising agency based in New York to understand how they perceived racial inequality and negotiated their identities in a White male dominated industry. One of the key finding was that the interns expressed ambivalence about seeking mentorship from more senior Black employees at their agency because they felt that displaying Black solidarity could contribute to further marginalisation. As a White male researcher, Boulton (2016) observed that this was a career limiting strategy for Black professionals, since informal networks are crucial for career advancement and are what White professionals use greatly to their advantage. However, Puwar (2004) states that because Black professionals are often subjected to intense forms of surveillance, any display of solidarity among them is often viewed with suspicion. Black professionals may therefore distance themselves from each other for fear of appearing to be creating divisions and of being labelled ‘troublemakers’ or ‘extremists’. Many of these research findings from studies in the global North resonate with experiences in the South African context.

2.4 Black Women’s Experiences of Marginalisation and Identity Negotiation in Corporate South

Africa

Although statistically, White people in South Africa are in the minority, Canham and Maier (2018) state that White men and women still benefit more than other race groups from structural

privilege. In their study exploring the raced, classes and gendered coalitions between Black and White women bankers, Canham and Maier observed that “solidarity between Black women and White women is virtually absent”, that “their relationship is characterised by suspicion, bitterness and relational distance” (2018, p.333), and that this is reflective of a historical legacy that did not allow women from different racial and class groups to form a united front when fighting for gender equality during apartheid.

Jaga et al. (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 Black African mothers who had academic degrees and were employed as professionals at the time of their study. They observed that these women internalised and adjusted their behaviour to the dominant culture of their organisations. The main sentiment expressed by the participants in this study was that they found the working environment to be infantilizing and paternalistic; they described a ‘face-time’ culture that required them to have their ‘bums-on-their-seats’ and be seen to be visibly busy all the time, and stated that leaving early was often frowned upon. Instead of being given the autonomy to manage their work in a way that would accommodate personal and family commitments, they described being micromanaged. The women expressed feeling undermined despite having attained high levels of education, such as Master’s degrees, and they stated that a lot of their energy was consumed by trying to constantly prove their worth to their White and male colleagues. This is a similar observation made by Canham and Williams (2017) whose Black senior managers and executive participants used “words like taxing, belittling, undermining and disempowering” to describe the effects that racism has on their work experiences (p. 31).

The participants in Jaga et al.’s (2018) study felt they were being accommodated only in so far as they assimilated to the male norm rather than fully integrated. Some viewed diversity and inclusion programmes as bringing imported solutions rather than ones tailored for the South African

context, and of having limited value. However, other participants felt that women empowerment initiatives driven by feminists have been successful and that this partly explained why Black women are now seen as the new breadwinners and so many Black men, especially in the townships, are unemployed. Acker (2009) argues, however, that corporate organisations sometimes co-opt progressive notions of 'empowerment' by removing middle management and shifting decision-making responsibilities to lower level employees ('empowering junior employees'), without increasing their salaries and at the same time decreasing their chances of promotion into senior management positions. Similarly, many male employees are being replaced by women but at reduced salaries, indicating that sometimes 'women empowerment' is not empowerment at all, but a form of exploitation. Flores Garrido (2020; 2021) similarly argues that the participation of women in the workplace does not necessarily translate into them being empowered and gaining independence because jobs are becoming increasingly precarious and women do not always have access to workers' rights, just payment and are rarely protected from their employers' power abuses.

In their study of Black professionals' middle class experiences of racism and racialisation in corporate South Africa, Canham and Williams (2017) observed that Black professionals (men and women) are not only subjected to the racism that comes from White people ("white gaze") but that of the "Black gaze". Black professionals police one another's behaviour and, as a result, people feel pressured to act and to speak in ways that are considered 'authentically Black' in order to gain acceptance from their Black colleagues and to avoid being perceived as selling out to Whiteness or as distancing themselves from the Black working-class. Canham and Williams state that "language and accent are key markers of particular performances of Blackness – proper Blacks speak 'Black'

languages and competent Blacks speak English with White accents” (2017; p.31). Canham and Williams (2017) observed that, as the first-generation Black middle class, their participants were “perceived as a threat to Black solidarity, which in its current form expects conformity” (2017; p.41). This study highlights that middle class Black professionals on the margins of privilege are experiencing and negotiating their identities in interesting and conflicting ways, and that some are challenging essentialised notions of Blackness. These contradictions and complexities are highlighted in Bolani’s (2018) autobiography, in which she shares her personal experience of being a young Black African professional in corporate South Africa.

In her book titled, *We Are The One’s We Need: The War on Black Professionals in Corporate South Africa*, Sihle Bolani (2018) shares her in-depth experience and observations of racism, sexism, classism at a South African Bank. One of the main issues that she highlights is that of the poor effort being made by corporations to retain high performing Black professionals and young Black women professionals in particular. She states that the ‘corporate war’ against Black professionals is maintained primarily through instilling fear and threatening the livelihoods of those who dare speak truth to power and challenge racist and sexist work practices, and by exercising the ultimate abuse of power through initiating the constructive dismissal of ‘problem’ employees. She observes that other key strategies that corporates use to oppress Black professionals include maintaining secrecy around salary structures and promoting only a few black professionals to the highest levels of the organisation, thus preserving the idea of scarcity of positions at the top which then leads to fierce competitive behaviour among Black professionals at the lower end of the corporate hierarchy.

Bolani (2018) opines that some Black executives and human resources (HR) professionals collude with those in power and often turn a blind eye to the injustices and marginalisation of young

Black professionals and young Black women in particular. When she was experiencing racism and victimisation at the hands of her manager and other colleagues, none of the five Black executives that she repeatedly reached out to for help made any effort to assist her. She notes that, in contrast, White professionals tend to uplift and protect each other and that is how they are able to achieve high levels of success and still maintain their dominance. She argues that corporates in general have a tendency of gaslighting employees who raise grievances by telling them that they are imagining things and need to try harder to fit in.

Edmondson Bell and Nkomo (2003) observe that in an effort to appear diverse, organisations often give Black women high visibility positions for public relations (PR) purposes but without providing them with the necessary support for them to succeed in these positions. So these token positions end up benefitting the organisation and not the women who are often perceived as being nothing more than ‘affirmative action cover girls’ who were hired or promoted for their race and not for their abilities. Therefore, it is possible that Black women in senior positions also feel constrained in their efforts to support more junior women because of the lack of organisational support with which they themselves have to contend. Acker (2009), Essed (1991) and Puwar (2004) also echo some of Bolani’s observations by stating that the greatest obstacle to transformative change in many institutions is the denial of systemic racism and inequalities that have become legitimised and normalised through various forms of control and enforced compliance of employees. Puwar observes that women “who are considered to be too vocal on gender issues may be labelled as boisterous, aggressive and too vocal” (2004, p.154).

2.5 Additional Barriers that Prevent Black Women from Reaching their Full Potential

Several scholars and researchers such as Davis (1983) and Collins (2000) have argued that Black women in particular have always been part of the working class. Davis (1983) observed that unlike their white counterparts, Black American women never had the luxury of staying home to raise their children during slavery in the U.S. because they and their Black male counterparts were treated equally and were expected to perform the same back breaking work from the crack of dawn until late into the night in the slave plantations and some even gave birth on the fields and were expected to immediately return to work because they were rarely afforded time to rest by their slave masters. As many of them migrated into domestic work after slavery was abolished, they continued to endure hard labour and long working hours for little to no pay. Some were live in helpers which meant they were on standby 24 hours a day to attend to their employer's needs (Collins, 2000). Similarly in South Africa, the migrant labour system introduced during apartheid, saw many Black African women in South Africa being left with the responsibility of heading up their homes while their husbands worked in the mines, while simultaneously taking care of the needs of White families as domestic workers (Wilson, 2011). Due to this legacy of them of being capable of performing hard labour, Black African women are often regarded as being more masculine than their White women counterparts and are seen as being more than capable of enduring strenuous work for little or to no pay (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1983).

Black women face numerous other obstacles throughout their life span that threaten their chances of reaching their full potential, such as being deliberately marked down or poorly graded during their schooling years (Eddo – Lodge, 2017; Essed, 1991); struggling to fit in and struggling to pay their tuition in institutions of higher learning (Swartz et al., 2018; Webb, 2020); and being penalised, like other women, for being mothers in workplaces dominated by men (Bosch, 2015;

2017; Williams, 2014). Other barriers that also have a negative impact on Black women's ability to access economic opportunities and that minimize their chances of upward mobility in the workplace such as biased psychometric testing, the lack of accountability for diversity programs and transparency surrounding salaries, will be briefly expanded on.

From their research conducted in the U.S.A. Dobbin and Kalev (2016) found that mandatory diversity training targeting managerial bias, psychometric and hiring tests, performance ratings and legalistic grievance procedures did not contribute to making workplaces more diverse. When it comes to hiring procedures, they found that managers made strangers and minorities take particular tests but exempted White applicants from doing so. On the positive side, they found that the participation and mobility of women and minorities was increased by targeted college recruitment programs with the involvement of senior managers, involving executives with mentoring women and minorities, and also making self-managed teams and special task forces accountable for ensuring that their teams are more inclusive and diverse.

In South Africa, Milner et al. (2013) conducted a review of the research on psychological assessments and found that while administrators of the tests did their best to ensure that the tests are "valid, reliable, fairly applied and not biased against any employee" (p.500) as required by the Employment Equity Act, these tests are not designed to ensure that there is redress and transformation in post-apartheid organisations and may thus still be culturally biased and contribute to maintaining a racist agenda.

Castilla (2015) argues though that even with affirmative action and diversity policies in place, companies can still be found to have a pay gap that negatively affects women and minorities. His study in the U.S.A proved that increasing transparency surrounding pay data and having greater accountability from senior managers regarding how they pay their employees helped to expose and

reduce unfair pay disparities. He argues that decision makers tend to make fair decisions when they believe that they will be held accountable.

2.6 Summary of Empirical Studies

The literature reviewed highlights that while globally and locally there has been some progress in terms of women's access to education and participation in the workplace, only a few women have managed to break through the very senior and executive levels of White male dominated organisations. For Black women, the obstacles to career progress are compounded by racism and racialised constructions of the 'ideal' professional identity. Acker (2009) observes that the metaphor of the 'glass ceiling' is inaccurate because women face obstacles at each and every level in the racialised and gendered corporate hierarchy.

The general sentiment among Black American and Black (South) African women was that, for the most part, diversity and inclusion programmes are ineffective because they are not genuinely designed with them in mind. Women negotiated their professional identities in ambivalent ways. On the one hand, they felt that assimilating to a dominant culture was crucial for their career success and sense of belonging, but that this assimilative pressure sometimes left them feeling alienated from their authentic selves and from other Black colleagues. There are several debates regarding what being authentic means. More (2017) suggests that in the context of an oppressive environment, authenticity may be understood as the process of recovery from an alienated self through self-affirmation and it also means having the freedom to choose one's possibilities with a given situation.

Although studies reviewed focused on the identity performances of young Black professionals in White dominated organisations, not many have focused on how young Black African

women in South Africa construct their identities in the context of the workplace, and this is another gap to which this study intends to attend.

Taking all these findings into consideration, this study aims to investigate young black women's experiences of marginalisation in corporate South Africa in the context of their intersecting identities. This study also aims to capture particularly the taken for granted effects that structural inequalities have on Black African women's ability to fully participate in organisations.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

It is argued that there is a need to research subjectivities that challenge and disrupt organisational practices that (re)produce inequalities (Holvino, 2010; Lawthom, 1999; Rodriguez et al., 2016). This study integrates concepts from theories of identity, narrative identity, belonging and alienation, and Bourdieu's theory of social practice which includes forms of capital, habitus and field, to make sense of how young Black women experience marginalisation and negotiate the workplace. First, the theories of identity are expounded on, followed by Bourdieu's theory of forms of capital.

2.7.1 Theories of Identity

2.7.1.1 Identity

The concept of identity is widely used to describe how people articulate their sense of who they are. In psychology it has been used to examine human behaviour in different contexts and from different theoretical perspectives (e.g., Botsis, 2018; Canham, 2014). Essentialist approaches to understanding identity view it as constituting an individual's core, true or authentic self that is fixed and stable throughout time, while postmodern and post-structural theories emphasize an internally inconsistent, fragmented, multiple self that is in a constant process of change and transformation

(Hall, 2000). From this perspective, the concepts of identity and subjectivity are interrelated in the sense that identity can be seen as constructing the subject while the subject is also capable of constructing their own identity/identities. Hall (2000) states that,

‘Identity’ refers to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as a particular discourse, and on the other hand, the process which produces subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us (Hall, 2000, p. 19).

This definition emphasises the construction of identity through external mechanisms such as power or ideology that create subject positions which people then take up and to which they become temporarily attached. However, individuals are capable of reflecting on these subject positions, can also resist them, and construct alternative identities. Hall (2000) states that identities are often “constructed through, not outside, difference” (2000, p.17), meaning that the concept is relational and that it is by recognising how one differs to the ‘other’ or what one lacks that one articulates their own identity.

Mama (1995) states that subjectivity refers to “individuality and self-awareness” (p.2) and is the way in which “individuals act on and use social history and experience to invent their own identities” that are contextual and intersectional (p.62). Kiguwa (2006, p.17) adds that, when investigating subjectivities, it is important to attend to the “personal investment to specific subject positions that may be ambiguously experienced as personally rewarding but also oppressive” by

individuals. Soudien (2008), for example, observes Black students' ambivalent experiences in historically White institutions (HWI) where they sometimes feel alienated and resistant to the institutional culture but at the same time, want to belong by conforming to the institutional culture and by feeling determined to succeed academically.

This study was interested in understanding how young Black African women, through their subjective experiences and the stories they tell about themselves, have developed particular (professional) identities and how they negotiate or resist the raced, gendered and classed identities. The narrative approach to understanding identity places an emphasis on the individual's active role in making sense of and transforming their sense of themselves and social reality through language.

2.7.1.2 Narrative Identities

Narrative identities are people's internalised and evolving life stories which integrate and reconstruct the past and "imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p.233). These life stories are psycho-social constructions which reflect and challenge the prevailing hegemonic gender, class and cultural patterns within which people are embedded (McAdams, 2001). According to Yuval-Davis (2006) these stories also reflect membership to groups or collectives to which one belongs (e.g., racial, ethnic, national, religious or professional groupings) and are subject to change and can be contested. It is through narrative identity that people "convey to themselves and others who they are", who they are not, "how they came to be and where they think their lives may be going in the future" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p.233; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Narratives connects the personal and the political by investigating, for instance, power relations, hidden inequalities or historical contingencies (Riessman, 2008).

With respect to how individuals come to construct professional identities, McAdams (2001) observes that many individuals who grow up in modern or Western societies are encouraged by society (e.g., parents, schools, the media, business etc.) to begin thinking about where their lives are going and who they might become in future when they reach late adolescent and young adulthood, and that it is from this socialisation process that they begin to experiment with different identities related to the type of work they might occupy, marriage or families they imagine belonging to in the future. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) have found that it is common for career narratives to follow a common script that usually begins with individuals' stories of early childhood interests, family relationships, educational choices, and career experiences and decisions made later on in their lives. These early professional identity constructions are open to change as one gains experience and learns to clearly articulate their professional preferences, talents and values (Ibarra, 1999).

Slay and Smith (2011) state that in a society that limits the opportunities and potential of many Black individuals, they "may have a restricted view of who they may become professionally" (p.88). They state that while professional roles provide individuals with a sense of autonomy and privilege, stigmatised cultural identities marginalise certain professionals by reducing their identities to one-dimensional characters that may curtail professional identity construction and limit their chances of achieving long term career success. However, Canham (2014) describes a 'third space' (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006) characterised by ambiguity and hybridity, that opens up possibilities for individuals to disrupt the dichotomy between the marginalised and dominant organisational cultures to create new identities that are more responsive to contextual challenges. He further observes that the concept of adaptation such as that described by Ibarra (1999) for example treats a person as an object who is subjected to the choices of others and assimilates the dominant culture without question. On the other hand, a person who integrates into the

organisation is a subject who, according to Freire (1979), has the “capacity to adapt oneself with the critical capacity to make choices and to transform reality” (2014, p. 88). New Black entrants to corporate South Africa either adapt and assimilate to productivity or performance pressures as defined by the dominant organizational culture, or integrate and are recognised and valued for their professional contribution and are given equal opportunities for career growth.

2.7.1.3 Identity and Belonging

Yuval-Davis (2006) describes belonging as an emotional sense of feeling at home and feeling safe that is directed at different objects of attachment. The stories that people tell about themselves, such as stories of career aspirations, relate directly or indirectly to what it might mean to belong to certain collective groupings (racial, national, religious or professional). The sense of belonging is always a “dynamic process and not a reified fixity” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.199).

The intersecting identity categories to which people belong constitute the multiple axes of difference, such as race, gender, class or age-group, and are related to different social and economic locations and certain positionalities. They reflect the flow of power relations and social divisions in society and include an element of construction. These identity constructions are not just cognitive but reflect the emotional desire and yearning that individuals and groups have to belong and to become. Identities are seen as always in transition that are constructed “through the combined process of becoming, belonging or longing to belong” (2006; p.202). People’s emotional constructions of their identities becomes more central when they are feeling threatened and insecure. Yuval-Davis observes that much of the literature in social psychology has demonstrated that individuals tend to conform to groups that they belong to out of a ‘fear of exclusion’ and that

their interpersonal relationships are deeply affected by their membership or lack thereof to these groups (2006; p.198).

The ethics and politics of belonging relate to the attitudes and ideologies that determine where and how identity and categorical boundaries are maintained and reproduced by powerful groups, but also contested and challenged by marginalised groups. These boundaries categorise people into 'us' and 'them' and dictate who has the right to belong in a certain community or organisation. Manganyi (1973) argues that in South Africa 'us' and 'them' are categories of relation and distance that inform the frame of reference through which Black and White people interact with each other. He argues that the dialogue between these two groups will remain superficial as long as Black and White South Africans are unable to transcend them.

Due to power differences, White men tend to have more authority than women and other people of colour and are the implicit signifiers of the managerial identity and management model especially within large bureaucratic organisations (Acker, 2009; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). In the corporate context that is still dominated by White male leaders, women and Black employees have to assimilate and be seen to possess valued competencies and attributes of the dominant organisational culture such as being intelligent, emotionally detached, rational, highly ambitious, competitive, having a workaholic mentality that prioritizes work above family and social life (Essed, 2012). Employees may be excluded because they challenge, resist or fail to live up to the assimilative pressure to adapt to the behavioural norm. Those that lack the productivity profile that is required for them to be included are likely to be marginalised through surveillance and discipline (Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Puwar, 2004).

2.7.2 Forms of Capital, Habitus and Field

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social practice argues that social agents (Individuals, groups or institutions) exist and operate in fields (or social spaces) that are competitive and that they use various strategies to maintain or improve their position in those fields. Success in the field is determined by the accumulation and volume of capital available to social agents over time in both the materialised and embodied form. He argues that there are three main forms of capital, namely economic, cultural and social which can be reproduced in identical or expanded form.

Economic capital includes money and property rights or assets which and can be converted easily into money. Cultural capital comes in three forms, namely, the embodied state or habitus (long lasting dispositions or beliefs and ways of acting, feeling, thinking or being shaped by history and one's ongoing context), objectified state (cultural goods such as artworks, books, instruments, taste, aesthetics), and the institutionalised state such as educational qualifications which can be converted into economic capital in the labour market. Lastly, social capital includes the networks and connections with powerful or well-known individuals or groups that can be converted into economic capital. Symbolic capital, such as credentials, stands for all other forms of capital and can be exchanged in other fields (Bourdieu, 1986; Thomson, 2008).

Bourdieu argues that there is an inter-dependent and co-constructed relationship between the field, capital and habitus and he likened the strategies that agents use to improve their position in the field as an unending game which is a site of struggle between the dominant less dominant players. Some individuals come to a field, e.g., an elite school or White dominated workplace, already equipped with some social and economic advantages and a 'feel for the game' which creates a field-habitus match, meaning that they already understand the rules of the game (or doxa or 'assumptions that go without saying') which they have acquired through the socialisation process from childhood and/or through their membership with certain groups. Therefore, being in certain

social spaces feels like second nature to them or they feel as though they are 'fish in water'. These individuals usually accumulate more capital and tend to be more successful than their peers who do not automatically understand the rules of the game of certain fields because they experience a field-habitus clash (hysteresis) or sense of not being at ease, or feeling like a fish out of water, and as a result take longer to assimilate or acquire the 'feel for the game'. Those with the 'feel for the game' usually misrecognise that they have an advantage over others and assume that their success is due to their aptitude and not because of their class privilege or accumulated habitus (Maton, 2008). Each field also has 'distinction' such that individuals in the education field those who hold a science, engineering or technology (SET) degree for example, are held in high regard or are seen as having a higher volume of capital than someone with an Arts degree in the globalised knowledge economy (Liccardo & Bradbury, 2017).

Bourdieu (1986) further observes that there is an inter-dependent relationship between the different fields (education and economic field for instance) such that what happens in one field often predicts what is likely to occur in another field. For example, learners that attend well-resourced elite schools and universities and who form strong connections with high net worth and/or networked individuals during the course of their upbringing and schooling are more likely end up occupying powerful positions in the field of politics or business. However, due to constraints imposed by racial capitalism in unequal societies such as South Africa, many individuals occupying the lower rungs of the social hierarchy are likely to struggle more than their privileged peers to achieve high levels of economic success and social mobility. The holders of dominant forms of economic capital i.e., those who own the wealth and means of production are also in a position to set those with less economic power or forms of symbolic capital such as academic qualifications against each other, thus creating a competitive labour environment in the economic field.

Although Bourdieu's theory explains how the reproduction of social inequalities occur, it is a fluid and complex theory that allows for individuals' agency and it provides room for the rules of the game to change albeit within the strict boundaries of the field (Thomson, 2008). Puwar (2004) for example, argues that Black individuals from marginalised backgrounds who successfully mimic the somatic and behavioural norm of elite White males as a result of being immersed in elite institutions for a long period of time are more likely to access the patronage of sponsors and mentors who can advocate for their career advancement. They therefore tend to be more successful than their peers within the same marginalised group.

Linguistic capital is a particularly important boundary marker when it comes to deciding who can be accepted into the inner circles of corporations in South Africa. English continues to be the medium of instruction in educational settings and the language of power in post-apartheid South Africa because it ensures access to socioeconomic and political mobility (Alexander, 2013). Puwar (2004) argues that employees who are able to speak the imperial/legitimate language well, with the proper tones, syntax and grammar, are perceived as being 'civilised' and culturally refined and are often given 'honorary citizenship' which is important for career success. These subtle codes that define who is included and who gets excluded are ways in which subtle marginalisation practices are (re)produced and White privilege maintained in organisations led by and/or dominated by White male leaders. In their study of Black women student leaders and political activists, Bradbury and Mashigo (2018) indicate that accent and policing of identity is even more prevalent in relation to Black women than Black men.

2.7.3 Conclusion

The majority of Black women face numerous barriers to their careers because of their gender, class, race and age. However, they are seen as uniquely positioned to provide an outsider-within perspective which allows them to make sense of the ways in which both the dominators and dominated perceive social realities (Collins, 1986; Holvino, 2010). Intersecting identities allows those who are positioned at the margins of privilege to share unique insights of their conflicting positionalities and to provide a counter-narrative to dominant discourses of oppression (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). Holvino argues that the collection and dissemination of differentiated narratives could challenge and possibly change the dominant organisational narratives that still privilege “maleness, heterosexism, Whiteness and Western-ness” (2010, p. 263). This study has adopted an intersectionality lens to understand the nuanced experiences of young Black women’s experiences of exclusion and alienation, and experiences of inclusion and belonging in corporate South Africa. It will also use the theories of identity to understand how these women negotiate their identities in corporate settings.

Chapter 3 – Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter states the research questions of the study and details how the study was carried out by describing the research design, recruitment strategy utilised, participant profile, data collection method followed, ethical considerations, how the data were analysed and concludes with the researcher reflexivity.

3.2 Research Questions

4.2.1 What are the experiences of young Black African women in Corporate South Africa?

1.1 How do young Black African women come to identify as corporate professionals?

1.2 What are the factors that facilitate or hinder their career development?

1.3 How do they negotiate the raced, gendered and classed identities within dominant cultures?

3.3 Research Design

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) as an analytical tool for understanding the diverse experiences of women, the identity constructions of professional Black women in particular, and the dynamics of power that continue to (re)produce discrimination and maintain systems of social inequality has been underutilised in empirical investigations (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Holvino, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Psychological research focusing on racism and racialisation has tended to prioritise Black male subjects to the exclusion of Black women (Mama, 1995). Mama (1995) and

Lawthom (1999) have argued that Black women should not only be defined in relation to White women or Black men but that they too deserve to be studied and understood in their own right.

This study seeks to contribute to organisational research by investigating the experiences of marginalisation and identity constructions of young Black African women professionals from an intersectional perspective. Through narrative research, which focuses on individuals' experiences of structural inequalities at a personal level, this study seeks to deepen scholarly understanding of the consequences of professional marginalisation and to better reflect some of the taken-for-granted experiences that remain invisible by providing young Black African women with the opportunity to speak back to dominant organisational and career narratives.

A qualitative research design was deemed appropriate for this study since it allows a researcher to make sense of participants' experiences, perceptions and meanings produced through the in-depth study of a particular phenomenon within a specified socio-cultural context and to understand how identities are constructed through the use of language. Qualitative research prioritises the participants' right to speak and the researcher is also central to the sense that is made (Banister et al., 1994; Neuman, 2014). This study falls within the interpretive paradigm because its main aim was to capture in-depth understandings of the subjective experiences of the participants' social reality as they interact with others in the workplace (Neuman, 2014). Interpretative social science is linked to hermeneutics, which makes use of theory to elucidate a deeper understanding and to challenge the surface account of text being analysed. The researcher also aims to share the viewpoint of the text as a whole and to make sense of how each part of the text also relates to the whole (Neuman, 2014).

Narrative psychology has a constructionist and discursive orientation, the constructionist orientation assumes that people construct meaning out of their everyday interactions and beliefs,

while the discursive orientation emphasises the importance of how language is used to construct reality and shared meaning in society (Ashworth, 2007; Neuman, 2014). The narrative approach, which analyses personal stories from a multi-level and interdisciplinary perspective, and that is also interested in including voices that have been excluded or neglected from dominant narratives, was employed (Squire, 2005; Squire, 2008a). There are several approaches to doing narrative research and the experienced-centred approach is the one that was used for this particular study (Squire, 2008a). The defining feature of this approach is its emphasis on the significance, meaningfulness and the deeply social nature of the stories and experiences that people produce. It emphasizes the sequential and temporal nature of storytelling, whose construction and performative aspects are dependent on the social context in which the narrator is situated and it may include experiences of past, future and present stories which may be told in contradictory ways (Squire, 2008b). The transformative aspect of narratives pays attention to changes (either positive or negative) or turning points that occur in the stories told by participants and is essentially interested in how people construct their identities, while also considering the provisional nature of the interpretations made by the researcher because of the fluid nature of identities (Squire, 2008a; Squire et al., 2008).

3.4 Recruitment of Participants

Five Black African women between the ages of 25 – 40 who had at least five years of work experience in the corporate/private sector were recruited for the study using the snowballing technique (Neuman, 2014) that relied on referrals from the researcher's personal and professional networks. This purposive recruitment strategy was selected to collect relevant and information-rich cases that would enable the researcher to answer the research questions (Fossey et al., 2002; Neuman, 2014). No claims are made that this is a representative sample as the aim of the study was

to capture the nuanced experiences of Black African women. A limitation of this approach is that the findings of the study cannot be generalised to all young women or even all young Black women working in the corporate sector in South Africa. However, the idiographic nature of this qualitative study means that it aimed to capture context- specific information and traded generalizability for depth. Interpreting the meaning and function of stories embedded in the research interviews is the main aim of narrative research (Banister et al., 1994; Neuman, 2014; Riessman, 2008).

3.5 Profile of Participants

Demographic information was collected to ascertain the participants occupation, industry, years of working experience, level of education, age category, home language and parents' occupation. This information was used for descriptive purposes as reported in Table 1 below.

The young Black African women who took part in this study are a privileged group in terms of their educational background and being part of the professional middle class that has been able to receive relatively decent job opportunities that have provided them with some level of financial independence and social mobility, and that has shielded them from the severe forms of class exploitation that women from a working class or working poor background often experience. However, due to the fact that some still live in racially segregated townships and or have family members that are part of the working class/working poor, they also indirectly or vicariously experience the effects of class exploitation (Collins, 2000; Essed, 1991) and their Black middle class position is precarious due to the several challenges they encounter in the workplace (Khunou et al., 2020).

Table 1 Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Current Occupation	Current Industry	Total Working Experience	Academic Level	Age Category	Languages	Parents' occupation
Palesa	Marketing Campaigns Specialist	Financial Services	> 10years	Honours	35 – 40	seTswana, IsiZulu, English	Mother – nurse Father – corporate
Sindi	Analyst	Financial Services	> 10years	Honours	25 – 30	IsiZulu and English	Mother - firefighter
Mandisa	Digital Design Specialist	Financial Services	4 years	Honours	25 – 30	IsiZulu, seSotho, English	Mother and father – corporate employees
Thula	Brand Marketing Specialist	Higher Education	5 -10 years	Honours	30 – 35	seTswana and English	Mother – accountant Father – self employed
Neo	Industrial Relations Manager	Logistics	5-10 years	Honours	30 - 35	IsiZulu, English, IsiNdebele	Mother - nurse

Below is brief description of the research participants; more details about them will be provided in the analysis chapters that follow:

Palesa is a marketing professional who was employed at a financial services organisation in Pretoria at the time of the interview. She grew up in a township located in the South-East of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, with her parents and younger brother. She attended a private school from grade one to eight then completed the rest of secondary education at a public Model C school, both schools are based in the South of Johannesburg. She matriculated around the time when careers in information technology (IT) were being touted as the next big thing and she found herself torn between choosing a career in IT and marketing. Not wanting to make a rushed decision, she decided to take a gap year during which she completed a short secretarial course. After this, she went on to complete a degree in marketing and business management at a college located in the West Rand, Johannesburg before her career journey started.

Sindi is an ambitious investments analyst who was employed at a financial services company in Johannesburg at the time of the interview. She grew up in a township in Ekurhuleni, East of Johannesburg and attended her schooling (Model C and private schools) in the nearby suburbs of Benoni and Bedfordview before attaining a degree in finance and investments. She stated that her mother came from a poverty-stricken background while her now late father's family was relatively well off in comparison. She and her parents lived in the backroom of her paternal grandparents' home until she turned five, after which they moved into a bigger home to accommodate their growing family, her three younger brothers. Her main career goal is to become finally secure and contribute to her family's wellbeing.

Mandisa is a digital app designer who was employed in a bank in Johannesburg at the time of the interview. She was born in Durban and her family moved to Johannesburg when she was two where she and her elder siblings (sister and brother) spent most of their childhood. Mandisa's parents are part of the first generation of urban Black African employees who entered the corporate sector in the 70s and 80s when business organisations began exempting them from the job reservation policies due to a critical shortage in skilled employees at the time, a process which led to the eventual abolition of the colour bar in 1987. The apartheid government also began allowing urban Black professionals who could afford to live in middle-class suburbs to do so through the abolition of the influx control measures in 1986 that had been used to prevent African urbanisation since 1948 (Terreblanche, 2002). This together with the introduction of further anti-discrimination policies in the democratic dispensation enabled her family to enjoy the comforts and privileges of living in the previously "Whites Only" Northern suburbs of Johannesburg where she and her siblings attended private schools. Mandisa is a part of a burgeoning generation of Black African children who have never experienced growing up in a township and who are in many ways challenging conceptions of what it means to be Black in post-apartheid South Africa.

Thula is a young creative from a township located in the South of Johannesburg. She spent a part of her childhood living in the Coloured community of Klipspruit West with her maternal grandparents, thereafter she went to live with her mother in the cosmopolitan area of Johannesburg CBD. She believes that her exposure to diverse cultures and being able to speak Afrikaans fluently as a child enabled her smooth integration into Model C schools located in the South of Johannesburg, where she attended primary and high schools. Her interest in all things creative was ignited when she was in grade three and after considering various careers such as interior design, architecture and

fashion design in high school, she settled on becoming a graphic designer. Through the course of her career she migrated from working in the advertising industry to working as a marketing professional at a private college located in Johannesburg.

Neo is a labour relations consultant who was employed in the freight industry in Johannesburg at the time of the interview. She was born and raised in a township in Ekurhuleni, East of Johannesburg where she still resides with her daughter and mother who is a professional nurse. She attended her primary and secondary schooling in Model C schools located in nearby suburbs of Brakpan and Benoni. After high school she followed in her elder sister's footsteps who is lawyer and completed her three-year degree in BCom Law and Economics, followed by an additional year completing her Bachelor of Laws (LLB) before embarking on journey to qualifying to becoming an attorney.

3.6 Data Collection - Interviews

In-depth narrative interviews were conducted to capture biographical and experiential data articulating the identities of participants (Phoenix, 2008; Sarantakos, 2013). All participants were interviewed in and around the city of Johannesburg in December 2021 during the time when the Omicron variant had just been discovered in South Africa and Covid-19 restrictions were announced. The Covid-19 rules and regulations regarding how to conduct fieldwork during Covid-19 that had been made available to all research students were observed (Higher Health & Universities of South Africa, 2021). Two participants were interviewed at the researcher's home and one participant in her own home. The other two participants were interviewed online because one had tested positive for

Covid-19 and the other was uncomfortable with meeting in person because of the Omicron variant that was circulating at the time.

Once permission had been granted for the research to be conducted by the ethics committee, the researcher created an online Google Form and replicated the information found in the participation information sheet (see Appendix A), consent form (see Appendix B) and demographic profile (see Appendix C) and created an [online link](#) for ease of access for potential participants. A call to participate poster was then created and distributed to the researcher's personal and professional networks on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp (see Appendix D). The participants who responded to the call were then sent a link to the online Google form which detailed what participation would entail (first part of the Google form) and it provided an option to choose an opt in or opt out of participation by selecting the option yes I agree or no I do not wish to take part in the study to the question 'Do you agree to take part in this study?'. The online consent form formed the second part of the Google form and participants were directed to select either yes or no to the statement 'I do hereby consent to be interviewed for the research study.

The participants who agreed to participate were directed to the third and final part of the Google form, the electronic demographic profile questionnaire, which they were requested to complete. The researcher then contacted the participants who had consented to participate in the study via email to arrange interviews and the finer details of the interview logistics, including dates, place and time, were finalised telephonically and using WhatsApp messenger.

The interviews were conducted in two phases utilising an adaptation of the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2011). For first phase of the interview a carefully constructed question which Wengraf refers to as the Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative

(SQUIN), was asked at the beginning of the interview: Can you tell me the story of your career journey and how you eventually landed in your current role?. They were told that they could take as long as they needed to answer the question in any way that felt most comfortable to them.

The advantage of using this form of interviewing method is that it gives participants the freedom to tell their story in their own way with minimal interruption from the researcher and it prevented the researcher from leading the conversation a particular way.

At the end of this interview, once participants had finished telling their story, the researcher used the semi-structured narrative interview schedule (see Appendix E) to further elicit information which had not been covered in the first part of the interview. This formed the second phase of the interview process. After answering these additional questions, the interviews ended. The interviews were audio recorded which allowed me (the researcher) to concentrate on the content of the participants' stories and to maintain maximum eye contact, which made the interview process more comfortable for both me (the researcher) and the participants (Khunou et al., 2020).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Permission to collect data using interviews was granted by the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical) and the following protocol number: MAPSYC/21/05 issued (see Appendix F). Before the interviews were conducted the participants were requested to sign a consent form (see Appendix B) once they had read and understood all the information included in the participation information sheet (see Appendix A). At the start of the interviews, participants were reminded that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point, during the research process or even retrospectively, without negative consequences.

To ensure that there was as little power imbalance between the interviewer (the researcher) and the interviewees (participants) as possible, the researcher disclosed her personal interests and reasons for conducting the research in order to build rapport and encourage reciprocity. The researcher informed participants of the intended use of the study to ensure transparency and honesty. The researcher also informed the participants that they were in charge of how much information to disclose and that they had the right to pause the interview if they felt distressed, or to request that the recording be stopped if they felt uncomfortable about disclosing certain information on the record (Banister et al., 1994; Burman, 1994).

To ensure anonymity in the final report, all information (particularly in relation to their employer) that may be publicly known was changed and pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants. To guarantee confidentiality, the data collected were made accessible to only the researcher and her supervisor.

To ensure that no harm was caused during the research process, details for counselling services were included in the participation information sheet (see Appendix A) for participants to make use of in the event that they felt vulnerable after interview. The researcher availed herself before, during and after the interview to attend to any queries or concerns from participants (Banister et al., 1994; Sarantakos, 2013).

3.8 Data Analysis

The interviews were approximately 1h45 – 2hrs in length and were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were not finely grained such as those required for conversation analysis because the analytic approach for this study focused more on what was said rather than how it was said, but they did include paralinguistic elements such as laughs or pauses (Squire, 2008b). The data were

analysed in two different ways – structural / vertical narrative analysis and horizontal / thematic analysis. Each approach provided unique ways of understanding the data.

3.8.1 Narrative (Structural)/ Vertical Analysis

The first form of analysis involved understanding the experiences of two of the five (Sindi and Palesa) participants' unique career journey in more depth through the process of vertical narrative analysis, which seeks to make sense of how and why participants tell their stories in the manner that they do. An adaptation of Wengraf's (2011) Biographical Narrative Interpretive Model (BNIM) two-track interpretation procedure was used as the method of analysis.

The BNIM pays attention to both the context/situation in which participants tell their stories and it also attends to their subjective experiencing over the course of their stories. The researcher's role is to present, according to their best understanding, a summary of the historically situated subjectivity while taking into account the participant's inner and outer world dynamics (psychosocial nature of their lives) and to try and make sense of the connections or inconsistencies suggested by the pattern of the told stories during the interview (Wengraf, 2011).

The researcher sequenced and segmented the transcripts temporally and according to change of topic. All transcripts had a beginning, middle and an end, and the stories were segmented according to the participant's childhood, schooling and training years first, followed by an analysis of their time spent in corporate, and lastly, on their experiences in their current places of employment. The researcher documented the gist of what was said in each segment, together with the manner in which the topic was addressed. This study focused mainly on analysing the interesting and unique particular incident narratives (PINS) that arose out of each participant's story. PINS are a

detailed story of something that happened at a particular place and time told in the participants own words.

Wengraf (2011) advises that one can also make use of other interview text interpretation procedures that may be appropriate or necessary for a particular study and this researcher made use of Gergen and Gergen's (1986, as cited in Murray, 2008) three primary structures for interpreting narratives; progressive, regressive or stable, together with McAdams' (1985, as cited in Murray, 2008) narrative tone (optimistic/pessimistic) and key themes to describe participants' overarching storylines.

3.8.2 Horizontal/Thematic Analysis

In the second stage deductive analysis using prior theory, Bourdieu's metaphor of a game discussed in chapter two, was used to organise the two overarching themes (learning the game and playing the game) and to interpret some of the insights arising from the data to better understand the sociocultural context and structural conditions under which the participants experienced their career journeys (Riessman, 2005). The thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which can be used with different theoretical frameworks and is also compatible with the constructionist orientation of narrative research, was also utilised to find themes within each participant's narrative prior to grouping the common thematic elements across while preserving the sequence and narrative structure of the narratives. The researcher followed the six step approach to finding themes in each individual case as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Once the transcription for each of the interviews had been completed, the researcher familiarised herself with the data through reading and re-reading each transcript and searching for patterns and meanings. Initial codes that appeared interesting were then generated manually, which

was followed by the grouping of codes into potential themes along with the relevant data extracts. The researcher then went through the process of revising and refining themes and collecting sub-themes with their relevant extracts for the final write-up which appears in chapter five.

3.9 Researcher Reflexivity

Khunou et al. (2020) state that interviewing participants of the same gender fosters a more relaxed interviewing process and is desirable for when one is conducting gender sensitive research or when one seeks to capture the power dynamics of the phenomenon being investigated. Essed (1991) also notes that it has repeatedly been shown that Black research participants are more comfortable sharing their experiences of racism with a Black interviewer rather than with a White interviewer. One of the primary goals of this study was to centre the experiences of marginalised young Black African women whose voices are often silenced by institutions (Burman, 1994; Kiguwa, 2019). My shared positionality and experiences with the participants of also being a young Black African woman in my 30s who has been educated in Model C schools, has received tertiary education and has worked in the corporate sector for nearly eight years, aided in making the interviewing process fairly comfortable and safe because of the similar career journeys that we have traversed. Participants were eager to share their experiences of working in corporate and because of the non-hierarchical relationship I was able to solicit in-depth descriptions of their experiences of being 'othered' either because of the gender, race, class or age. My insider knowledge of how graduate programmes and corporate cultures, particularly in the financial services sector, work made it easy for me to relate to and understand the participants experiences.

Throughout the research process I was concerned with being overly identified with the participants but I think that the non-directive interviewing method that I chose helped me not to

steer the conversation in a particular direction. However, my insider position may have created blind spots particularly in analysis phase of the research, as I may have disregarded information that others with external experience or outsider status may have found valuable to my interpretation and may have been able to see connections and patterns that I was not able to see clearly and emphasise (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

The knowledge, which is not necessarily easily available to people outside academia, that I gained from conducting a review of the literature and familiarising myself with various theories used in this study as a research psychology student and outsider to my participants helped me to appreciate the participants' stories from a new perspective that I didn't have prior to embarking on this research study and it also helped me to critically evaluate the information provided by participants. Occupying the space between being an insider-outsider and combining my personal and professional experiences enriched my understanding of the phenomenon under study (Collins, 1986; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Even though the interviews were fairly easy to conduct as already stated, some participants became emotional as they shared memories of victimisation they had experienced in the workplace, and while I had been trained as to how to provide support for participants when they shared their vulnerability, I had no guidance on how to process difficult emotions after the interviews as a researcher. However, I attended one of the online post graduate events hosted by Wits University (Gagliardone & Dinizulu, 2022) where one of the professors, Dr. Mpho Mathebula from the Department of Psychology shared her experience of dealing with difficult emotions during one of her research studies and I believe that that helped me to realise that I was not having a unique experience and I appreciated learning about the creative solutions that she and other researchers in attendance utilise for dealing with such post interview situations.

Chapter 4 – Vertical Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the analysis for this chapter was to present the narratives of two of the five participants, Sindi and Palesa, following the unfolding narrative of their 'told stories' (Wengraf, 2011) consecutively. It follows the structure of how the participants structured their own stories. The approach pays close attention to particular incident narratives (PINS) to understand how and why participants told their stories in the manner that they did. Lastly, it outlines the connecting structural hypothesis, written as a summary at the end of each participant's story.

4.2 Sindi's Career Narrative – Breaking Barriers in the Financial Services Sector

Sindi's story was about overcoming many barriers from childhood and school, right through to working in the male dominated industry of investment banking. She shared some of the key challenges that she has had to wrestle with in spaces where she often found herself being employed as the only woman in the team or company.

4.2.1 "I was a very ambitious young person." – A PIN about Becoming a High Achiever

From grade one to three Sindi attended a primary school which was predominated by Indian and Muslim learners and was located in the city of Benoni in Ekurhuleni. She described the school as being "ugly on the outside" and she longed to go to a school that was attended by White learners in the more affluent side of the city, not only because it was well resourced and maintained in comparison, but also because she saw herself as "bright kid" that was eager to harness her academic potential and be surrounded by the very best among her peers. Acknowledging the

immense academic potential that her daughter had and also perhaps because of her own experiences of being denied access to certain educational and career opportunities due to growing up in a poverty stricken home, Sindi's mother agreed to transfer her to a Model C school. Once at the new primary school, that she attended from grade three to seven, she was exposed to a competitive schooling environment that she initially struggled to assimilate to:

And then uhm there was this concept of top 5, top 10, top 20 academically and I had never been exposed to that. My previous school didn't have that... you know... we just had teacher's pets and... you know there was none of that, *"Oh so and so came first in class."* There was none of that and when I saw that I went to my mom and I cried to her. I was like, *"Mom there's this thing called top 20 and like all the kids that do good in their subjects are like recognised and they get these fancy badges and..."* You know?... and my mom is like, *"Wow you can actually also be part of that. I used to be."* Uhm, so my mom grew up in a Coloured community, she's Black [African] but she was adopted by a Coloured man and by virtue of that she then... under apartheid she was a Black [African] person living in a Coloured [community] and so when she was growing up she'd go to the Coloured schools and she was like most probably the only Black [African] person right. Everyone else is Indian or Coloured and I think she experienced a lot of racism right, but what was interesting is that she used to beat them all academically. She always came first, she was like the smartest, the brightest. She started telling me those stories about her school life and I became inspired and I actually started coming out in the top 20, top 10 at the school that I was at you know (smiling). And uhm yah so then I became that person that does well in school and I was very good at mathematics.

Sindi's mother recounting of her own experiences of overcoming racialised and gendered stereotypes about Black women's inferior intellectual abilities that prevailed under the apartheid era to motivate her daughter has been found to be a form of intergenerational resistance strategy that many Black women across the world are known to use in order to conscientize their children about the realities of growing up in an unequal society and as a way of cultivating in them a form of positive Black identity that they can arm themselves with as they navigate the world that more often than not marginalises them (Davis, 2018). From her narrative it was clear that Sindi's mother is a very influential and supportive figure in her life and hearing how her mother overcame racial, ethnic and gendered barriers to achieve academic success motivated and transformed Sindi into becoming a dedicated and high achieving learner from that point onwards, which also then contributed to improving her sense of belonging in the school.

Perhaps owing to the fact that she came from a working class family but was exposed to how more affluent children lived in the suburbs through her schooling, Sindi stated that by the end of primary school she, "badly wanted to become a success" and that she made a pact with herself to always surround herself with equally ambitious and intelligent people in the hope that this would also increase her own chances of success.

Unfortunately, the first two years that she spent in a public high school (Model C) were "horrendous." She argued that the quality of the public schooling system had badly deteriorated by the time she arrived there in the year 2006 and that because it was attended by predominantly rowdy learners who often overpowered the teachers, the school was not a conducive environment for the few dedicated learners in the classroom. She used this argument to highlight her sense of frustration with the school at the time and to also justify why she then requested that her mother

move her to a private school, albeit at a huge financial cost to her already struggling and burgeoning family.

Sindi thus went on to complete the rest of high school at a private school in Boksburg Ekurhuleni, but had somewhat of an ambivalent experience at the school. On the one hand she described being a lot happier at the school and being exposed to incredible levels of wealth which further fuelled her ambition and motivated her to work even harder, but she also reported experiences of racism on the other hand where she perceived that her teachers would deliberately undergrade Black learners (including herself). She claimed that although she did well in mathematics she always felt that she was marked unfairly when it came to English and that it is for this reason that she did not gain admission into some of the fields of study, that require a high admission point score (APS) for mathematics and English, that she had hoped to get into but rather settled for studying finance after she matriculated in 2010. The phenomenon of Black learners or students being systematically marked down by their teachers has also been observed by researchers such as Burgess and Greaves (2009 as cited in Eddo-Lodge, 2017) and Essed (1991) and since the schooling system is still far from being truly meritocratic in post-apartheid South Africa (Alexander, 2013), perhaps as Sindi is suggesting, the English language could still be functioning (whether intentionally or unintentionally) as a gate keeping mechanism for Black learners wanting to enter certain fields in tertiary institutions, particularly the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

After completing her three year undergraduate degree in finance at one of the top universities in Johannesburg, Sindi spent an additional year qualifying for her honours in investments and endured numerous rejections while trying to secure a graduate placement at top local and

international investment banks during that same year, however, she persisted until she was eventually accepted for one at a financial asset management company based in Cape Town.

4.2.2 “I felt like I had no support whatsoever and I was spiralling into a depression.” – A PIN of Microaggression in the Workplace

Sindi described the company that she joined as a graduate trainee in Cape Town as being dominated by White and Afrikaner male employees and she stated that out of 60 employees, there were only about 5 or 6 Black employees and stated that, “There were people there that had so much shame and hated the fact that they were equal to a Black person in the working environment.” However, she did not allow the subtle elements of racism that were present at the company to overshadow her main purpose of being there, which was to gain working experience and to learn how to become an investment analyst. Although she loved what she was learning, her main concerns were with regards to job security, since she was initially hired on a contract basis, and with barely surviving the high cost of living in Cape Town due to being severely underpaid in comparison to her White counterparts. Being made a permanent employee after three years was no consolation for her because she continued to experience financial distress. She reported that the death of her father shortly after being made permanent resulted in the deterioration of her family circumstances and was another major catalyst for her deciding to return home to Johannesburg so that she could be a source of emotional and financial support for them.

After surviving only six months in another Johannesburg based investment management firm due to the general negative environment that she and her colleagues had to endure because of their manager’s indiscriminate bullying and micromanaging style of management and due to her believing that she was being underpaid relative to other junior employees, she resigned from her job

and found a new job at a financial services firm in Johannesburg shortly before the start of the Covid pandemic in 2020 where she was still employed at the time of the interview.

She described working for a great manager when she arrived at the company who was kind, supportive and shielded her from being harassed and bullied by other male colleagues as she was the only woman in the entire investment team. Unfortunately, this manager was retrenched shortly after she began working there and she soon felt thrown in the deep end because of having to take on his work without any support. This sense of overwhelm was also compounded by the fact that she began to experience the worst form of victimisation under her new manager and other senior colleagues. She narrated in detail one of the many incidences of microaggression that she experienced at the hands of the company's chief executive officer (CEO) that made her feel like she was being constantly undermined:

and then uhm recently... there was an episode where I was presenting on a Zoom call or Microsoft Teams meeting and you must remember, it's a big audience...

So but anyway, so this guy on the call like asks me about something... like a date and then I tell him. So he didn't expect... because he's asking me a trick question, he didn't expect that I'm going to answer him correctly in a public [forum]... so then he was embarrassed. So then he's like, "*Put it on the slides*"... and I'm like, but it is on the slides, it's on the second slide... and I think he just got annoyed that, "Damn!"...

Mpho: Now he's the one that's looking like [laughs]...

Sindi: ... Yes and in front of the whole company right, cause everyone is listening! We're on a Microsoft Teams, there's over 50 people on that call.

Mpho: Hmm...

Sindi: Uhm... and... and then he wasn't with the happy with the fact that I responded to him and I didn't back down. He thought I'd just be like, *"Yeah...oh no."* No! I'm not that! You know, I don't care what big of a bully you are I typically stand up for myself when it comes to bullies. Uhm... I'm assertive... uhm and I have a domineering personality, so if I meet someone that is a bully as well, I know to sort of handle them. Sometimes it's a lot for me especially because I'm the only girl and I'm at the bottom right and I'm not like... so I have to be very conscious of the way I say things right? The way I'd wanna say it, I can't. So I'm... I'm tight lipped... basically... and... so this guy, I noticed that he didn't like the fact that I stood up to him and I'm like, *"but no actually it's here"* [in the 2nd slide]... you know... uhm... and I feel like he felt like I was challenging him. So then he started this whole big thing and continued to attack my presentation thereafter and it's quite ironic because everyone in the team does this sh*t but then he said, *"Yah don't ever do this, not in this company."* You know and this is what every other person in the team does. How are you going to be such a hypocrite and say I mustn't do it when everyone else does it... and expect this from me when everyone else does it... you know, and then he said he's going to take it off line and on that day when I presented I was actually working from home. Uhm to show him that I'm not scared of him I immediately drove to work, to the office... uhm after that incident. To show him that I'm not afraid of you.

... I went to work, looked him in the eye. He said nothing to me because he knew what he was saying on the call was wrong, it's hypocritical. In fact in the past you've said I must do this if I don't have time, and I've taken on someone else's job so I'm pressed for time. Like I

cannot do what ya'll need me to do the way ya'll want me to do. There's... I have to take short cuts elsewhere you know...otherwise I'm never going to cope you know... and he was a bit guilty when he saw me there.

Since she still had aspirations of growing and lasting long in the investment banking industry, Sindi stated that she began to reflect on the constant bullying and microaggression that she was experiencing in her budding career and decided that she would no longer cower in silence or be apologetic when faced with conflict situations between her and her colleagues but would find a way to confront them head on. When the above incident occurred, she stated that she began sensing that her senior male colleagues were surprised and equally threatened by her constant display of competence and excellence since they had expected her to flounder under the heavy workload of having to do her own work and that of her previous manager, and because of the unreasonable expectations they had set for her. In the excerpt above, the CEO begins to use a form of super-surveillance (Puwar, 2004) by nitpicking and amplifying minor mistakes in Sindi's presentation because perhaps she disrupted his stereotypical expectations of not only a woman's intelligence but a young Black African woman's confidence and command of investment knowledge in a male dominated industry. To further assert his male dominance over her, he requests to see her offline over a minor issue (concerning writing a date in a certain business format: 1H22 instead of first half of the fiscal year) when she daringly responds to him during the meeting.

Even though Sindi managed to display a brave face in front of the CEO during this incident, she stated that his constant undermining behaviour emboldened other colleagues to further disrespect her and disregard the contribution that she makes in the team. She also suffered the physical and mental consequences of the constant victimisation that she was confronted with at the hands of her manager and her manager's manager, and had to seek outside help from a psychologist

for the severe anxiety attacks and depression that she began to experience. She mentioned that at some point she also began doubting her own sanity and it was her psychologist and a colleague that reassured her that she was not going insane:

and how I knew I wasn't crazy, I had a colleague sit me down and be like, *"Sindi I noticed you're always being shot down at these meetings. Is it because you're Black, is it because you're the only female and I noticed that the other male analysts are not bashed the way that you are. Their ideas are not questioned the way yours are questioned and sometimes the questions that they ask you are laced with rudeness."* And this is a male saying this to me. So, I felt so vindicated because this person was listening to that call and actually experienced the actual events from my perspective and that sort of vindicated me that I'm not going crazy because when you speak to other people and they're like, *"Urgh nah you over stressing, like you're being overly dramatic, you're being this, you're being that."* And because those people say that to you, people then don't go out and seek help. You know, when all these bad things happen to them they think it's normal and it's not, and your body is hurting you know... and sooner or later you're going to have a manic episode because all these little things just keep building up and there's just this denialism of these things happening... you know.

Sindi stated that felt as though she was being gaslighted when pointing out the incidences of sexism and racism that she was experiencing at work. Often when Black people point out racism they will be told by dominant groups that they are overreacting or using the 'race card' because they want to be treated special. Essed (1991) argues that in addition to White people denying the experiences of Black people, they often also do not take responsibility for their racist behaviour. It is

not often that a White man, like Sindi's colleague above, will acknowledge a Black woman's experience of racism and sexism and in so doing it demonstrates that patriarchy and racism can be disrupted when White men choose to act in non-conforming ways that display a positive form of masculinity.

4.2.3 "I will make myself a success one way or another." – Summary

Like many young Black youth from the townships, Sindi is a highly motivated young woman who yearns to see herself contribute to her own and her family's financial wellbeing. Time and again her narrative illustrated how she continually rose above the myriad of challenges that came her way, since childhood, with an unwavering sense of determination, but she also acknowledged that at times she has felt frustrated, angry and exhausted by the injustices that she has had to continually endure so early on in her career because of the ageism, sexism and racism that she has experienced. She also felt that there is some level of denialism by both dominant and dominated members of society about some of the experiences that young Black women encounter in corporate, which can be disempowering and make one feel as though their problems are being minimised or dismissed completely (Essed, 1991). Unlike the other participants, her experience of alienation, marginalisation and sexism in the workplace was compounded by the fact that she has never experienced working with other women (whether junior or senior) since the start of her career and stated that often feels "unwanted" and lonely, hence she now opts to work from home in the post Covid era to avoid forced and inauthentic social interactions. Even though she mentioned that she has toyed with the idea of changing careers, she is still heavily invested in her career in investment banking and was still optimistic at the end of the interview that things could get better in the future. Sindi's narrative was progressive in the sense that even though she faced many challenges and described living from hand

to mouth during the early stages of her career, by the end of the interview she felt that she had grown as an investment analyst and her salary was edging towards being decent although still not satisfactory.

4.3 Palesa's Career Narrative – From Thriving to Navigating Corruption in Corporate

Palesa's story was about thriving as a marketing professional not too long after graduating from college, to then experiencing an unexpected and devastating encounter in the workplace that saw her having to start her career from the bottom again.

4.3.1 “I wanted to be a lawyer actually [laughs].” – Settling for a Career in Marketing

Palesa started her narrative by highlighting that she had been interested in becoming a lawyer in primary school because she wanted to fight for the rights of women and children. However, in the process of learning about business economics, one of her chosen subjects in high school, she was exposed to the field of marketing and felt that it was an area of study that she wanted to explore further after high school. Unlike the other participants, she decided to take a gap year after matriculating and she used it to ascertain whether marketing was really the right career route for her to pursue. During the course of her gap year, she completed a short secretarial course where she learned basic computer and business skills. Even though information technology (IT) was being touted as the next big career trend during this time and she felt a bit of societal pressure to go in that direction, she ultimately chose to study marketing as she felt that IT was not for her.

After completing her three year undergraduate degree in marketing and business management at a college in Johannesburg, she worked for eight months as a sales representative and another eight months working for a small recruitment agency as a recruitment researcher. She

then applied for a graduate programme advertised by a multinational company in the motor industry that she had come across while still working at the recruitment agency and after successfully completing the 12 month programme with seven other graduates, her career in marketing began.

4.3.2 “There were campaigns that worked so well that we achieved proper sales you know.” -

Thriving as a Campaigns Specialist and a PIN About Resisting Abuse

Permanent employment opportunities had not been guaranteed to the participating graduates upon the completion of their programme, but Palesa was fortunate enough to have secured a placement in the financial services campaigns team, a team that she had worked briefly in as a graduate and where she felt at home as it aligned with her marketing interests. For the duration of her time spent at the automobile Company A, Palesa reported to a total of four managers, the first three of which were women, and she provided her impressions of their management style along with several PINS on some of the interactions she had with some of them to illustrate what it was like working at the company:

Hmm... I think when I was working for Company A under the German lady...even when I was working under [Name of manager] I had great successes. Uhm [Name of manager] didn't know CRM (customer relationship management), I knew CRM so she sometimes had to rely on me for guidance and she gave me the platform because she didn't have a choice you know and I thrived, I thrived! I could... uhm.. it was tough, it was hard work but I was able to come up with initiatives that were great for the organisation.

Palesa described her time spent working at Company A as one of the most memorable moment of her career because she enjoyed her work and she believed she had the necessary support that she needed to execute her responsibilities from particularly the women managers she worked under and her team members. She also experienced professional growth that saw her being promoted from campaigns administrator, to campaigns specialist and lastly to customer experience specialist, a role she held until she left the organisation. She experienced a great sense of belonging in the company and this was also aided by the fact that, unlike Sindi, she also had work friends to share her work experiences with and to confide in as the organisation was fairly diverse in terms of race and gender composition. Unfortunately she was not always shielded from incidences of bullying and intimidation:

Palesa: uhm [Name of manager] was a White Afrikaans female manager. She was not the greatest manager... hmm... she was emotional about things you know. If she didn't wake up on the right foot of the bed, or the right side of the bed then we knew it... uhm... she had favourites and it was clear who they were. You know, she was just not a great leader... I felt... uhm... and at some point she was not having a good day and she was... I had uhm submitted copy for a campaign to her... copy is like the wording of the campaign...

Mpho: Okay.

Palesa: ... so that she can look at it and give me feedback or changes before we roll it out you know. Before we submit it to the marketing and sales divisional manager for approval and the bigger team you know... for approvals... and that day *she just* was going at me... but she was not criticising the work, it felt like she was just criticising me... and... I... as she was busy shouting and performing... At [Name of company] there are no offices, it's cubicles. So there are manager cubicles and then cubicles that the general staff sort of like share. So the managers will each have their own cubicle... sort of like an office.

Mpho: Yeah...

Palesa: So...

Mpho: Like open plan.

Palesa: Yes, it's an open plan. So one of the managers next to her cubicle... you know... wanted to peep and see, "*Who is she talking to like this?*" That's how bad it was...

Mpho: Hmm...

Palesa: And... [sighs]... I just couldn't take that! For me that was the last draw... I grrrrrred that paper... [laughs]... that I had given her to look at, I put it down on the table and turned it upside down... I looked her in her face and I said, "You will *never* speak to me this way ever again. *Today is the last day!* I will never accept such treatment ever again from you. You know that if you make changes, I change them immediately, I diligently do my work so I don't understand what are you *busy* going on with here. Can this please be the last time." I did it in such a way that I was not loud, none of the managers next to her heard... could even hear what I was saying, but I sent her that message saying hm-uhm... you will never speak to me that way ever again... and then... I got up and I left... I went to my desk... I said to her, "*You will call me once you are done with the changes.*"... and I left.

... You know at that moment I was willing to lose my job, I couldn't anymore... I couldn't *stomach* that abuse!... And then fine since that *day*, [Name of manager] would never speak out of turn with me. I could see her getting upset and holding herself back.

Palesa stated that her manager above had a reputation for mistreating Black African employees in particular but similarly to Sindi, she describes standing up for herself when she could no longer stand being bullied by this manager. She stated that, fortunately, after the above incident their relationship was repaired to some extent, in the sense that the bullying stopped and her manager began to treat her with some respect. Her manager also relied heavily on Palesa who had expertise in customer relationship management that she did not have and so they were forced to reconcile. Unlike Sindi, however, Palesa had colleagues that she could confide in and whom she

received support from and so she did not experience the sense of denialism and gaslighting that Sindi did regarding issues of racism. This manager, however, soon left the organisation due to being pushed out.

Palesa was also sadly pushed out of the organisation by the last manager (White male manager) she reported to after he threatened to “crush” her psychologically after an unresolvable work related dispute transpired between them. Fortunately, some former colleagues alerted her of a job opportunity at another automobile company [Company B] where she was employed a month after resigning from her job.

4.3.3 “Ey that was the worst position I have ever had in my life!” – A PIN about Uncovering Corrupt Dealings at Company B

Palesa had expected to experience a smooth transition from her previous company to the new one because they (Company B) were looking for an employee with a marketing campaigns background, which she had. Even though she described her first three months at the company as pleasant, things soon took a turn in an unexpected direction when the head of department started a racing team on behalf of the organisation.

She argued that since she and her manager, the first Black male manager she had ever worked for, were the only two employees that made up the marketing team, the responsibility to execute events that would support the company’s newly formed racing team fell squarely on them. What frustrated her, however, was the fact that her job description had stated that she would be responsible for running campaigns for the company, but she soon found herself dedicating her entire energy on being an events manager. This change occurred without her being properly briefed by her manager. Furthermore, he ignored several requests from her to officially change her job

description so that it could properly reflect her new role and so that she could be properly measured for the work assigned to her as an events manager. To add insult to injury, her manager would outsource a professional events company for the events that he was responsible for at the company's Cape Town and Durban offices, but would expect Palesa to organise events assigned to her at their head office in Johannesburg without providing a budget or any other form of resources and then he would blame her for underperforming. Tensions increased between the two when Palesa sort intervention from human resources (HR):

And [sighs] my ratings and performance reviews were not even done... uhm... he started intimidating... I asked HR why my KPIs are not being done, why are they accepting that? Until he laid a grievance against me for non-performance. He laid a grievance, I won it... the first one. The second one, they only found me...uhm... they found something wrong...uhm...on one thing that he had... uhm...charged me on... uhm and said it was negligence. He said it was negligence because at an event, where a dealer paid for that event they brought in food, I left it with the team and I went home to go and take a table cloth and go buy a foldable table because I didn't have resources to come and put those things and then they said that food was sitting in the sun, what if customers and dealer staff had gotten food poisoning? And I said, *"Guys I did not have these and these and these, I had to go get those things!"* You know?... but they found me at fault for that and because this was the second grievance, uhm they deemed our relationship as having broken down. So... I had to be moved... HR had to make a plan for me to be moved... and this HR head decided to move me in a position that was so junior, firstly...Reception... they said they didn't have any other positions... and that position was a contractor position, not a permanent staff

reporting to... working for... uhm... Company B... which meant that my salary was going to be affected and would have had to report to... what's that... a broker... and employment broker [choking up]. And that was it for me because when he led the first charge I had gone into depression... I then was admitted in hospital, [Name of mental health facility]... for that... and my psychologist had said, "*Palesa you are being abused and we need to admit you*"... because I had suicidal thoughts due to this... and I marked all the indicators of being clearly depressed. And uhm... I went in. I asked... when I went into my...uhm... grievance... I asked for a lawyer to come and represent me, they refused... And finally when... uhm they changed my position and they said I can only work in... uhm... reception... I resigned.

Uhm... so.... I just... when I uhm resigned...they said to me, "*You will not serve a notice, It's with immediate effect...*" [Pauses and fights back tears] "*Tomorrow please bring in your company car, your laptop and everything.*" And by that time my manager had given IT an instruction to block my laptop. So, for a week I was not working. I went to IT because I had made friends there and they said, "*What have you done? Your manager said we must do this.*" And I explained to them... and I said you know... I know certain *dealings* that they were doing... my manager and his boss. And I had evidence in my in emails of those dealings. So, when they decided to lock my computer... I had downloaded everything...

Palesa's recounting of her experience at Company B initially did not make sense because of the speed with which her dispute with the manager escalated and which seemed to be disproportionate to the genuine concerns that she had raised. However, later on in her story, she revealed that she had uncovered that her manager and other colleagues, including the head of

department, were misappropriating funds meant for some of the events, particularly the ones she had been assigned to, hence she was never provided with a budget for them. She suspects that is the reason for her victimisation and why her manager fought so hard to either get her demoted to the position of receptionist or to leave the organisation, and also to erase all traces of evidence from her laptop that he knew she had access to. His aggressive behaviour suggests that perhaps he was afraid that she could potentially expose his and other colleagues' corrupt activities.

Palesa's health and her career languished during this time as she resigned without having a secured another job. Her sense of financial security was further eroded by the fact that her then husband had been recently retrenched and so they both found themselves being unemployed. She was, however, grateful that her life had been spared because in recent times South Africa has witnessed a rise in corporate and public sector corruption, and the assassination of whistle-blowers and would be whistle blowers who have evidence of corrupt activities.

Palesa refused to be demoted from middle manager to reception, but for the sake of survival she soon accepted a very junior position (still working in campaigns), with a "far lower salary" at a financial services firm in Pretoria where she was employed at the time of the interview.

4.3.4 "I expect to just be treated fairly." - Summary

Palesa's narrative started with her stating that she had wanted to become a lawyer and ended with her considering transitioning out of corporate and pursuing a career in psychology because she has always been a person who has had a keen interest in fighting for vulnerable and disenfranchised members of society. Even though she had settled for a corporate career, a strong sense of fairness and justice was a consistent theme in her narrative and she demonstrated this by

providing epic pins (Wengraf, 2011) of how she always stands up for what is right in the workplace, and similarly to Sindi, this was also a strong part of her identity.

Apart from the fact that she had transitioned from a private to a public school earlier on in her life, which suggests that there might have been financial constraints that she faced during that period, Palesa did not explicitly mention any financial challenges that she felt hindered on her education and training. The earlier parts of her career narrative had a very progressive and optimistic tone as she narrated enjoying her job in marketing and being recognised and rewarded with promotions for her dedication, but unfortunately it took on a regressive structure (Murray 2007) due to the disruptive events that occurred during the time she was employed at the second automobile company (Company B), and after her career trajectory and finances were negatively affected due to being forced to accept a junior position at her current place of employment out of necessity.

4.4 Conclusion

Sindi and Palesa's stories reflected the fact that assimilating into an organisation as a young Black African woman is a complex process because, over and above having to assimilate into a dominant culture, being qualified and dedicated to one's work does not guarantee that one will have a smooth ride and climb up the corporate ladder. There are numerous contextual factors, such as encountering power abuses and gendered racism and sexism, that can derail one's career plans and it is unfortunate that at times individuals are unfairly blamed for failing to attain career success or mobility according to societal standards. Even though both women were assertive and were able to push back at times when faced with microaggression, intimidation and victimisation, the psychological and sometimes financial consequences were costly and it is evident they could have

received more support from their organisations or the human resources departments than what they got. It was also interesting to note that they faced far more intense abuse from male managers and this reflects the kind of tolerance for violence against women that unfortunately still occurs in the society at large.

Chapter 5 – Horizontal (Thematic) Analysis of Data

5.1 Introduction – Learning and Playing the Game

The main aim of the analysis for this chapter was to understand how participants chose their career paths and how they experienced the corporate environment. This was done by searching for similarities and differences across the cases so that a comprehensive exploration of key issues could be presented. The researcher made use of both inductive and deductive thematic coding as discussed in chapter three to come up with the themes and subthemes for this chapter. Although this chapter continues the emphasis on participants' own voices as demonstrated in chapter four above, allowing themes to emerge from the data, these data are deductively organised in the frame of Bourdieu's theory.

In their narratives, participants often referred to the corporate environment as a game, some referred to their experience of corporate as being like 'hunger games' and others as a 'political game'. As discussed in chapter two, Pierre Bourdieu often used the metaphor of a game to describe the social space/ field as a competitive arena in which people use different strategies to maximise their positions (Maton, 2008). This metaphor of a game was therefore used to name and explore the overarching common themes across participants' narratives.

The first theme, learning the game, focused on the education and training phases of the participants' career journeys and explored firstly, how the socialisation processes at school and at home influenced the participants career choices and, secondly, examined their first impressions of the corporate sector via student recruitment and training programmes.

The second theme, playing the game, explored the factors that participants identified as having facilitated their career progress, the work practices that they perceived as unfair after having

gained work experience, and the changes that they believed could be implemented to further organisations' transformation agenda. The theme Learning the Game and its subthemes will now be discussed.

5.2 Learning the Game – Constructing Provisional Professional Identities

Due to the persistent unequal distribution of economic and educational resources in post-apartheid South Africa, the type of adult socio-economic status and quality of education that the youth receive often has a huge bearing on their economic and social mobility. The two sub-themes that follow explored participants' studies, early exposure to the world of work, followed by their first impressions of the workplace through internships and graduate programmes.

5.2.1 “No child of mine is not going to have a degree.” – Choosing Careers

With the de-segregation and de-racialisation of schools, there has been an increase in the migration of Black learners from poorly resourced rural and township schools to well-resourced public multiracial schools (also referred to as Model C schools) and private schools located in urban and affluent, predominantly White, suburban areas. All the participants in this study attended a combination of Model C and private schools and they narrated how they began to consider possible career paths in high school, particularly during their transition from grade nine to grade ten when they were required by their schools to choose subjects that would inform their future careers. By virtue of having parents who had obtained some level of higher education and some parents who had exposure to the corporate world, it was observed that the intergenerational cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) of these parents was passed on to the participants as they were expected to access

higher levels of academic study and to go on to occupy roles in the corporate sector or to start their own businesses (Liccardo & Bradbury, 2017):

Palesa: ... I fell in love with marketing while I was doing uhm business economics and in fact I wanted to study uhm purchasing management which is now known as logistics. And my dad was like, *"You're just studying one aspect of marketing, why not do marketing in general so that you can then maybe decide to specialise in something. Don't start narrowing yourself in while you're just starting off."* So, I said, *"Ok that's fine."*

Neo: I remember one of the careers that I'd looked at and I said, I would love to do drama but ah, my mother. I remember the conversations we would have, she wasn't [laughs] interested and then I'd considered law and the only negative aspect of law was because my sister had done it so that was the only thing, but everything of it seemed lovely you know. I'd be the person in high school that would do a little bit of research and I saw that it would uhm channel you into different careers, but obviously uhm luckily my sister used to give me a bit of information.

Mandisa: Uhm... so yah, then I matriculated from there in 2011 and I didn't have a plan. I didn't know if I wanted to study and then my father again was like, *"No child of mine is not going to have a degree"*, but I was like, why study if I don't know what I want to do? I don't want to waste your money. Then he was like, ok well, you know the way things are going within South Africa they're looking at people that have more skilled based work were they are doing things with their hands, not necessarily using their brain. It's both brain and hands,

but it's a skillset that people are trying to look at more and are acquiring. So then I was like, ok well let me study fashion because I mean I've always liked clothes growing up and my mum was very stylish growing up, she was also in corporate and you know, seeing her in a two piece suit... you know... and she was always like dressed well and always you know... to the tee. So I was like let me do fashion but I had no idea as to what I was getting myself into.

Participants narratives reflected how their family members were instrumental as role models and in providing career guidance and for some with persuading them to take a pragmatic approach to choosing subjects and careers that would most likely lead to secure and stable employment, which is an important consideration in a country with a high rate of unemployment.

Bourdieu (1986) states that one's upbringing together with their educational experiences helps to shape their habitus, which includes their beliefs, perceptions and sense of self, and that investing in education is one of the key strategies that families use to advance their social position and income in society.

Black families in particular, both historically and presently, have been known to make incredible sacrifices to ensure that their children receive quality education, not only for their children's individual benefit but with the hope that their children will support and uplift family members in the future (Davis, 1983; Webb, 2020). This is best demonstrated in Sindi's excerpt below, whose career choice was mostly driven by her desire to financially support her struggling working class family:

Sindi: I was very good at like science and mathematics. Not so good at the other ones, but you know uhm my mum really suffered during those years. She was severely underpaid and

we really struggled as a family to make ends meet you know?... Yah then I started at [Name of university] and I did finance, and then uhm I then went on to do my honours in investments, I just really liked investments. Then after my honours that's when my career started.

Due to the history of colonialism and on-going imperialism, White citizens in South Africa continue to maintain their economic and cultural dominance in the post-apartheid era. Relative to their peers from rural and township schools, participants' narratives indicated that they accumulated a larger volume of cultural capital due to assimilating some of the values and norms of the dominant class such as, mastering the English language and receiving an overall better quality of education during their schooling years, which later facilitated their integration and sense of belonging in elite universities and White dominated workplaces. However, not all of them gained the social capital required to ease their entry into the economic field as highlighted by Thula, who stated that although her art teacher assisted her with exploring possible careers paths, she had no access to professionals that could provide further exposure to the creative fields of, for example, advertising or architecture that she was interested in:

Thula: And it was until high school, with the assistance of my art teacher, where I started to explore different career paths within the creative thinking space....and I used to enjoy the class to be honest with you, the art class... So that's when I realised that okay, I think this is the path, ideally the right path for me and via various career expos as well. We didn't have much career expos at that point in time and I wasn't even exposed to much, and I didn't even have some sort of mentorship or even access.

Coming from the township and at a time when social media was not yet ubiquitous, made it especially difficult for Thula to gain exposure to the wide variety of career opportunities that were available to her. It has been observed that in unequal societies like South Africa, the unequal access to information and professional networks also tends to obscure what the marginalised perceive as opportunities that are possible or impossible to access or pursue when compared to the members of more privileged classes (Bourdieu, 1977 as cited in Schubert, 2008; Slay and Smith, 2011).

5.2.2 “It’s Like Hunger Games” – Early Exposure to the Corporate Environment

Participants reflected on their early exposure to the corporate sector, for some this was while still completing their degrees, while for others it was while participating in internships and graduate programmes after they had completed their tertiary education. Most participants recalled the competitive selection processes that they had to undergo in order to secure employment, which included panel interviews, psychometric assessments and for some even socializing with senior executives of organisations. Through these experiences they began to take note of some of the ways in which gender, race and class hierarchies are reproduced through the recruitment process, thus reinscribing social inequality through the process of cloning (Essed, 2012):

Sindi: Like gender inequality is actually so rampant in corporate SA. All the guys in my graduate class already had graduate programmes in June, none of the Black girls had *any* graduate roles. Like the guys were cruising in second semester. They already clinched their jobs and I’m talking about Black guys; I’m not even talking about my White colleagues or

students and that's when I started seeing the inequality... when it's time to get opportunities and careers. That's when my eyes became open...

Mandisa: So now I'm like, this feels like hunger games. Like it's... everyone is now competing against each other and it shouldn't be like that because we came in here as a group but now... So out of those five people that got in there were, I think there were three White girls that got in and one Black guy and then...I forgot, actually I think it could have been four White people that got in and then one Black guy. So already I was like this is a bit weird because the majority of us were not White.

Sindi narrated how she became aware of how the investment banking graduate programmes that she applied for had a skewed preference for male candidates, while Mandisa also noted that out the 15 candidates that she had participated with in her banking graduate programme only five, four of whom were White, students were eventually selected for permanent employment. This suggests that the process of cultural cloning defined as “choosing automatically for likeness” (Essed, 2012, p. 135) or choosing those who already look, think, sound and behave like those who already dominate these fields, does not occur only when employees are being considered for promotions, but also during the recruitment process. Valued corporate attributes such as being intelligent, rational and ambitious are still seen as residing in White male bodies and are used as boundary markers for who can enter corporates spaces and those that closely approximate this White male norm are also likely to be hired than those who do not. This means that from early on in their corporate careers, participants felt the assimilative pressure to conform to the dominant culture and to minimise signs of cultural difference in order to access career opportunities or risk

being unemployed. It also means that some corporations in South Africa misrecognise the potential of Black African entrants, which leads to the maintenance of subtle exclusionary recruitment practices (Bourdieu, 1986; Essed, 2012; Puwar, 2004). Black African and Coloured women who have historically been, and are still presently, overrepresented in domestic and other low paying, semi-skilled or unskilled work (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016), are still regarded as an anomaly in corporate and investment banking, even though many have proven that they are capable of succeeding in these male dominated industries.

Sindi: There was also this thing that urgh you get in through connections, a lot of the White people get in through connections and also a lot of the rich Black kids whose parents are politically connected uhm get the graduate programmes first.

Sindi also perceived that Black African graduates from affluent and politically connected backgrounds had easier access to employment opportunities compared to graduates from poor and working class backgrounds. This confirms Southall's (2014) observation that the intra-racial wealth gap has been widening among Black Africans in post-apartheid South Africa as some have joined the ranks of highly networked political and corporate elites and their children are also beginning to benefit economically from these connections. Access to employment opportunities is, therefore, not only determined by race and gender, but increasingly by class as well. This was the case with Mandisa who, through her father's corporate connections, managed to secure a placement in the banking graduate programme after initially not receiving a firm offer from the recruiters.

5.2.3 “The test that they make you do to see your IQ...” – Experiences of Selection and

Psychometric Assessments

Some participants expressed their uneasiness and frustration with the various assessments that they had to undergo during the graduate or internship recruitment process:

Neo: ... and I remember applying for a medium firm and going through... it wasn't a vocation work; it was like they took you on a retreat for three days and uhm... that's what I applied for in my penultimate year. And when I went there, it was just horrible! It was... it wasn't a stringent interview process but the whole thing was... like we were supposed to act like robots and I *hated* it, but I went through the process... The selections, the activities, the assessments that would be conducted were *odd*! I can't remember what they were, but I was like why are they looking for candidate attorney's prospective “whizz” like this you know?... You know where its *forced* ‘socializing.’

Neo experienced what Bourdieu refers to as a “habitus-field clash” (Maton, 2008), because she was not accustomed to the aspect of networking that formed one of several assessments that she had to undergo during the recruitment process at a law firm. She recalled how she struggled to form a connection with the senior partners (mostly White men) of the firm and consequently missed out on an employment opportunity because of not being deemed a ‘culture fit’. However, the recruiters and senior partners took it for granted that students from all types of socio-economic and class backgrounds would ‘naturally’ be at ease with networking. This demonstrates how certain elite social relationships are consciously or unconsciously reproduced and is another example of how cultural cloning occurs (Essed, 2012).

Sindi: You know I had done so many interviews Mpho and I kept being rejected and rejected. I was on the verge of depression actually because you know how hard I would work. Like some of these psychometric tests that you do at the top banks... Now I'm talking about international banks, I'm not talking about Standard Bank, I'm talking about Citi Bank, JP Morgan... like just to get into an interview... like the test that they make you do to see your IQ is very hard and I used to prep *so hard* for those things...

In a critical review of psychological assessments usage in South African organisations, Milner et al. (2013) argue that in most instances psychometric tests contributed to maintaining the status quo of the dominant culture rather than being used for the transformative purpose of ensuring that candidates of all genders and racial groups receive an equitable chance of being selected and succeeding in organisations. Dobbin and Kalev (2016) also confirm that some studies in the United States have shown that White males are often hired without having to endure the rigorous tests that their women and Black, Asian or Hispanic counterparts are subjected to and that this type of biased recruitment practice is still common in many organisations. However, they suggest that some organisations are beginning to rethink their recruitment strategies to ensure candidates from all backgrounds are treated fairly. It is possible, therefore, that psychometric tests and other similar assessments add yet another layer to the process of cultural cloning and this could be another reason why many Black women are excluded from accessing certain employment opportunities.

5.2.4 “I enjoyed that stint and I worked well with the team.” – Positive First Impressions of Corporate

Even though participants narrated their experiences of gruelling recruitment processes, some stated that they had positive first impressions of their internships and graduate programmes after successful placement:

Thula: I then gained the courage at some point to take the opportunity to go to an agency where I interned at [Name of advertising agency] and all my fears like literally flashed in front of me when I got there, but the beauty, the beautiful thing is that I was fortunate enough to take on the internship but also join a team that was warm, embracing and uhm to a certain extent almost uhm erased all those perceptions I had about the Ad industry in general.

Palesa: So once uhm you sort of like almost reach your 12 months you can start applying for permanent positions that come up. So...uhm... my first stint was in the [Name of company] financial services campaign team. I stayed longer than what I should have because as a team we started working very well you know. I enjoyed that stint and I worked well with the team and then HR [laughs] enforced that I move in other departments because they believe that it gives a person a wider exposure of the business so when you get appointed you have a better view on whatever position that you get appointed for.

Although not all students coming out of tertiary institutions enter the workplace through internships and graduate programmes, the participants in this study acknowledged that they are a

crucial steppingstone into corporations and that they provide great exposure and structure in organisations that can be intimidating and overwhelming for graduates with little to no working experience. Thula and Palesa stated that their sense belonging at the early stage of their career was facilitated by being part of a warm and embracing teams and being assigned to work that they enjoyed. So they, in essence, felt safe in their teams and they belonged (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Participants' early impressions and experiences of corporate organisations can therefore be described as ambivalent because although they were exposed to the bitter truth of employment opportunities not being easily accessible nor equitable, even when one is highly qualified, they were nonetheless appreciative of the existence of internship and graduate programme opportunities which facilitated their transition into corporate organisations. The findings of participants' experiences of corporate once they had gained some work experience are presented next.

5.3 Playing the Game – Experience of Dominant Cultures

This theme explored the key factors that participants identified as either having facilitated or hindered their career progression once they had been employed on a permanent basis. Being able to play by the rules of the corporate game, participants experienced a fluctuating sense of belonging and exclusion. The first sub-theme discussed below explored how supportive managers increased participants' sense of inclusion and belonging, and how being able to network with their White and senior colleagues also aided their ability to fit into organisations. This will be followed by two sub-themes (Inequitable Pay and Working Ten Times Harder) that highlight the main factors that participants perceived as unfair and that contributed to their sense of exclusion. The final sub-theme, Recommendations for Transforming Corporates, presents some of the suggestions that

participants provided on how to ensure that transformation initiatives are meaningful and are not just tick-box exercises.

5.3.1 “A manager is what makes or breaks you in corporate.” – Supportive Managers

Yuval-Davis (2011) argues that belonging is more than a sense of feeling safe or comfortable, how people relate to each other is an important part of belonging. Having a supportive manager was one of the most important factor that participants identified as being most facilitative to their career growth. Being provided with adequate mentorship and recognition for their hard work promoted their sense of belonging in organisations.

Mandisa:... my manager who is a Black female, amazing! If I didn't have her, I don't think I'd be where I am now because she gives me the freedom to do whatever, she trusts in me, she gives me the recognition and she's what a manager should be for everyone... I wouldn't be in that space if I didn't have the manager that I have and a lot of people are like a manager is what makes or breaks you in corporate.

Sindi: ... but I liked the fact that my boss, even though he was Afrikaner, he was young you know, and he... I don't think... I think he can be racist, maybe he was hiding it, but he was such an honest person. He lived such a straight like life and he was so fair towards me and he groomed me to being the type of analyst I am today...

Palesa: ... I reported to a White German woman who I felt was very fair mostly...uhm who was supportive and encouraging....When you show your dedication, when you show uhm hard work, she definitely supported you, you know.

While participants in this study recognised the importance of informal networking for career advancement, most of them foregrounded the importance of having mentorship from their direct managers particularly in the early stages of their careers. Their managers' support played an important psychological function by increasing their sense of acceptance and belonging in their teams and organisations, which further enhanced their sense of competence and professional development (Ibarra, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Participants' narratives also highlighted that some Black and White employees do sometimes transcend the 'us and them' ways of relating and are able to form respectful and meaningful connections, especially when they are able to suspend their stereotypical ways of viewing the "other" (Manganyi, 1973).

Unfortunately, some participants experiences were marred by conflicting and at times harmful relationships with some managers that they had encountered in their career journeys due to not receiving adequate organisational support and mentorship needed for them to perform their duties at the level that was expected from them by their employers:

Neo: I had a principal who was... so when they say you have a principal in articles, that's the person who is supposed to mentor you, teach you, oversee your work. I never interacted with that lady; I think she was one of those of people that had made it in law firm, getting clients... she just did not... the last time I saw her was when we were signing off my contracts and I was good to go. So there was no mentorship there... there was no... I wasn't saying she

must take me out to lunch, but be involved in what am I absorbing you know. What is your understanding of what a principal should be to a candidate attorney, as they would term it at that time. Uhm so we didn't have a relationship in that respect... I think I was just tired of not feeling like I'm moving or doing anything productive at the time, that I thought to myself, 'No I just need to leave this place and try and do something different.'

Neo's primary dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the law firm where she began her career stemmed from the fact that her employers had promised to expose her to different areas of law but had failed to honour that promise and that the person that had been assigned to manage and mentor her, simply avoided her for the duration of her stay at this company. In contrast, a White female graduate who had joined the company as a candidate attorney at the same time as her was treated completely different and was provided with all the support necessary for her to thrive.

Essed (1991) argues that racism does not only consist of what people do, but also what people fail to do and that neglect is a form of passive racism, which she defines as, "Not doing something one would normally expect in a situation" (p.14). She further argues that passive racism occurs when White people try to maintain a non-discriminatory self-concept and that by not doing anything, providing adequate training and mentoring to a Black colleague in this instance, they try to protect themselves from being accused of being racist. In addition to the subtle racism that she experienced, she also felt excluded from most workplace activities because she felt she did not embody the habitus (Maton, 2008) required for her to comfortably interact with the firm's elite and mostly White target market.

Neo's colleagues failed to level the playing field so that she could have a fair and equal chance of succeeding like her colleague and unfortunately, the burden to assimilate, network and

perform at high standards fell disproportionately on her shoulders (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Ultimately, her experience of subtle racism and classism at this organisation prompted her to resign.

5.3.2 “I could liaise in a way that White people wanted me to liaise” – Using the “Double Consciousness” to Get Ahead

Some participants, such as Mandisa, used their ability to effectively network with White colleagues to their advantage and to increase her sense of belonging in the workplace:

Mandisa: It [schooling background] helped me a lot because I could liaise in a way that White people wanted me to liaise, if that makes sense. So, I remember ... when I got to CIB they did an induction where you meet the head of Digital and you have coffee with them and I remember sitting in the room and everyone has to introduce themselves and she was like, *“Yah, and Mandisa, so Mandisa uhm was here last year for three months and she did amazing work.”* So already I didn’t have to introduce myself because she took a liking to me first of all, but because she went to an all-girls boarding school and so did I there was already that mutual understanding and liking... and I think yes you’re right it really did benefit uhm my transition within [Name of Bank] and all of that stuff, uhm but especially with White females...

Mandisa acknowledged that her embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that she had accumulated by being immersed in predominantly White spaces since her childhood (predominantly White neighbourhoods and private schools) assisted her in negotiating her way in corporate with greater ease and confidence than some of her Black peers in the same team who were from

different class backgrounds than her, and she was also able to take advantage of the “double consciousness” (Du Bois, 2007) that she developed in boarding school with regards to learning how White people think and behave through her everyday interactions with them, which then enabled her to socialise and network effectively with her White peers at work. Her proximity to her senior White colleagues that she cultivated through networking and socialising with them both inside and outside of her workplace resulted in her being exposed to work opportunities that her Black peers were never exposed to and ultimately being fast tracked within the team through an unexpected promotion which made her feel validated.

In contrast, despite their Model C schooling, some participants, like Thula, found it difficult to build relationships and to easily fit into their organisations:

Thula: So, that was also one the reasons why I was like, okay you know what I think... it’s a good call to make a move out of this space, because what I wasn’t willing to do was to almost sacrifice my own values, my identity and I wasn’t keen on always trying to fit in...

...but as I’ve highlighted that because I’ve always felt like I’m on my own on my entire journey and there is no back up plan, if I can put it that way... uhm I very earlier on knew that I *really* have to be mentally powerful... mentally strong ... I’ve come to learn this about myself, as long as I haven’t gotten to a point where I affirm myself, I will forever be in self-doubt, irrespective of what anyone says. Even if someone says, “*Oh no you’ve done this really well, this is really brilliant*”, for as long as I haven’t really come that full circle, there will always be that element of self-doubt... almost like an imposter syndrome...

Thula mentioned that because of the lack of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and having to rely completely on herself to succeed, feelings of self-doubt and fear of failure began to surface as she also began to internalise some of society's messaging about her not being deserving of certain opportunities because of her gender, race and class. Over time she has come to believe that she is suffering from an "imposter syndrome" (Clance and Imes, 1978), which affects many high achieving women who sometimes feel inadequate and less than competent in the workplace despite evidence pointing to the contrary. Unlike Mandisa, Thula stated that she was not always keen on playing the "fit in game" because it felt inauthentic and sometimes demanded that she compromise her own values and identity.

Yuval-Davis (2011) also argues that the concept of belonging is not only concerned with encouraging positive emotions in individuals but that it involves the idea of creating a space/spaces safe enough for every individual irrespective of their race, class, gender or age to interrogate and articulate difficult emotions such as anger or annoyance, and one that provides them with an opportunity to discuss what they perceive to be unfair treatment. It goes beyond the feelings of safety that occurs through interpersonal relationships, but also needs to include the structural safety offered by organisations as a whole and that goes beyond certain individuals. The sub-themes below explore the key factors that participants described as hindering their careers and perceived as unfair.

5.3.3 "I should be earning way better than what I'm earning." – Inequitable Pay

The politics of belonging in the workplace context involves exploring how social categories of race, gender, class etc. are used to determine who is most deserving of certain economic resources and opportunities, and how boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are maintained by the

dominant class to maintain their privileged position (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Participants perceived the pay gap that existed between them and their colleagues to be one of the most impermeable boundary markers that contributed to their sense of exclusion and from being recognized as equal members of their teams and organisations:

Thula: ... I looked at the structures at agency and I'm like, no but guys you cannot say you're inclusive and diverse when *all* your Black employees are literally the lowest earners and are at the bottom you know, and there's one or two, three, four tokens that are sent to the top or that are accommodated or included.

Palesa: In my team currently I have a sense that I'm probably the lowest paid but I am contributing far more... I did campaigns for the entire group *on my own*, the only support that I was then given was that of an intern...

Sindi: Yah the salary thing is a problem... it's a *big* problem. They feel like because you are Black, you're from a poor background, you don't deserve like a big pay cheque. Like you must just be happy for that little itsy-bitsy thing that they give you know, like that is the type of mindset I'm seeing.

Liberal feminist advocacy groups and government policies have tended to put more of an emphasis on women's access to education and participation in the labour market and not enough emphasis on the quality of employment opportunities for women particularly from marginalised backgrounds (Florres Garrido, 2020). Therefore, even within the category of 'women' many Black

African women in South Africa are among the most undervalued and underpaid employees as demonstrated by participants and Espi et al. (2019) who found that the majority of Black African women in South Africa, “earn marginally less than Coloured and foreign national workers and around half of what Indian and White women earn” (p.58), and this is also due to the racism and sexism that they encounter in the workplace.

Mandisa: She’s like, *“No uhm leadership had a set meeting and they were looking at people’s salaries and yours was one of the salaries that got an increase,”* which made me think that means I’ve been getting underpaid or something along those lines... More money but essentially now I’m in a new tax bracket but I’m at the bottom of that new tax bracket which is [sighs and claps hands]. That’s why my manager is like I don’t know if it’s good or bad news.

Neo: ... I literally went from the previous job, title is different, responsibilities, but I think I just made a R400 increase. I’m telling you I’m not even market-related. The friend of mine who referred me for the position... I applied, I didn’t even know it was open... had told me that they’re offering about R15000 more than what they had offered me, but they offered me what they offered me and I thought to myself, really? But I needed a job at the time.

Participants also stated that HR practices such as requiring employees to produce proof of salary from a previous employer, making them sign non-disclosure agreements that prohibit them from discussing their salaries with other employees, keeping them on the lowest level of the income tax bracket, and not matching their salaries with the contribution or demands required by their jobs,

served to camouflage discriminatory salary packages and contributed to maintaining an exploitative status quo.

Unfortunately the lack of transparency with regard to how salaries are determined was not the only issue that concerned participants, having to work ten times harder than their colleagues was another issue that dominated participants' narratives.

5.3.4 "I literally worked myself to the bone." – Working Ten Times Harder

Participants' narratives confirmed how the ideal corporate employee is typically expected to work long hours to and be willing to go above and beyond the call of duty to prove that they are fully invested in their careers. Black African women often feel that they have to display superhuman capabilities to prove that they are just as capable as their White colleagues and Black men:

Mandisa: ... being a Black female in any kind of setting but especially in corporate is very very hard because I'm constantly having to upskill myself to prove that, you know, I *can* come to the party and you *can* trust me with the work.

Dating back from colonialism and apartheid, people of African descent have been regarded as intellectually deficient and less capable than their White and even Indian/Asian counterparts. Such racialised stereotypes still persists in post-apartheid South Africa, thus participants felt pressurised to constantly display exaggerated forms of competence in order counteract these racialised stereotypes or stigmatised identities (Collins, 2000; Mama, 1995; Puwar, 2004).

Neo: I literally felt like, okay I'm a parent now, I'm going to have to prove a point. I literally *worked myself to the bone*. I took maternity leave at the very last moment when I could, I gave birth a week later.

The discourses of having to perform “back breaking work” or “working myself to the bone” came up repeatedly in participants’ narratives and it was evident that the idea of Black African women having to overextend themselves without sufficient recognition in organisations today is an extension of the history of colonialism and apartheid where Black women were expected to perform gruelling work for little pay or no pay (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1983).

Sindi: Yah so they throw you in the deep end so that you fail...so that you... you think you're so smart, you think you're so this, you think you're that... then they just throw you, but how I'm wired and how she's [her friend] wired is that we work even harder and those people don't like that because the more you work, the better you get at it right, and the more smarter you become... because it's not someone that tells you how to do it, it's something you learned yourself and you develop a strategy to do it on your own without anyone's help, but while doing that it takes you longer, right.

Participants also spoke often about being ‘thrust into the deep end’, meaning taking on responsibilities well above their pay grade and rank, and were sometimes even expected to take on the work of their White peers in addition to their own with virtually no support, but still with the pressure to produce high quality work. Interestingly, this expectation came from both their Black

and White managers and it can therefore be seen how racialised and gendered stereotypes are, perhaps unconsciously, internalised by all race groups.

Participants experienced the workplace in a contradictory ways, because on the one hand they were viewed as being less capable than their male and White women peers when being considered for career advancement opportunities and were often required to attend additional training than their colleagues to 'upskill' themselves even while being highly qualified, and at other times, they were expected to take on more work for no additional compensation because of being viewed as being strong and capable enough to handle anything that is thrown at them.

Many experienced and endured these contradictory expectations without complaining, for the fear of losing their jobs. The unequal power dynamics between them and their managers, especially in the early stages of their careers, meant that they often do not have sufficient negotiation power.

5.3.5 "I think it's more of an image thing." - Recommendations for Transforming Corporates

Even though participants acknowledged that many private/corporate organisations have tried to implement organisational policies such as affirmative action and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes to increase the representation of Black and women employees in companies, they all felt that most of the companies they had worked for had not gone far enough. Participants felt that organisations still needed to ensure that adequate processes are put in place so that senior managers and HR are held accountable for ensuring that all employees, regardless of race and gender, are remunerated fairly, are provided with equal opportunities for career advancement, and are provided with adequate protection for some of the power abuses and other

workplace related challenges that they encountered. They provided some suggestions on how these issues could be addressed:

Mandisa:...I mean there's many things, there's many uhm... you know... groups or things that they try. Like there's this one thing called [Name of a women's empowerment group] or whatever, where you get females you know trying to empower each other but essentially it's just a... I think it's more of an image thing to say that we're doing good, but essentially are we? Because I still don't know what I should be getting paid because no one is transparent. So that makes me doubt my argument when I'm arguing with HR, but essentially if I had people to go to, to bounce off these thoughts to be like, actually you're crazy or actually Mandisa you need to challenge the system. There's none of that, so I wish in corporate people were more transparent about how much they're earning...uhm...because I think it would make it easier for everyone and it would make HR accountable.

The point made by Mandisa regarding the need for organisations to be more transparent with regards to how they remunerate employees is the same made by Castilla (2018) who has shown that disparities in pay in certain demographics such as women, ethnic minority groups and foreign employees are significantly reduced when companies introduce transparency and accountability measures into their performance rewards system or when employees are unionised. Mandisa alluded to the fact that in the absence of such systems being in place, that women empowerment committees, for example, could serve as a space where such critical issues are discussed and that they could move beyond just being social networking events between more senior and junior women employees.

Neo: ... if maybe corporate employees could be getting unionised it could be better because the protection I've seen these [blue collar] employees have has been to their benefit. We fight with the shop stewards and the unions but it's for the better because ... especially because of the background that our country comes from its important...

From her experience of working in highly unionised blue collar work environments and fighting for workers' rights, Neo suggested that young professionals in corporations join unions so that they can be better protected from particularly the power abuses that they encounter from senior managers.

Sindi: ...you cannot have 8% of the country holding 80% of the country's wealth and 80% only having 5% of the country's wealth, It's not sustainable. There's certainly going to be more of these social unrest... uhm... things happening you know... if that doesn't change, which is why more companies need to employ more Black women because the Black women are the ones that do right by their families...

Sindi suggested that corporate companies should be held accountable for ensuring a fair distribution of resources and wealth across the society as a whole. Terreblanche (2002) has similarly argued that the marginalised should not have to carry the burden of trying to bring about transformative changes on their own and that corporate elites need to held accountable for their role in maintaining an unequal status quo. However, in the absence of a strong political will, these ideas are not likely to bear fruit any time soon in a capitalist society such as South Africa.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of participants' experiences of corporate organisations by exploring the themes that were common across their narratives, which revealed that while the cultural capital that they accumulated through their privileged schooling in many ways facilitated their transition into White dominated corporate organisations. Unfortunately, they still encountered racialised classism and sexism in the early stages of their career journeys which made them feel undervalued and excluded. However, they also encountered positive experiences of working with supportive managers and team members and some were able to cultivate strong networks that contributed to their sense of belonging.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This study was interested in understanding how young Black African women, through their subjective experiences and the stories they tell about themselves, have developed particular (professional) identities and how they negotiate or resist the raced, gendered and class identities. It also aimed to understand their experiences of marginalisation in the corporate/private sector. From the research questions, this study aimed specifically to understand the socialisation process that led them to identifying as professionals, the factors that facilitated or hindered their career development, as well as how they negotiated dominant corporate cultures. The chapter will summarise the key themes of study, discuss the key limitations identified and present the direction for future studies.

6.1 Summary of Key Themes

Participants' narratives revealed that assimilating the values and norms of the dominant class in Model C and private schools helped them to not only gain a double consciousness (Du Bois, 2007) in terms of understanding themselves from the perspective of a dominant White culture as well as their own, but it also endowed them with the cultural (and for some, social) capital that facilitated their transition into tertiary institutions and later into the workplace.

Even though all the participants were young Black African women with Model C and private schooling, this study revealed that they experienced varying degrees of belonging and exclusion in their career journeys. They also experienced unique challenges from their schooling years and were differently included in the corporate sector based on the volume and types of cultural and social capital they possessed, as well as the level of agency they exercised upon entering the workplace, for example, some participants were able to network effectively with White and senior colleagues

and thus gain access to career advancement opportunities that their peers were not exposed to.

What was evident, unfortunately, is that the role of assimilating into the corporate sector, to a large extent, fell on the participants and the unwritten rule of organisations in corporate South Africa is that new entrants into the corporate space must fit in into the dominant culture of the organisation. Participants felt the assimilative pressure to conform and to minimise signs of cultural difference or risk exclusion and unemployment. However, even with these barriers in place, participants acknowledged some of the positive aspects and impact that internships or graduate programmes had in facilitating their entry into the workplace.

One of the key themes also highlighted in this study was the importance of mentorship or sponsorship for the early stages of young women's careers. It was evident in this study that those that received adequate mentorship and support fared much better than those that did not.

Unfortunately, like in Jaga et al.'s (2018) study, once employed in the corporate sector, participants stated that they worked ten times harder than their White colleagues but earned much less. The sense of precarity, not only in terms of salaries but also in terms of being securely employed was a dominant theme in their narratives. One could tell by the sense of nervousness they expressed at the threat of being unemployed but also at the relief that they felt after being permanently employed.

It was also evident that they all, but to varying degrees, experienced some form of racism and sexism, which underscores the fact that patriarchal and racialised attitudes are still dominant in corporate South Africa. Participants also received inadequate protection for the power abuses that they experienced at the hands of some managers.

With all the obstacles that the participants encountered, this study demonstrated that Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social practice is not deterministic or reductionist, and the participants

in this study showed some dynamism and agency in terms of navigating their careers in spite of the persistence of structures of race and gender.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

There was a large amount of data generated by the in-depth narrative interviewing method but due to the length and time constraints of the thesis, not all of this rich data could be presented. This is a qualitative interpretive study that presents a partial interpretation that is open to other interpretations. Prior theory was, however, used to triangulate the information that emerged from the data.

6.3 Recommendations

Professionals who have an interest in organisational behaviour such as organisational psychologists, HR managers or DEI practitioners can use the findings of this study to make working environments more inclusive by taking seriously the contextual and structural factors that limit young Black women from equitably accessing work opportunities and participating in activities that could empower and elevate them.

Counselling and community psychologists could use the findings from the study to devise strategies that could further support young Black professionals who encounter similar challenges to those encountered by the women in this study, especially when it comes to the victimisation and power abuses with which some young women have to contend.

Organisations could make more of an effort in ensuring transparency of policies and pay to foster a more transformed and equitable environment and to demand more accountability from senior managers to ensure that they treat their employees fairly. Women's empowerment groups

initiated by organisations could also ensure that there is more solidarity and support between senior and junior employees and that networking events are more than just tick box exercises.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

Similar studies could be replicated to explore the career journeys that other young professionals of different races or genders categories experience in the corporate sector and in workplaces that have majority Black employees (such as the public sector) to analyse whether there are similarities and differences in experiences and organisational cultures. This would provide a much more holistic view of how young professionals as a whole experience the workplace.

Unfortunately what was highlighted in this study that has not been mentioned in previous studies, was the issue of corruption. This study revealed that there was not much protection provided to the participant who encountered corruption in the workplace and it is likely that the disempowering effects of race and gender dynamics made her more vulnerable. Perhaps future studies could explore what happens to young professionals who encounter corruption in the workplace.

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PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



Appendices

Appendix A: Participation Information Sheet

Good day,

My name is Mpho Makube and I am a psychology student at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for my Master's degree, I will be undertaking a research project under the supervision of Professor Jill Bradbury. The purpose of this research is to understand young black women's career journeys and their experiences of working in corporate South Africa.

If you are a young Black professional woman aged between the ages of 25 and 40, I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. Participation will involve being interviewed by me at a time and place that is convenient for the both of us, taking into consideration Covid-19 protocols to ensure our health and safety.

Due to the in-depth nature of the interview, it is expected to last approximately between 1hrs – 3hrs and it will be audio recorded with your consent using a digital audio device. Choosing to participate in this research is completely voluntary; you will not be disadvantaged in any way should you wish to withdraw at any stage of the interview process. You are also free to refrain from answering questions that you are not comfortable to or do not want to comment on. Should you feel discomfort or distressed at any point during the interview, the interview will be stopped, and we can resume at another time. Should you need support or counselling after the interview, you can contact the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG)

on 080 045 6789 or Lifeline on 0861 322 322.

Although your identity will be known to me as the interviewer, this will be kept strictly confidential, and you can choose a pseudonym (false name) that will be used to represent your participation in my final research report. Any information that could directly identify you, as an individual or your place of employment, will be removed from the transcript of the interview. My supervisor and I will be the only ones that will have access to the audio recording of the interview, and this will be stored securely in a password protected file and computer. With your permission, we would like to store a copy of your interview transcript that has all identifying information removed.

You are welcomed to contact me with any queries or concerns you may have before, during or after the research process. The final report of this study will be made available online via the university library website. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408 or email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Before beginning the interview, please read and sign the consent form and complete the short biographical profile in the link provided.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:

Mpho Makube, 0316301e@students.wits.ac.za, 072 746 4931

Supervisor:

Prof. Jill Bradbury, Jill.Bradbury@wits.ac.za, +27 011 717 4515

Appendix B: Consent Form for Interview

I, _____ (full name/s and surname of the potential participant) do hereby consent to be interviewed by Mpho Makube for her study exploring young black women's career journeys and their experiences of working in corporate South Africa. I understand that (please tick each condition in the box provided to indicate agreement)

☐

My participation in this study is completely voluntary

☐

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits associated with participation in this study.

☐

My identity will be kept strictly confidential, and any information that may directly identify me will be removed from the interview transcript. If I am referred to it will be using a pseudonym (false name).

☐

A copy of my interview transcript (with all information that may directly identify me removed) may be used by other researchers for academic purposes, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.

☐

I am giving the researcher permission to audio record my interview.

☐

I can withdraw from the interview at any time and can at any time request that my responses not be included in the study.

I do hereby consent to be interviewed for the research project

YES

NO

Signed: _____ (signature of participant)

Date: _____

Appendix C: Demographic Profile

1. Please indicate your current occupation

2. Please indicate the industry in which you work

3. Please indicate your years of total working experience

- ☐ 5 – 10
- ☐ More than 10

4. Please indicate the highest qualification level attained

- ☐ Matric
- ☐ Diploma
- ☐ Bachelors
- ☐ Honours
- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

5. Please specify age category

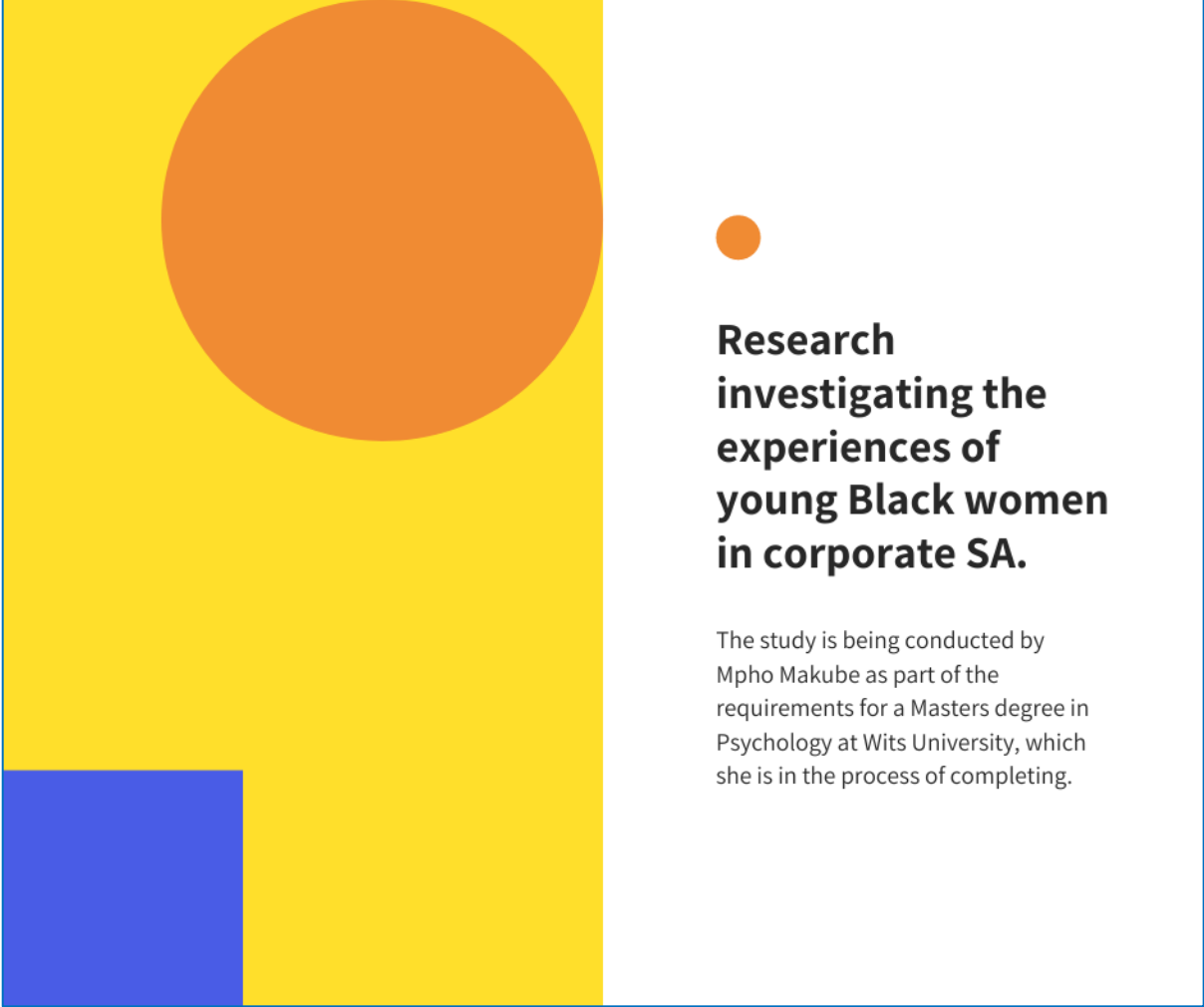
- ☐ 25 – 30
- ☐ 30 – 35
- ☐ 35 – 40

6. Please specify your Home language

7. Please tick all languages in which you are fluent

- ☐ English
- ☐ Zulu
- ☐ Xhosa
- ☐ Tswana
- ☐ Ndebele
- ☐ Sepedi
- ☐ Tsonga
- ☐ Venda
- ☐ Swati
- ☐ Sotho
- ☐ Afrikaans
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Appendix D: Call for Participation Poster

The poster is divided into two main sections. The left section features a large yellow rectangle with a large orange circle in the upper right and a smaller blue rectangle in the bottom left corner. The right section is white and contains the text of the call for participation.

**Research
investigating the
experiences of
young Black women
in corporate SA.**

The study is being conducted by Mpho Makube as part of the requirements for a Masters degree in Psychology at Wits University, which she is in the process of completing.

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS!



Who?

Looking for Black African women between 25 - 40 working in the **corporate sector** residing in or near Johannesburg to participate in a research study.



How long?

Between 1hr - 3hrs face to face interviews to take place from 15 Nov 2021 - 15 Dec 2020



What is the research about?

The purpose of the research is to understand young Black women's career journeys and experiences of working in corporate South Africa.



Interested?

Email 0316301e@students.wits.ac.za if you would like to participate and/or to find out more info.

Appendix E: Narrative Interview Schedule

Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN)

Can you tell me the story of your career journey and how you eventually landed in your current role?

Semi-structured Narrative Interview Schedule

Can you tell me a story about how your early life experiences at home or at school have shaped your career choices?

What have been some of the most memorable moments of your career journey thus far?

Can you tell me a story about some of the challenges or turning points that you have encountered in your career journey?

Please tell me a story about something that happened at work that you experienced as affirming and enabling for your career.

Please tell me a story about something that happened at work that you experienced as possibly racist or sexist or in some other way discriminatory.

Can you tell me about your future career aspirations?

Is there anything else you would like to share that you have not shared already?

Appendix F: Ethics Approval Letter from Faculty



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAPSYC/21/05

PROJECT TITLE:

Young Black Women's Experiences of Corporate South Africa:
 Navigating Dominant Cultures and Negotiating Professional
 Identities.

INVESTIGATOR

Makube Mpho (0316301E)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

19 October 2021

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Low Risk

EXPIRY DATE

31 December 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

25 October 2021

CHAIRPERSON

(Prof. Peace Kiguwa)

cc: Prof. Jill Bradbury (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature _____

Date _____

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES