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WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP:

An intersectional analysis of age, race, ethnicity and gender in one South African national institution

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University of the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg, 2019

This thesis has been approved for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in Diversity Studies by the University of Witwatersrand.

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences of women in leadership at the NRF. This is done within the context of gender inequality in leadership in organisations, and seeks to use the experiences of women in leadership to address gender inequality within the NRF. This study also explores the intersectionality of age, race, ethnicity and gender. Eight women in leadership roles at the NRF were interviewed. They varied in terms of race, ethnicity, age and level of leadership. Critical discourse analysis, critical diversity literacy and poststructuralist feminism were used to analyse the data. The analysis focuses on both the challenges the women leaders experience, and the enabling factors and ways they navigate these challenges. The challenges they experience within the organisation are related to “masculine” views on leadership, a masculine and hierarchical organisational culture, ageism, academicism, lack of networking opportunities, motherhood and work-home balance, stereotyping, and the sense of not belonging due to various and intersecting social identities. Enabling factors include awareness, taking responsibility, viewing diversity as fairness, legal advantages, “feminine” views on leadership, changing the organisational culture, expressing emotions, mentoring and networking, advancing others, and challenging stereotypes. The central issue is that the NRF has a masculine culture that expresses itself in various ways and prevents gender equality. Addressing these organisational culture issues may lead to more equality, not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of race, age, disability and level of education. Recommendations for equality are made.

Keywords: gender, leadership, intersectionality, critical discourse analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, about one in four organisations have no women in senior leadership roles, and only about one in four senior leaders in organisations are women (Grant Thornton, 2018). South Africa is doing a bit better than the global numbers on women in leadership: 80% of organisations have at least one woman in senior management and 29% of senior leaders are women (Grant Thornton, 2018). But only 10% of South African CEOs are women, which is lower than the global 12% (Bain & Company, 2017).

Gender equality in leadership and organisations is not just about numbers; it is about how well women thrive within the organisation, whether their perspectives are valued and influential and they are not just tokens, whether the organisational culture is diverse and inclusive of women, and whether it is a safe place for women to work, free from (sexual) harassment. For women not to be seen as a token and for their voices to to be respected, their representation needs to be at least 30% (Kanter, 1977; Grant Thornton, 2018; Bain & Company, 2017). According to research done by Bain & Company (2017) in South Africa, women are far less likely than men to recommend their organisation as a great place to work. They have similar aspirations to their male counterparts of rising to the top, but are less confident about getting there, because they feel it is more difficult as a woman.

Academic institutions are not an exception to the worldwide phenomenon of gender inequality in organisations. The academic world was established by and for men and still reflects a male space and male standards (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017). Despite more women than men graduating in South Africa (Bain & Company, 2017) and policies in place to create more gender equality in organisations (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017), there is gender disparity in academic institutions in (South) Africa. Especially in leadership positions, the more senior the position, the less women are represented. In South Africa (in 2007), less than 30% of senior positions in universities were filled by women (Shackleton, 2007).

Women are generally underrepresented in academia and leadership positions, but black women even more so than white women. Black women are severely

underrepresented in academia. The academic world was not only designed for *men*, but for *white* men, creating a double burden for black women (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017). In 2015, only three black women academics were A- and B-rated[1] compared to 79 white women academics in South Africa (Phakeng, 2015).

1.1 The research problem

The problem this research focuses on is gender inequality in leadership in organisations, based on the experiences of women in leadership at the National Research Foundation (NRF), a South African national, parastatal organisation that manages national knowledge production, and includes academic entities as part of its overall organisation. This study examines the experiences of women in leadership in the context of gender inequality in leadership in organisations, and analyses how these experiences can contribute to addressing gender inequality in (the) organisation(s).

Gender equality is about similar power, opportunities and status for all genders (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005), and based on the numbers described in the introduction, many organisations - worldwide and in South Africa - are not fully gender equal. Organisations are not always great places for women to work and are not proportionately representing women in leadership roles, limiting the power, opportunities and status of women. Because gender inequality in (academic) organisations continues to exist, it is relevant to continue doing research on these issues (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017), and to do so from different angles and with different focuses.

The NRF is no exception and has gender inequality in leadership positions. At a junior level the numbers are equal, but the more senior the position, the less women are represented. Their organisational culture is also not experienced as women-friendly; it is described as patronising, male-dominated and according to male standards, and there are a significant number of sexual harassment issues (NRF Status Report: 2015). This research is also requested by women in leadership positions within the NRF. They want

[1] A-rated = leading international researchers, B-rated = internationally acclaimed researchers

to gain more insight into the gender inequality within the organisation and within leadership, in order to be able to address issues causing this inequality more effectively.

1.2 Rationale of the study

Many studies have been done that focus on the challenges women experience in rising to the top or becoming more senior leaders, the so-called glass ceiling, but less research has been done on factors that may *enable* women in rising to the top (Pheko, 2014). This study focuses both on the challenges and enabling factors women leaders experience.

There is not much knowledge on women in leadership in Africa compared to the knowledge that has been produced on women in leadership in other parts of the world. As a result most of the theories are framed by research done in Western countries. There is a need to extend knowledge on women in leadership within the context of Africa (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009), which this research aims to contribute to.

A significant number of studies have been done on gender inequality and the challenges women face in academia (Shackleton, 2007; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017), but not much in-depth and qualitative research that focuses on women's experiences has been done on women in academic institutions in Africa (Odejide, 2007; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). This research will study in-depth how women in academia experience being a leader, using qualitative methods that enable this.

Very little research has been done on how gender intersects with other social identities in organisations (Benschop, 2006; Acker, 2006), and on the intersectionality of gender and race among women leaders in academia. To my knowledge, no research has been done on the intersectionality of women leaders and age/generation in the context of South Africa, and how women of different age groups that either grew up during or after Apartheid may have different experiences as leaders. This study will examine the intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity and age for women leaders in this organisation.

Another valuable contribution that this study will add to the existing knowledge on these issues lies in using a critical perspective and discourse analysis. This research is not only interested in the factors that affect or determine women leaders' experiences, but also in the discourses that shape these factors. It will link the experiences of these women to the discourses related to 'women in leadership' that exist in the society, the organisation and the direct environment these women live and work in.

1.3 The objectives of the study

The objectives of this research are threefold.

Firstly, this research aims to add a valuable perspective to the knowledge in the field of women in leadership, in academia, and in South Africa. It will do so from a critical research perspective, with a focus on intersectionality and discourses.

Secondly, this research aims to support women in leadership at the NRF in particular. The research is set up to give these women a stronger voice. The purpose of this research is to give the NRF more insight into gender inequality in leadership within their organisation, to be able to provide tools for creating a more gender equal organisation.

Lastly, this study is about using knowledge to increase social justice and equality, specifically for the NRF, but also for other organisations.

1.4 Research questions

The main research question is:

How do women in leadership at the NRF experience being a woman in leadership?

The sub-questions for this study are:

- What challenges or advantages do these women experience in 'rising' to the top of the organisation?
- How does organisational culture enable or inhibit them?

- How does the age of these women affect their experiences?
- How do the cultural background, ethnicity and race of these women affect their experiences?
- What ideas or discourses about leadership exist in the organisation and in the environment of these women?
- Do these women see differences in leadership styles between men and women? And if so, what differences?
- How do these women think they are being perceived as leaders by others?

1.5 Chapter overview

Chapter two gives an overview of the literature informing this study. The chapter defines key concepts, and explains the theoretical positioning of the research. Chapter three describes the research methodology. It focuses on the NRF as the research site, the data sources, the collection of data and the way the data is being analysed. It also explains the ethical considerations of the research and identifies limitations of the research. Chapter four describes the data analysis. It focuses both on the challenges women leaders experiences, and on the enabling factors that women in leadership experience and the way they navigate the experienced challenges. Chapter five examines the reflexivity and intersectionality of the researcher, which influences the aim of the research, the interviews and the data analysis. Chapter six concludes the research and gives recommendations to increase equality and for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL POSITIONING

2.1 Gender in organisations

2.1.1 Gender

Gender is defined as ‘patterned, socially produced, distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine’ (Acker, 1992, p.250). Gender is a socially constructed difference, as opposed to ‘sex’ that is often seen as the ‘natural’ difference between female and male bodies. The distinction between gender and sex is however not so simple, as many argue that gender constructs sex: the idea of a gender binary is not dictated by nature, but reflects a cultural need to create this binary (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon, 2002). This study defines gender as socially constructed differences between female and male. Female includes trans women, should they be in a position of leadership in the NRF.

2.1.2 Organisational theory

There are different views on organisations. The mainstream view defines organisations as economic institutions where human resources are used to produce goods and services, and is interested in how to do this most effectively and by maintaining the *status quo*. A critical organisational approach sees organisations as places where groups of people work together, and is interested in the ways that the organisation has an effect on people and sees a need to change power disparities within the organisation (Mills, & Simmons, 1995; Litvin, 2006). This research adopts a critical approach to organisations.

This research has a gender perspective on organisations. A gender perspective is interested in how the organisation defines and socially constructs female or male, and feminine or masculine (including stereotypes). It studies the organisational practices that maintain and justify labour divisions and inequalities between women and men. It

helps to see how gender definitions in organisations are fluid and can change. It assists in seeing how values and ideals in the organisation often express male dominance, how men and women interact, and how individual identities are being created. It can also provide a broader view on how organisations function (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Acker, 1992). While I argue that a gender perspective is crucial in organisational theory, it is not the only perspective. Other social group identities, such as race, age and class, are relevant too. This research is therefore gender-sensitive, but not gender-exclusive (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Acker, 2006).

This research views the organisation as a culture, using Schein's theory. Schein (2004) states that organisational culture is very abstract, but also very influential in how organisations function. Schein distinguishes three levels of culture: the artefacts, the espoused beliefs and values, and the basic underlying assumptions. The underlying assumptions, including discourses, are the essence of the organisational culture and can be analysed through the artefacts and values, such as language and behaviour. He further argues that culture and leadership are closely linked; the culture defines a successful leader and determines who will be a leader (also in terms of masculinity and femininity), and leaders in the organisation also manage the culture (Schein, 2004). Organisational culture is greatly connected to gender, as it constructs beliefs and definitions of gender (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

2.1.3 Gender inequality in organisations

Gender equality is '…measured by comparable decision-making power, equal opportunity for education and advancement, and equal participation and status…' (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005, p.2). Within organisations there is a division of labour, leading to gender inequality. This division of labour is both horizontal: more men than women in positions of leadership, opportunity and power, linked to masculine ideas about these roles, and vertical: more women than men in less prestigious, less powerful and low-status jobs, and linking feminine qualities to these jobs. There are different reasons for why gender inequality exists in organisations (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

The way society is structured and the ideologies and norms that dominate in society affect the way organisations function. Capitalism and patriarchy, and the interaction between the two, are seen as causes for structural gender inequality. Patriarchy is a system in which men dominate women, and aims to maintain unequal relationships between men and women. Capitalism reinforces patriarchy, because without the unpaid and low-paid work many women do, capitalism would not survive (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

Societal norms, such as no support for equal opportunities for women, or the demand on women to be primary caregivers at home, can result in gender inequality in organisations (Bain & Company, 2017). Socialisation is believed to affect gender inequality. From a young age, we are socialised into how to behave as either female or male. These gender roles are normative and normalised, and we internalise these ideas and act accordingly, thus affecting the work-related choices we make (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Being socialised in societies with patriarchal views teaches women that male authority over women is normal and to accept this (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017).

The way organisations are structured and functioning, and the practices and culture of organisations create gender inequality. This is called the ‘gendering’ in organisations: the seemingly gender-neutral processes in the organisation that structure it along gender lines, related to ideas, socially shared beliefs and stereotypes that exist in organisations around femininity and masculinity, and women and men. This is due to the fact that historically, organisations were designed for and to be directed by white men, resulting in white, masculine cultures, making organisations more challenging environments for women and people of colour (Dodds, 2012).

A central aspect of these gendered processes is the concept of the abstract or ideal worker. The definition of the ideal worker seems gender-neutral, but corresponds to assumptions about the male worker (who also happens to be white), someone who is completely dedicated to work and does not have family obligations. Although for some jobs (at lower levels), women, especially women of colour, are preferred because they are cheaper and can be more easily controlled (Benschop, 2005; Acker, 1990; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2006). This is gender typing of jobs: certain jobs are linked to either

feminine or masculine ideas, making only a particular gender more suitable for and more likely to get a particular job (Benschop, 2006). Gender-typing of jobs limits the opportunities women have, which does not only have an effect on the chances but also on the aspirations that women have (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Need, Visser & Fischer, 2001).

Proportional representation in organisations and teams also matters. Kanter's (1977) token theory explains that when few women (compared to men) are in certain positions, they experience more pressure, visibility and stereotyping, making it harder and less appealing to be in a position that is dominated by men (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Acker, 1990). People tend to choose people similar to them. With power and decision-making often in the hands of men, this results in more men selected for similar jobs, keeping power male-dominated (Herring & Henderson, 2011).

Gendering also happens in the values related to how to work that may affect the genders differently. For example, working overtime has consequences for one's social and family life, and with women having more family responsibilities, they are more easily excluded (Acker, 2006). Having a masculine or feminine organisational culture has a determining gendering effect too. Masculine cultures are more difficult for women to fit in and maintain a distinct gender role pattern and hierarchy (with males being dominant) (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Acker, 2006; Hofstede, 2001). Another cultural gendering aspect is the condoning of disrespectful behaviour or harassment towards women, which can be discouraging for women's career advancement (Bain & Company, 2017).

This research is mostly interested in how ideas, stereotypes, beliefs and discourses on gender, and structures and processes in the organisation affect women in leadership, while taking into account the societal norms and the socialisation of these women.

2.1.4 Approaches to gender in organisations

There are four views on how to increase gender equality in organisations (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). The first one focuses on developing women, assuming that due to

socialisation women are less skilled than men for certain careers and therefore need to be trained in order to compete equally with men in these jobs. The problem with this approach is that it focuses on individual women as a problem to be solved and requires them to adapt to the male norm, while organisations do not structurally change, leading to minimal positive outcomes.

The second approach also assumes that women and men are different, but focuses on celebrating female qualities. The issue with this approach is that the definition of femininity is essentialised, limited and constraining. Gender differences are over-emphasised and women are still pushed into female-appropriate roles.

The third view aims to create equal gender opportunity by addressing policies leading to structural inequality in the organisation. These type of interventions have helped to improve gender equality in organisations - mostly for white and middle-class women and marginally for women of colour, but are less effective when beliefs around gender and power imbalances are not addressed.

The fourth approach therefore focuses on power imbalances and the gendered social practices within the organisation. These practices include policies, but also relate to values, discourses and social interactions, and addressing these practices is the most effective way to create gender equality (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This study mostly uses the last approach, but does incorporate aspects of the previous approach.

2.2 Gender and leadership

Many studies have been done on why there is gender inequality in leadership, why significantly fewer women than men hold positions of leadership, decision-making and power, worldwide and in all type of organisations. This is referred to as the ‘glass ceiling’: women may be present in lower management positions, but for a number of reasons they are not able to reach the top levels of organisations (Pheko, 2014). In addition to the reasons mentioned in the previous section, there are specific causes for gender inequality in leadership.

An important cause for this inequality is gender stereotyping. The ‘think manager-think male’ mindset is the most common. Men are generally seen as more competent leaders, because leadership is defined in - what culture defines as - masculine terms, making it easy to see men as having qualities associated with leaders (Pheko, 2014; Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003; Schein, 1973). Schein (1973) developed a tool to measure the ‘think manager-think male’ connection. From studies using this tool it can generally be concluded that most females and males link manager qualities to definitions of masculinity. (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy & Liu, 1996; Schein, et al., 1996). A study done in the US suggests that the perception is not only ‘think manager-think male’, but also ‘think manager-think *white* male’ (Chung & Lankau, 2005). This is supported by several South African studies that observed negative connections of females and blacks to managerial qualities (Manwa, 2002). A study using Schein’s tool in South Africa also analysed the results based on the intersectionality of gender and race of the participants. They concluded that both black and white men linked managerial qualities to male characteristics, but black men supported this link more strongly. White women linked women and men equally to managerial qualities, but black women viewed women as possessing managerial qualities (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010), which is a unique result in the studies done using Schein’s tool. Most probably linked to this ‘think manager-think male’ mindset, women that are successful as (top-level) leaders often display masculine behaviour to be able to compete and be taken seriously (Pheko, 2014; Alvesson & Billing, 2009), although women also tend to be negatively viewed when they do this and do not behave according to their gender role stereotypes (Bleijenbergh, et al., 2012; Acker, 2006).

Women have to work harder and need more or higher educational qualifications than men, to be seen as equally competent as men, making it harder for them to get promoted (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017; Eagly et al., 2003). In addition, when women perform according to feminine stereotypes in roles where that is expected, they tend to not receive recognition because feminine qualities are undervalued (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

Women also experiences difficulty in rising to top level positions because of unfair and biased performance reviews, job advertisements, recruitment and selection (Bain & Company, 2017; Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). Most organisations base performance reviews and selection criteria on the basis of meritocracy, assuming that that means it is gender-neutral and objective. But meritocracy favours white men over women and black people (Canham, 2014).

Even when women have become leaders, there are still stereotypical prejudices about their skills and qualities, and they are often less appreciated than male leaders (Pheko, 2014; Eagly et al., 2003; Alvesson & Billing, 2009) The ‘glass cliff’, putting women leaders in poor performing work environments that are likely to fail, helps in confirming these stereotypes (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

Another reason for gender inequality in leadership positions relates to networking, support and mentoring. Being mentored or supported as an employee by someone more senior increases the chance of being promoted. To get a mentor is harder for women than for men, because it happens mostly through informal networking - the 'old boys’ network’ - with more male mentors available preferring men to mentor, due to homophily (Pheko, 2014; Bain & Company, 2017; Canham, 2014). This informal networking is also disadvantageous for recruitment, where recruiters and the selection committees are overrepresented by men (that already know a man suitable for the job) (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012).

The inequality can also start in the type of education that women and men pursue. For example, MBA’s (education related to becoming a manager) can be biased against women in the content and the way it is being taught (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

The work-family balance is often seen as an important cause. When women have children it is in most cultures assumed they prioritise family responsibilities over work responsibilities, which is undesirable for many organisations and can therefore be challenging for senior level women-with-children leaders, especially if they conform to these ideas. For men with families and children this is not an issue. Even if women do not have children or if they have a different view, they may still be ascribed these

stereotypes and be judged accordingly (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Taking maternity leave can also negatively affect promotion prospects (Motaung, et al., 2017).

Most of the research done on women and leadership focuses on the challenges they experience when they try to ‘rise’ in the organisation, but not much research has been done on what helped them break through the glass ceiling or the positive experiences women leaders may have (Pheko, 2014). This research wants to look at all the experiences of women in leadership, both positive and negative.

2.3 Gender in academia

Despite a significant increase in women enrolling and graduating in higher education globally, there is gender inequality in academic institutions (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017). Women are worldwide underrepresented in senior academic positions (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012), and have limited power to influence the vision and structure of academic institutions (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017). In South Africa, less than 50% of research and teaching staff at universities are female and the majority of them are in junior positions (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017). Women make up only 19% of full professors (Bezuidenhout & Villiers, 2011). There are several reasons for this gender inequality that are specific for academic institutions.

The purpose of academic institutions is to produce and share knowledge. Knowledge has historically been defined in masculine terms and higher education institutions were designed for white men (only white men could attend). The nature of academic work, which is authoritarian and individual, relates to the masculine qualities that men have been socially taught. Because of this, women are systematically and structurally at a disadvantage (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017). Similarly, science is more strongly associated with agency, more often ascribed to men, than with communal qualities, more often associated with women, thus increasing prejudice and discrimination against women in this field (Carli, et al., 2016).

In academic institutions, the amount of research someone does is the most important factor for being acknowledged, appreciated and promoted. Women produce

less research than men and they have more difficulty finding funding for their research. Women teach more and they co-author more academic articles than men. In South Africa, women also achieve higher degrees at a later stage than men, and combine family responsibilities with work life. Regardless of the heavy workloads that academic women experience, they are not valued as much as their male counterparts, because there is such an over-emphasis on research production (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017).

Stereotypes about females and males also affect the academic world. Stereotypical thinking about women not being as good scientists as men creates prejudice and discrimination against women working in science (Carli, et al., 2016). And being a professor can be seen as too highly demanding for a woman, which limits women from being chosen for senior academic positions (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012).

2.4 Gender & leadership in (academic) organisations in (South) Africa

Women in Africa are doing relatively well as leaders in government, with Rwanda leading the world with the highest percentage of women in government, but are, similar to the rest of the world, not well represented as leaders in other organisations (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Phakeng, 2015).

Research has been done in Africa on women in leadership and has focused mostly on factors limiting women's advancement. These factors are: socialisation of girls into a primary role as mother and wife, limited access to education, role conflict of family and work life caused by unsupportive husbands, gender stereotyping that sees women as less competent and only fit for certain jobs and excluding them from male-dominated organisations, and organisational procedures that seemed gender-neutral but disadvantaged women (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009).

Research that has been done suggests that the experiences of women leaders in organisations in Africa can be different from women leaders in other parts of the world. One example is a study that found that women leaders in South Africa view work and family as complementary and not necessarily as conflicting, and have a different

understanding and definition of ‘family’ than Western women (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). Also worth noting is that some African feminists argue that pre-colonial African societies lacked gender hierarchy and viewed the genders as complementary, with important leadership roles for women, making it worth studying gender inequality within the context of Africa (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Odejide, 2007).

In South Africa, Apartheid had a huge impact on how organisations were defined and created. The very foundation of Apartheid was to create inequality based on race, ethnicity and gender. Leadership, senior positions and well-paid jobs were in the hands of white males and defined in terms of white masculinity. The organisational culture was ingrained with ideas of separation, exclusion and domination of black people and women. White women were supposed to stay at home or work in assistant jobs, and black people were expected to work in low-paying and low-status jobs. This did not change overnight after Apartheid ended; there is still inequality based on race and gender in organisations and white males are still the norm (Canham, 2014; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). Academic institutions are not an exception to this trend. On the contrary, under colonial rule and Apartheid, higher education was designed to create inequality in society. After 1994, academic institutions were restructured, but the inequalities based on gender, race and class still exist (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017; Mama, 2003).

Thanks to the Employment Equity Act (EEA), which promotes equality in the workplace and implemented Affirmative Action (AA) for previously disadvantaged groups, inequality issues in organisations are being addressed. Unfortunately, the EEA does not address the issues of the norm being white and male (Canham, 2014). Also, the EEA has benefited white women much more than black women: their leadership numbers are growing much faster than that of black women (Canham, 2014; Phakeng, 2015). This may be due to white women being closer to white men (who hold the power) than black people, because networking with people in power is important in gaining more equality (Canham, 2014). Because black women are the most marginalised in society, they are often quite different from the organisational culture and standards they

work in, which may make it harder for them to become a senior leader because they disrupt the ‘way things are done’ (Canham, 2014b).

The high incidence of sexual harassment on higher education campuses in Africa is also an issue. It can hinder women in completing tertiary education and it can prevent women from career advancement (Barnes, 2007).

South African academic institutions experience a ‘leaking pipeline’ for female academics. Due to several reasons such as high work pressure and unclear work expectations, female academics leave before they reach senior levels (Bezuidenhout & Villiers, 2010). In addition, the retirement age in higher education is at 60 years of age, which is relatively young considering that women generally only become professors after the age of 48. Female academics in South Africa take on average longer than their counterparts in (some) other parts of world to reach senior levels. They experience delays due to financial issues and the need to work and earn money first or on the side, and due to child-rearing activities being primarily the responsibility of women (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2011).

2.5 Intersectionality

Intersectionality means that social identity categories are not separate from one another, but that people are seen as constituted by multiple social identities that intersect. This study will examine how intersectionality affects the unique experiences of the women leaders (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008).

To study intersectionality in the context of organisations is very relevant as gender inequalities and other inequalities, such as race and class, mutually reinforce each other. Organisational hierarchies are often gendered and racialised: top managers are very often white men (Acker, 2006).

Using intersectionality to analyse the experience of women in roles of leadership is particularly interesting because being a leader is also an identity, one that is affected by the social identities and the socio-historical and cultural contexts of individuals (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). The research of Carrim & Nkomo (2016) shows that South

African Indian managers struggled with their identity as manager, because their social identity as Indian women and their upbringing under Apartheid contrasts with the white and male definition and expected behaviour of a manager in South African organisations, and they experience very limited power to change the definition of manager. Intersectional identities exist within the larger context of socio-historical-political issues, and therefore this study seeks to analyse social identities within the socio-historical context and in relation to leadership identity.

This study specifically focuses on the intersections of gender with age, race and ethnic/cultural background, but includes intersections with other social identities, such as (dis)ability.

2.5.1 Race

Race is a social construct that is vaguely linked to the colour of someone's skin. It is also a lived reality that significantly affects the experiences of people that are defined as black (or coloured) in South Africa (Canham, 2014).

According to Acker (2006), gender and race & ethnicity (and class) are integrated together in organisations. They are the basis for inequalities in organisations, and therefore worth studying together. In South Africa, gender can not be studied separately from race, because they are completely connected, due to South Africa's history of Apartheid, racism and racial segregation. The effects of this history and the inequalities are still very visible in society and in organisations (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). Black women have very different experiences from white women, as they experience a 'double burden' of both racism and sexism (or even a 'triple burden' because of class) (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Canham, 2014), so when studying the experiences of women, the differences between black and white women need to be studied as well.

2.5.2 Ethnicity

Ethnic (or cultural) background is also a relevant social identity to study in the context of gender and leadership in organisations in South Africa, because of the many

ethnic groups that live in South Africa and because ethnicity can influence the discourses participants are exposed to. There can be a difference between the experiences of and views on women by Zulus and Tswanas, or Afrikaners and English South Africans (Andrews, 1999). Culture is known to have an effect on ideas about women in leadership. Looking at the different studies done on women in leadership in Africa and comparing these studies to research done in the Western part of the world, it can be concluded that culture has a huge influence on gender inequality and the experiences of women (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009).

2.5.3 Age

Age or generational differences can have an effect on the experiences of women in leadership in organisations, due to the history of Apartheid: older participants may have been more affected by the sexist and racist values and norms of Apartheid ideology (Teppo, 2009; Andrews, 1999). I could not find or did not have access to literature on how this may have an effect, but this is based on my own (limited) observations that older people may be more influenced by sexist and racist ideologies as a normal way of living than young people that grew up in a democracy that tries to create a more equal society. There is some literature on very young people being optimistic about the future (Swartz, Harding & De Lannoy, 2012), but I have also observed older young people being disappointed and frustrated because the promises of equality in the new democracy did not fully take place. That is why this research aims to investigate if age is relevant to the experiences of women in leadership in a South African organisation.

2.6 Theoretical positioning

This research is positioned within the theories of social constructionism, critical discourse analysis, critical diversity literacy, and feminist theory.

2.6.1 Social constructionism

A social constructionist perspective sees all experiences as socially produced and reproduced (Braun & Clark, 2006), and argues that an absolute truth does not exist but that reality consists of social constructions (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). It states that language and discourses construct reality (Terre Blanche, et al., 2014b), and enables unmasking the taken-for-granted definitions of reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This paradigm is more interested in the socio-political context of the research data than in taking individual experiences at face-value (Braun & Clark, 2006). Social constructionism also helps to challenge dominant ideas and to give voice to alternative ideas (Canham, 2014).

As the research question focuses on the experiences of women in leadership, this view will be combined with aspects of interpretative research, to understand how these women ascribe meaning to their experiences in the socio-political context (Braun & Clark, 2006; Neuman, 1994; Terre Blanche, et al., 2014b), and to use these experiences to analyse the discourses that are influencing or defining these experiences (Terre Blanche, et al., 2014b).

2.6.2 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis is one approach within social constructionism (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), and focuses on the relationship between language and power (Litvin, 2006). Critical discourse analysis is based upon certain premises: our reality is a product of discourses and we should be critical of taken-for-granted-knowledge, our reality is contingent and historically specific, it is anti-essentialist, our reality is maintained by social processes, and our knowledge leads to different social actions (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

This research adds the view of discursive psychology: the analysis focuses on participants both as products of discourse and as producers of discourse, and on how people use discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

2.6.3 Critical diversity literacy

Critical diversity literacy is critical research in the field of diversity. It provides tools for understanding diversity from a critical perspective and for analysing research data when doing critical discourse analyses. It is defined by ten criteria (Steyn, 2015). These are the criteria relevant for this research: understanding of the role of power in constructing differences; recognition of unequal material value of different locations, including norms and stereotyping; analysing intersectionality; defining how the past works in the present; recognising essentialised, internalised and naturalised social identities; ability to interpret coded hegemony, where power is hiding itself; analysing how diversity hierarchies are inflected through the material; understanding the role of emotion; deepening social justice.

2.6.4 Feminist theory

The research is based on feminist ideals: to critically address gender inequalities in society and to not only study these but to also want to change these inequalities (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). This research is feminist research, because of the focus on women's experiences and issues, preference to reduce the power difference between researcher and participants, self-consciousness of the researcher about her role in the research, and action-focused (Eagle, Hayes & Sibanda, 2014). Feminist research also enables the voices of the suppressed-by-patriarchy to be heard (Shackleton, 2007).

The research mostly draws upon poststructuralist (postmodern) feminism. Post-structuralist feminism offers a way to balance a social constructionist view of gender: both the categories and the definitions of men and women are socially constructed (Gergen, 2008), with standpoint feminism: the view that women's voices equal women's experiences and treating women's voices as literally true (Cruz, 2008). This research wants to give voice to women's experiences, because their experiences are underrepresented in research, knowledge and society, and their input is valid (Kilomba, 2013; Cruz, 2008; Kobayashi, 1994). But instead of accepting women's voices as literal representations of their experiences, post-structuralist feminism helps to analyse how

women have access to different discourses (either liberatory or oppressive) and choose to reproduce or critique these discourses. This way their voices will be heard, but they will also be analysed from a socio-political and critical perspective (Kitzinger, 2004; Cruz, 2008).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research's theoretical positioning and the research questions inform the research methodology (Braun & Clark, 2006; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). A qualitative research design has been chosen, for a number of reasons. The study focuses on the 'how' of experiences, and on so-called 'soft data', discourses and words. The analysis is done by critically 'extracting' the data and presenting a coherent picture. These are best researched within a qualitative design. Also, social constructionist research and critical discourse analysis is done within a qualitative design (Neuman, 1994). In addition, it is easier to study intersectionality in a qualitative research design (Bowleg, 2008).

3.1 The research site

The research was done at the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa. The NRF is an independent government agency and entity of the Department of Science and Technology, with a mandate "to promote and support research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the necessary research facilities in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of science and technology, including indigenous knowledge, and thereby contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of all South Africans" (NRF, 2019). The NRF was founded in 1998 and incorporated several agencies that previously worked with research funding. The structure of the NRF is divided into Corporate Services and Operational Divisions, headed by a CEO and a board. The NRF has multiple locations, each with its own focus (NRF, 2019). Most of the interviews were held with women working at the main office in Pretoria, which is mostly responsible for the operations and funding aspect of the NRF. The hierarchical structure of the NRF consists of six layers: top management; senior management; professionally qualified and experienced specialists and mid-management; skilled technical and academically qualified workers, junior management supervisors, foremen and superintendents; semi-

skilled and discretionary decision making; unskilled and defined decision making (NRF Status Report: 2015).

The NRF was chosen as a research site, because I was interested in doing research on women in leadership within an organisation and women in leadership positions within the NRF were interested in gaining more insight into the gender inequality within their organisation. Access to the NRF was established through my supervisor, who holds the Research Chair (SARChI) in Critical Diversity Studies, and has been doing research within the NRF on transformation. As a researcher I was working under the auspices of this broader research project into transformation at the NRF. That is why the NRF specifically gave permission to name them in the research report as an indication of their commitment to transformation.

3.2 Data sources

Non-probability sampling was used to select the participants. Participants were not selected randomly but through purposive sampling, because the participants needed to be relevant and interesting for the research (Durrheim & Painter, 2014; Neuman, 1994). The participants were women in leadership roles employed by the NRF, and to be able to answer the research questions a broad selection of these women was needed. They needed to be of different age, race and ethnic background to study intersectionality, and they needed to be in different levels of leadership to cover the broad range of leadership role experiences.

Access to these women was through my contact person at the NRF, who invited the women and planned all the interviews. A diverse group of women that matched the criteria were emailed information about and an invitation to participate in the research (see appendix A), and eight of them responded positively.

Because critical discourse analysis is labour-intensive, the smaller the sample size the easier it is to analyse, and a few interviews can often be enough to generate a lot of information (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Each interview generated a lot of data, and

after eight interviews there was enough data to do a proper analysis, and data saturation seemed to have been reached.

Of the eight women interviewed, one identified as white, one as Indian, two as coloured and four as black/African. Two were born in other parts of Africa, and one of them was a naturalised South African. The women came from at least six different ethnic backgrounds. The ages of the women ranged from late thirties to early sixties, with three of them in the age group of 35-44, two in the 45-54 age group, and three in age group of 55-64 years old. Three of the women interviewed were senior leaders (corporate executive & senior management) and five were middle managers.

3.3 Data collection

The data was collected through interviews. Although it is very common in critical discourse analysis to analyse documents (to eliminate the researcher's influence on the data), or use a combination of different data sources (documents and interviews) to create a better understanding (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Kelly, 2014), this study used only interviews for a number of reasons.

The main reason for choosing only interviews and not a combination of analysing documents and interview transcripts was time-constraint. It was important that women in different levels of the organisation, and with different backgrounds, were being interviewed. Doing, transcribing and analysing interviews takes a lot of time. Analysing both interviews and documents would be too time-consuming for this project.

The first reason for choosing interviews over documents is to give women more voice, because the research is for them (Kobayashi, 1994). One way to do this is by interviewing them and using them as the data source. Secondly, this study is interested in these women's experiences and they are best analysed when the researcher hears their experiences from them instead of through documents. Thirdly, certain aspects of interpretative research were applied and interviews are helpful in understanding how these women give meaning to their experience and which discourses they adopt or critique. Fourthly, interviews are a good way to obtain information about the women's

experiences of interacting with other people within the organisation, which is relevant for the research question (Potter & Mulkay, 2007). And lastly, interviews provide the opportunity to ask a range of people the same questions, making it easier to compare data (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The interviews were semi-structured with mostly open questions, because this allowed for more in-depth questioning, while still asking the intended questions (Kelly, 2014). The interviews were intended as having a conversation, not with the researcher as the expert and the participant as the research subject, but as a co-enquirers, thus producing more valuable data and giving the participants more voice (Kelly, 2014; Harvey, 2003). Open questions also allow for studying intersectionality. To study intersectionality it is important to ask about experiences in general to create space for intersectional experiences, instead of focusing on specific and 'competing' different identities. Only if the participants did not mention anything about intersecting social identities, they were specifically asked about it (Bowleg, 2008). An overview of the questions can be found in appendix B.

The aim was to have interviews of about one hour. Shorter interviews with more participants are preferred to long interviews with only a few people, because this will better help in answering the research questions (Kelly, 2014; Neuman, 1994). Most interviews took more than an hour, because the participants shared a lot beyond the specific questions. The longest interview was one hour and 30 minutes.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, with notes taken during the interviews to help with the transcription and analysis. Not only words and sentences were transcribed, but also the expressions and the way they were being said, such as pauses, sighs, laughs, and other emotions, because expressions and emotions are relevant for the analysis and can lead to significant insights (Kelly, 2014; Wiggins & Potter, 2008). The participants were not sent the transcripts for approval. The transcriptions were used to analyse the data.

The interviews took place at the workplace of the participants. They all had access to a private office or space to have the interviews, to ensure privacy.

3.4 Data analysis

Critical discourse analysis, combined with using critical diversity literacy, intersectionality and poststructuralist feminism, is used to analyse the data.

Different steps in doing critical discourse analysis are used. The first step is coding and theming: classifying the data into categories (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Taylor, 2001; Terre Blanche, et al., 2014a). Two main categories are chosen: the challenges the women experience, and the enabling factors and ways they navigate these challenges. This is done to show a clear distinction between these two types of experiences, and to emphasise that these women have agency over their experiences and are not only victims of inequality.

The analysis itself consists of several stages that intertwine: reflecting on and searching for patterns in the data (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), such as binary oppositions, recurrent terms, phrases and metaphors, and subjects that are talked about (Terre Blanche, et al., 2014a); studying the functions and effects in the data (Potter & Wetherell, 1987): discourses do something, they have an effect, they create particular truths, and they constrain or empower certain subjects (Terre Blanche, et al., 2014a); looking for variation and consistency in the texts, while looking at context; looking at what other discourses the text is dialoguing with: usually different discourses exist next to one another and discuss with one another (Terre Blanche, et al., 2014a); and, looking at how '...structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control are manifested in language...' and aiming '…to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)' (Wodak, 2004, p. 199).

The data is also analysed using the criteria of critical diversity literacy. Questions about the data are asked, such as: 'how are differences being naturalised?', 'who is taken seriously?', 'is there an attempt to rewrite the past?', 'are groups being essentialised?', 'how is power hiding itself?', 'how are material things divided?', 'who is doing emotional labour?' and 'how can my analysis destabilise power?' (Steyn, 2015; M. Steyn, lecture, 28 September 2017).

The data analysis includes how intersectionality has an effect. This is done by comparing the experiences of women on different axes of social identities, for example the black, young woman and the white, older woman, to see how the intersectionality of age, race and gender affects their experiences, and by using a broad analytical scope (the socio-historical context) to be able to recognise intersectionality (Bowleg, 2008).

Poststructuralist feminism is also used to analyse the data. This focuses on how the participants reproduce or critique the discourses they are exposed to and analyses their voices from a socio-political and critical perspective (Kitzinger, 2004; Oliveira & Vearey, 2015).

Part of the analysis is the application, which is the practical part of the research. This phase focuses on what is problematic about the discourses and addresses issues and problems related to gender inequality within the organisation (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). This is helpful in suggesting social change in the discussion of the results and giving practical advice on how to make change happen.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are very important when doing research, especially when human participants are involved (Wassenaar, 2014). Doing ethical research means: treating participants ethically, doing valid and meaningful research, and using reflexivity as the researcher.

The main ethical principles in doing research with human participants is to make sure they are not harmed by the research (non-maleficence) and that the research benefits the participants (beneficence). Confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary informed consent are ways to conduct research in ethical ways (Wassenaar, 2014; Brinkman & Kvale, 2008). These are discussed in the next two paragraphs.

One of the ethical dilemmas, related to the consequences of the research for participants, is that I engage critically with what the participants shared in the interviews, in order to explain (damaging) discourses that exist in the organisation and in society. This can result in negative feelings for the participants, but is meant to expose social

injustices, which ultimately will and should benefit the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). There are unequal power relations between me and the participants, but I try to reduce those by being in dialogue with them, by doing research for, with and alongside them (Harvey, 2003; Riessman, 2005; Kobayashi, 1994), and by being respectful of what they shared, analysing it also from a perspective of agency of the participants. The participants are not only victims of inequality, they are able to navigate these issues and experiences and challenge issues of inequality.

Doing ethical research also means doing good research, adhering to scientific quality: research should be valid, rigorous, transparent and justifiable (Wassenaar, 2014; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Hence a thorough explanation of the theoretical positioning and methodology of this study, and the effect I, as the researcher, may have on the outcomes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008).

Ethical research is also research that adds value to society (Wassenaar, 2014). This is described in the objectives of this study.

3.5.1 Confidentiality

All participants signed for anonymous participation. Some were very explicit about this, others expressed less concern about being identified in the report. Confidentiality and anonymity are ensured by not referring to the participants by name or another indication that could lead to identifying them in the research report. Recording interviews can raise questions about confidentiality (Riessman, 2005), so the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews are saved in password-protected documents with a code name known only to the researcher. The names of the participants and what they said is not discussed with anyone else.

To ensure confidentiality I was very aware of using quotes that could lead to identification of the participant. That is why I grouped participants as much as possible. I used only two levels of leadership, senior and middle management, even though there are more levels in the organisation, to make sure identification of the participants based on level of leadership would not be possible. Also, I only speak generally and relatively

about age instead of mentioning a particular age or age group, and I am careful about using quotes linked to a specific race or ethnicity. There was a complication when I wanted to use a particular quote by a participant when this quote could lead to the identification of this person. Because I was not sure if the participant was ok with this, I discussed this issue and its possible consequences with the participant, and let her decide whether to publish it or not. It was not my decision to make (Ryen, 2004; Brinkman & Kvale, 2008).

3.5.2 Informed consent

Informed consent means that the participants are informed about the aim and design of the study, as well as risks and benefits for them as participants. It also means that they consent to voluntary participation and can withdraw from the study at any time (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Informed consent was asked of all participants and it was openly disclosed to them what the research is about. The participants all signed a consent document, which can be found in appendix C.

None of the women interviewed withdrew from the study, or informed me after the interviews that certain information could not be used, so all the data of all the interviews was used.

3.6 Limitations of the research

An important limitation of the study is that I was able to interview only one woman leader from another location than the main NRF office in Pretoria, so I could not compare different NRF locations. My analysis is therefore concentrated on this particular location. The input of this one participant was not used to analyse issues specific for this location, but was useful for describing more general experiences and matters concerning the NRF in its totality.

It would have been interesting to interview more women, with even more diverse backgrounds, to get an even bigger picture. However, many of the issues were

mentioned in similar terms several times by the participants, indicating that the analysed themes are not singular experiences but structural concerns.

The number of participants may have been too small to properly study the intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity and age. I was able to analyse intersectionality to some extent, but not as much as I would have liked to and not to the extent that certain assumptions can be made.

The single method research design is a limitation of this study. Only interviews were used for data collection while a combination of different data sources - documents and interviews - would have created more data and from different perspectives, and may have led to a better analysis.

The participants all had a certain level of awareness when it came to gender and diversity issues. The participants were also informed the study was about women in leadership, so they automatically focused on women and gender. This made it difficult sometimes to hear about their general experiences and be able to analyse those from an intersectional perspective, and it meant that I usually had to ask about other social identities specifically (also making it difficult to analyse). Asking about other social identities, however, usually gave me more open responses and less thought-of or prepared responses, compared to answers around gender, making those responses interesting for my research.

4 ANALYSIS

This chapter seeks to explain and provide context to the experiences of women in leadership at the NRF using two areas of focus:

1. the challenges they experience and describe;
2. how they navigate being a woman leader and what enables them.

This will be done by also studying discourses, ideas and perceptions around women and men in leadership, organisational culture, and age, race and ethnicity. Table 1 gives an overview of the two focus areas and their respective aspects as they are discussed in this chapter.

Table 1: Challenges and enabling factors

4.1 Challenges	**4.2 Enabling factors and navigating the challenges**
4.1.1 Not knowing the reason for experiencing challenges	4.2.1 Awareness
4.1.2 Views on leadership	4.2.2 Taking responsibility
4.1.3 Vision for leadership (or lack thereof)	4.2.3 Diversity as fairness
4.1.4 Age, maturity and leadership	4.2.4 Legal advantages
4.1.5 Organisational culture: Hierarchy Academicism Feedback & performance Networking Emotions English as norm Woman-friendliness	4.2.5 Views on leadership
4.1.6 Motherhood	4.2.6 Changing organisational culture: Hierarchy Performance & feedback Networking
4.1.7 Work-home balance	4.2.7 Expressing emotions
4.1.8 Stereotyping	4.2.8 Mentoring
4.1.9 Culture	4.2.9 Actively advancing others
4.1.10 Views on organisational challenges	4.2.10 Work-home balance
4.1.11 Social identities and the sense of not belonging	4.2.11 Challenging stereotypes
	4.2.12 Limited effects of Apartheid

The data are presented as part of the analysis. The interview quotes from the participants that are used in this chapter are in cursive and in between quotation marks. They are anonymised and literally quoted, and used to support the claims made in the analysis.

4.1 Challenges

This paragraph describes and identifies the challenges the participants experience being a woman leader at the NRF. It focuses on the aspects that they feel inhibit them or make it harder for them to progress. It also analyses problematic issues that they may not necessarily view as such or as related to gender inequality, but that they did mention during the interviews.

4.1.1 Not knowing the reason for experiencing challenges

What came up in all the interviews is that it is very difficult for these women to decide whether certain challenges or issues are caused by their gender or other social identities or because of another reason, for example, a challenge everyone is facing or a relational issue. Often it isn't clear why they are not being listened to or taken seriously. In several cases they are sure it is due to the fact they are a woman, but most of the time they are not certain, although they feel it must be at least part of the reason. Sometimes they also think it is related to their race, level of education, level in the organisation, age, or country of birth, or the intersection of several identities, but it is hard for them to pinpoint. This makes addressing issues of discrimination or inequality harder.

"I can tell you that there are certain individuals, who don't listen to you because of being a female and possibly the colour of your skin. It's not evident like as in like in your face, but it definitely plays a role as to whether you're being listened to or not."

“So it's very difficult to decipher that from the experiences I would have as a woman or whatever.”

“It's very difficult to say why you are not being heard.”

“I think it's because of me being a woman, me being African, and yes, the position as well, also. […] Probably a combination of those things.”

“I can't say it was just because of gender, you know. I think gender might have been one of those things…”

“I wonder if it was gender or, if it's not."

[When asked if race or ethnicity plays a role in how she is being perceived]: “I don’t know.”

“I don't know. [long pause] Well, not not from my experience, you know, let me just say.”

4.1.2 Views on leadership

Leadership, and what it means to be a good leader, is strongly linked to men and masculinity. Male and men are the standard, and women must adapt to that standard. Most women interviewed feel that men are automatically seen as competent leaders with a valid contribution to the team, whereas women need to prove themselves time and again. Good women leaders must ‘work like a man’ in order to succeed. Historically, men were fully outnumbering women in senior management, and only slowly women have entered this level, so men have been able to set the standard, and it seems the standard has not been redefined to accommodate women. The literature confirms the issue of leadership being designed for, originally dominated by, and associated with white men, making it easier for them to climb the ladder, compared to women (Dodds, 2012; Acker, 2006; Schein et al, 1996), and also that women need to work harder to be seen as equally competent (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017).

“In that team, we have about four male, and then we have two black African women. And, you know, they're dominating us in terms of the number…”

“So that's where the additional *effort from a woman's perspective comes in, because it seems like the male side is like an easier acceptance of the information that is given.”*

“Men naturally are thought (of) to be very masculine, and as a woman you have to come in with a voice*, with a* presence*, with the* work *ethic…and move, and very strong, almost taking on the persona of being masculine.”*

“With a number of men already they've conquered at that stage of being senior leaders in their organisation….with women it takes much longer for them to get into that mode.”

“The senior leadership has been male.”

“I just need to work hard to ensure and prove to everyone that, you know, I can do it, as a woman.”

“Interviewer: “do you also think that women or girls should be more like men in this respect?” “If they do want to get ahead in the culture, there’s an element at which they need to within the prevailing culture.”

“I'm a man in all respects”

“Because they [women] need to prove *themselves more than what men need to prove themselves.”*

“You have to prove that you can do it, whereas I feel that with male leaders.. […] It's subconsciously undermined, and it's something that, you know, people think, and culturally, especially from the African culture, we've got this thing of, you know, men need to be respected, more than women. So, even the African men, they've got that belief that, you know, if I'm a man, whether you are a good leader, or not a good leader, as long as you are in that position, then automatically you'll be respected. But as a woman, you have to prove yourself that you can do it.”

In accordance with other research (Pheko, 2014; Alvesson & Billing, 2009), as a woman in leadership in this organisation you need to be hard, strong and assertive to be heard, to be taken seriously and to be able to function. Being hard, strong and assertive are “masculine” characteristics, connecting leadership again to masculinity and the male norm. Due to this norm and trying to fit the norm, women leaders are often seen as unnatural, less competent or tougher than their male counterparts, both in this and other organisations (Bleijenbergh, et al., 2012; Acker, 2006). Acker (2006) also

explains that women leaders have to walk a fine line of being masculine enough to be taken seriously and seen as competent, but not too much to lose their likeability and perceived competence as a leader.

And even then, some people simply don't like to be led by a woman due to patriarchal thinking.

"*[As a woman] you have to have a strong personality and you have to have of lot of hair on your teeth, in order for you to just* function*. You know, to stand your ground. So as a woman you have to be more assertive, in order to get your points across, that's a definite."*

"You must be clear *on your positions [as a woman]…otherwise you may not be heard."*

"We have to work hard to make sure that men do understand that, you know, we also have the power, as women."

"I'm a hard person, I am, I'm not even going to, but you have to be, you have to fight more, you have to articulate more, you have to push more. Because if you don't *necessarily, nothing will necessarily come out of it."*

"You have to be more assertive to be taken more seriously, and if you become more assertive, then you obtain the reputation of being a tough person."

"I've seen a few places where females try to overcompensate, and not being themselves."

"When there are females who do *do that [assume a position like men do], they are..considered aggressive.."*

"You gotta be aware of it, as a female, so that sometimes your hardness is seen as, you know, from that role. You're tough*, you know, where tough is not seen to be a compliment."*

"When you report to a female boss, she's actually more hectic than the male boss. It's almost like they're punishing you for something. […] I think that's the general in the NRF, the women are just more hard-arsed. […] Because they need to prove *themselves more than what men need to prove themselves."*

"I wondered a little, a bit about males, in this case, males always reporting into a female senior, you know. I find guys who are a bit patriarchal can struggle with that."

A unquestioned understanding is that one, especially as a senior leader, has to work long hours, needs to be always available, and needs to work from home in the

evening and on weekends. This is also connected to masculine ideas of leadership: the ‘ideal worker’ who is always available for work and doesn’t have other obligations (Benschop, 2005; Acker, 1992; Acker, 2006). This perspective makes it easier for men to progress as a leader, as they are often not seen as responsible for taking care of their children, whereas women are seen as the ones who will put family before work (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). It seems that the women leaders interviewed are not aware how this idea of working long hours is problematic and a challenge for women (leaders), and how it is also not necessary; it is only one way of looking at leadership.

“I'm operating essentially as a man, where I was here at seven this morning, and I think I can leave at eight if I so wish. It's just a pretext and when it comes to the personal level, I feel it more in my health than anything else. The time, the work/life balance sometimes is, is not, isn't because really, you can't do this thing and still be able to exercise and still be able to to eat healthily and, you know, all those things, so, it affects you negatively in that respect for both men and women.”

“But here we've got this culture of you must work, if you're not working, you know, if you're not sending emails 24/7, the assumption is you're not working.”

“To be honest I've only seen children come to work with women; I've not seen men bring their children.”

There is a strong focus on achieving results as a leader, especially from the perspective of senior management. The senior leaders interviewed have a different definition of good leadership from the women in middle management. Senior leaders emphasise the need for achievements and are results-oriented (even when they also focus on people), while middle managers see leaders’ main focus as enabling the team. Both Kanter (1977) and Hofstede (2001) explain that being results-oriented is seen as masculine, while people-oriented leadership is linked to femininity. Research done by Fagenson (1990) found that both women and men in higher levels of the organisation showed more masculine traits than those in lower levels of the organisation. This masculine definition of and performance in senior leadership make it easier for men to get into and succeed (or at least be seen as successful) in senior management.

“Everything is KPI-driven…the person gets lost.”

“I guess we tend to get very self-absorbed or so roped into doing, getting the job done, that we don't always breathe, and think about how we engage people.”

“A good leader, it gets to be assessed on the basis of whether the results have been achieved or not, in my opinion. But to lead, you're leading to what end, really. To what end, because at the end of the day, what needs to be achieved is what needs to be achieved, and so the circumstances as I'm saying will dictate then whether one is a good leader or a bad leader.” (senior leader)

[Feedback a senior leader received and quoted]: “You’re really tough on us, you expect us to deliver…you want things done…”

“My definition of a good leader is somebody that creates an enabling environment, and makes it possible to bring out the best in your team. That's what I think a good leader is. To provide the necessary direction and advice, but also recognising that your team is made up of people and making sure that you're able to bring out the best in each member of your team.” (middle management leader)

4.1.3 Vision for leadership (or lack thereof)

A comprehensive vision for leadership, what makes and defines a good leader and how to select and grow employees into positions of (senior) leadership, seems to be missing. Most leaders, especially in senior management, are recruited from outside of the organisation, employees can be in the same position for many years, assessments for potentials are not being used, and those recruited from outside can be placed in positions lower than their capabilities and experiences. ‘Good leaders’ are defined by ticking a few boxes of measurable criteria, but the organisation is not good at defining the ‘softer’ aspects of good leadership, and overall lacks ways of creating leaders from amongst themselves. Talents are only recognised incidentally, making progression and learning more of a lucky bet (depending on who sees you) than because of any organisational vision. It seems that only the very energetic, driven and not-scared-to-take-a-risk people, with the approval and help of someone in a senior

position, are able to move up, not recognising the potential leaders that are not capable of showing themselves to the right people.

This lack of vision and policies on creating and selecting leaders doesn't only lead to demotivation among those in the organisation that wish to be promoted, it also ties leadership again to masculine norms. The male leadership definition is not being challenged or changed, and leadership is determined by "masculine" 'hard data' and assertiveness, and not so much by feminine 'soft' qualities.

"Because when you're recruiting for an ED, we will go to the market. When you're recruiting for a corporate executive, you'll go to the market."

"One of the things I think in this *organisation is, your entry point might be a level within the organisation, but your experience prior to your entry might not be at that level. […] Because even though the position was junior, I had had more experience than what the position actually required of me."*

"…having people make the space available for you as well, and then obviously you just work bloody hard."

"So what are the leadership gaps and I don't, I think that *is what we're not working on."*

"NRF has just lacked them where they are. If you are an administrator at that time, you spent 14 years as an administrator, they don't give you an opportunity to assess you, to check as to whether...after assessment, you know, can you be moved maybe to a senior…"

"I know other people who've been in their positions for 16 years, same position, but also, there's fault in terms of their inability to find new ways of doing things, so then they're not innovative. My personality is such as that I will do *until you recognise that I've done."*

"We've seen *where if you* shine *a little bit too much, if focus is a little bit too much on you, you're brought back to size. I wasn't under an individual who didn't want that. When I say under an individual, the actual person at the top who saw my potential…but it's not the case for everyone."*

"We haven't quite gotten the handle on how do we evaluate *the leadership…[…] So what are the leadership gaps, and I think* that *is what we're not working on."*

4.1.4 Age, maturity and leadership

There is a strong connection between age and leadership qualities; you need to be ‘old’ to be a leader. The assumption is you can only be a good leader when you have a lot of experience, while talent, skill, personality, values or vision seem less relevant. Good leadership and behaviour as a leader are also regularly described in terms of ‘maturity’, relating it to age. And the actual age of leaders is an obvious link as well: all senior leaders interviewed are older than 50, most leaders in executive management are “close to retirement age”, the youngest woman leader interviewed was just under 40 years old and was considered 'young’. Hierarchy is closely linked to age; the older ones are generally higher up in the organisation. This suggests ageism within the organisation: discrimination and inequality based on someone’s age.

This is, in addition to discrimination, problematic for a number of reasons: young people have less opportunities (too young to be a (senior) leader) and less influence (less power for those lower in the organisation due to hierarchy); old people are making decisions for people who may live very different lives from them due to generational or life stage differences; a disconnect between senior leadership and young people in the organisation; being a good leader isn’t necessarily related to age, so the organisation may miss out on talent, especially since there seems to be potential among young people.

“I know age definitely does play a role, because you find that the majority of your senior staff are quite mature.”

“I think many people, if I'll be honest with you, perceive me as young and inexperienced.”

“You know, these managers are quite mature...you always have to prove yourself…I think because of age. And because of perception that there is a lack of somewhat of experience.”

“With the younger people, they see you as the senior leader, the older person. So they're not as comfortable to engage with you. And because they're not as comfortable to engage with you, it impacts on the extent to which you can-cannot lead.”

“But there are people that have potential, knowledge, insight, younger people, you know."

In addition, linking age and ageism to gender inequality, it is mostly older *men* in senior management, making decisions for, among others, young women. Due to the sexist history of Apartheid, women in the organisation older than 45 may not have had the same opportunities to become senior leaders as men, keeping older men firmly in the most powerful positions. If (senior) leadership positions would open up to younger people, more women would have opportunities. And not only women, also people of colour would have better chances of getting into the more powerful positions of the organisation.

[When talking about decisions made by senior male leaders that affect young women in the organisation]: "But that's not in the psyche of a male leader in general. And so it's completely not considered."

Another issue is that within the organisation maturity is sometimes linked to masculinity: when you are mature as a woman, you act like a man. This implies that young women aren't ready for (senior) leadership until they have adapted enough to the male standard.

"I find that firstly *I fall into* this *women category, personally,* until *I have to* think *about* that *fact.* Now *that I'm being much more mature and so on, it's something that I think about, but previously it happened without even thinking."*

4.1.5 Organisational culture

Several senior leaders are not able to describe the culture, suggesting that a coherent organisational culture does not exist, that they are not 'in touch' with it, or that they have a limited understanding of what organisational culture means. Most probably, it demonstrates a combination of the three. If they are able to say something about the culture they often connect culture to rules, working hours, and values, the 'harder' measurable aspects of culture. Organisational culture is often not linked to other aspects of culture, such as behaviour, interaction, language, systems, hierarchy, or how

the culture affects the people working within the organisation. And even when they are connected, they are referred to as ‘nebulous’, ‘hard to define’, they are unidentified and second to the ‘core business’ of the organisation. Again, the emphasis is on the measurables and the results (the “masculine”), and less on the way people are working together towards the organisation’s goals (the “feminine”). It is also interesting that the ‘core business’ (which is not further defined) is seen as separate from the culture of the organisation. Isn’t the way things are done integral to the purpose of the organisation?

“It's very difficult for me to describe it [organisational culture]…”

“We've been trying for the longest time I can remember to build what is called a one NRF culture, where we're defined by this thing called an NRF culture. I think we've struggled as an organisation, to define what that is. We are led by a set of values which were developed bottom-up, so the values are quite well-known and and people kind of speak to them and about them. But if you ask me to define an NRF culture, I'd struggle a bit.”

“But what do we want to be, culturally *as an organisation, that hard to define part, I think we're still struggling with that as an organisation.”*

“The cohesiveness of the organisation broadly, not sure about how effective that is and also the uniformity of the culture within the organisation. I'm seeing pockets of this, or that, or that, here, there. In comparison to the organisation that I come from […], there was a certain level of uniformity there, in how things are done, what time you come to work, what is expected of you as an employee, compared to the NRF. I think I'm not getting that general kind of culture which permeates everywhere.”

"We all have one NRF values, but in terms of how we need to behave, in terms of, you know, the culture of each *business unit, it's not the same.”*

“…just to firstly identify the nebulous things that we can start to focus on, which are not about the core business, but how we do our work, and how we can improve, both in terms of relating, and in terms of the approach to the work that we do. But I feel that we need to focus first things first.”

An unsubstantiated assumption is that a homogenous culture can’t exist for a large organisation.

“Once you're hitting 100, 200 people...you're not likely to have a homogenous culture, you're likely to have mini-subgroups.”

Senior leaders are quick to compare the cohesive culture on the executive level to the non-cohesive culture of the rest of the organisation. They seem a bit disconnected from the rest of the organisation. It may therefore be harder for them to realise what is happening with the average employee.

“…that we [senior management] were at odds with the culture of the organisation in itself.”

The organisational culture is described in highly masculine terms (even if it is not always recognised as part of the organisational culture): hierarchical, patriarchal, power plays, task-oriented, rigid, hard on people, and performance expressed in measurable numbers and targets. This masculine culture can make it more difficult for women leaders to function, to succeed and to be valued.

“I think, this organisation itself, it's a male-dominated, patriarchal organisation, and it’s male-dominated, and as a result, you feel it in some way. The women leaders, who are at executive levels, I've seen them have to be very strong, and... If you are wrong, it's hard to really get aid, in terms of helping men stand up for you. You're fed to the wolves. And to fight your own way out.”

“A little bit less so now, but it has been very much a patriarchal environment.”

“I think the culture at the moment it's all about numbers…the qualitative thing gets lost…”

“There isn't much flexibility within the organisation in terms of decision making, in terms of allowing innovation, allowing people to do new things in new ways. I think that it's very rigid in the way that it does things and once a position is taken, come hell or high water, nothing and no one is gonna change the position. And there are times when people's spirits are killed, you know, you come in as an individual and you end up dying, as that individual.”

Hierarchy

The hierarchy of the organisation is often mentioned and manifests itself clearly in different ways. It is expressed in the physical, in the language used, and in the ways people interact. The hierarchy also exists in age (see paragraph 4.1.4) and in level of education (explained in the next sub-paragraph).

A strong hierarchy is problematic because it gives those in the higher levels of the organisation much more power than others in the organisation. It is in itself creating, enabling and maintaining power inequality. Hierarchy is masculine in its very nature, it is about power and dominance, and not about pursuing equality on any level. It is an important characteristic of a masculine culture, which in its essence perpetuates gender inequality (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2006; Hofstede, 2001). Acker (2006) describes hierarchy in organisations not only as gendered, but also as racialised and classist, adding to the problematic issue of hierarchy.

Hierarchy increases gender inequality especially when there are more men than women in the senior levels of the organisation (which is the case), making the organisation patriarchal as well. This 'boys' club' of power and networking can make it harder for women to access this level (Pheko, 2014).

"The NRF can be very hierarchical, so there's no doubt that there's a boys' club at the NRF."

"This male bonding, you know, and having to decide whether you're going to navigate that and break into it, or you're just gonna…I don't have energy for that kind of nonsense."

The physical hierarchy exists in the 'executive wing' (that looks much nicer and is newer than the rest of the building), different treatment for different levels of hierarchy (the diversity workshops were in venues of different quality and esteem), and the use of IT hardware (the higher the level, the better the laptops). Not only is (physical) hierarchy in itself problematic, it can also be detrimental to the functioning of the organisation. Employees need the hardware that is most suitable for their jobs, not for their status, and they need an enabling (physical) environment to work in. The executive wing is referred to as 'Nkandla' by people in the organisation, the place that former president Zuma had built, using millions of public money that was intended for the people. It doesn't seem this reference is just intended as a joke, but most likely reflects some of the discomfort employees experience about this physical inequality.

"As you can see this is an executive wing in terms of the corridors."

“We've now put on an extra wing to this building, this part of the building is new. And so, the staff talk about it, the senior executives sit here […] the joke is this is Nkandla.”

“But, within the organisation the rules can be very hierarchical to the point where, if you're an intern, you can have a desktop computer but not a laptop. And then at the next level you can have a laptop but only of this kind. Then at my level, you can have a reasonably sized laptop, that's relatively light, but if I want to order a laptop for a colleague, then, you know, there's a restriction on what can be ordered. Which makes no sense.”

“But also, when they, when the executives went, they went to a very plush venue. Yes. And then when we *directors went, also (a) very comfortable venue. And then they found some room at the Pretoria zoo, it was awful… […] But I think what's unforgivable is taking a group of NRF colleagues to a substandard venue, and asking them to talk about issues on diversity. That's just a setup for things to go wrong.”*

Senior level management is once referred to as the ‘parents’, implying that the lower levels of the organisation consist of children in need of patronising, establishing a clear hierarchy.

“Leadership is a two-way street, and it's like mentorship, it’s like parenting. If you have a strict parent now, you don't value that strict parent now. You might value that parent 10 or 20 years later when you realise that that parent was directing you in a certain way, and I think leadership is a bit like that.”

There are certain ways to behave towards those in the higher levels of the organisation, ‘or else’ it will have negative consequences for those with less power. This is mentioned very regularly, which indicates that hierarchy is evident and widespread, and that participants are very aware and find it problematic. One even called it ‘mafia’, referring to the experienced power abuse.

“The values [of the organisation] are used as a stick.”

“Judging you without knowing you. […] They formed their conclusions. […] And that's how the NRF is. And then they will sideline you.”

“If somebody has a negative experience with you, and that individual happens to be an executive director, you’re marked for life. You are marked for life. So, no matter what you do, it will never be seen as anything good, and there's no possibility of you progressing, because that

one *individual has marked you, that* one *individual has the power to turn everybody else against you. It's..mafia."*

Words like 'shame', 'uncomfortable' and 'irritated' are used to describe certain behaviour that is not appreciated by those in power. Creating feelings associated with shame, being uncomfortable or irritated by those in power must be avoided at all times, especially if you want a career within the organisation.

"[When talking about sexist jokes made by senior leaders] I also find in those settings it's difficult to deal with it immediately, cause somebody who's your senior and it's in a very public setting. It's very difficult to say anything in the moment. Because there's a lot of people around, you don't want to shame the person, and.."
Interviewer: Why do you not want to shame the person?
"Because the person is senior to me and not my peer."
Interviewer: Why do you choose the word 'shame'?
"Because that's how it will be perceived…especially in a hierarchical organisation, where, you know, you need to acknowledge a person's position…"

"In a meeting where we are discussing certain things I will gladly criticise, be it the CEO or whatever, and everybody is uncomfortable! […] So, what I'm saying is that, it's not the lack of its truth, nor the lack of understanding of its importance, but it's the extent to which it makes that person who is likely to have a decision on your future feel uncomfortable… But the point is that men will never do that. If it's going to make you uncomfortable, they will say it somewhere else. Not in a way which will make you feel uncomfortable."

"And at the end of the day those may be career limiting depending on who you've irritated and to what extent."

Career advancement, for some people, is more important than organisation advancement or doing a good job. This could possibly be due to the hierarchy. The only way to get ahead in the organisation and to have influence is when you move upward.

"If they [women] do want to get ahead in the culture…"

"I find women more*, in terms of being vocal about their views, which are leading* nowhere *insofar as their development, however which are clarifying issues, fine. And at the end of the day those may be career limiting depending on who you've irritated and to what extent."*

Academicism

Differences in level of education are a hierarchical divider in the organisation. One can only be a senior/executive leader when one has a PhD, and this notion is not automatically questioned. Interestingly enough, one of the leaders first mentions (quote below) that having a PhD is *helpful*, and then she changes to *needing* a PhD. So there is room for negotiation on this. Someone else mentions that investing in people to understand the processes is also an option.

Even when a PhD is not necessary for the role and someone is well-skilled, this person can be viewed by others in the organisation as less competent and is often taken less seriously. This points to academicism within the organisation, defined as a power inequality based on someone's academic achievements and an (over-) emphasising of the value of an academic degree, using academic status to define hierarchy. Thus perpetuating and strengthening the hierarchy and power inequality within the organisation. This makes it very hard for those in the organisation without a PhD to access a senior level of leadership, or even to be valued based on their skills and performance.

"..it's more about your educational level, that then determines whether you are actually listened to or if they take what you say seriously."

"Maybe there is a little bit of this perception of 'you think you've got a Master's or PhD, you're better than me'."

*"The thinking is that without a PhD you would not be able to get too much done or, you know, there would be some issues. **I didn't find that the case**, as long as you were able to deliver on what was needed. You know, people really deal with you as the person who delivers on the work. I think it's **helpful** in the end in this environment that's working within the science community to have a PhD. I worked the greater part without it. But I never once, that I can absolutely remember, you know, some things would stick with you, and there's nothing that stuck with me that said 'I felt discriminated by the scientific community in my relationship with them, because I didn't have a PhD'. […] In the end when I realised that [she could not get to a senior level without a PhD], it was a motivation that you're working in this environment, you would **need** it. And also, you know, eventually, for discussions on PhD studies and Master studies, you would **have to** have had that experience yourself."*

“I find that some of the times we had individuals that don't understand the research process that are in management and administrative positions, that don't understand the research process, are highly *competent administratively, and so that tends to create conflict. […] Maybe we don't invest enough as leaders even in ensuring everybody* understands.*”*

“I mean, your age *as well as the level of your education, then you also feel inferior to apply for positions, because you feel you do not qualify. But if you can be given an opportunity, you might find that a lot of them qualify.”*

Yet, with a PhD there is a perception that natural sciences are more important than social sciences. Natural sciences are linked to masculinity and men, social sciences to femininity and women (Carly, et al., 2016; Kainz, 2018), perpetuating male dominance in this scientific environment.

“The other thing that I think sometimes differentiation occurs is an area in which you work…and sometimes I don't think that is seen to be on the same level as, you know, the physics and the maths, and, you know, those kind of things. So it's kind of the social sciences and humanities-natural sciences kind of split.”

“Research was a male dominated place…”

Feedback & performance

The organisation doesn’t seem to have a strong feedback culture. Due to the strong hierarchy, it is complicated to be critical of others, especially towards those with more power for fear of retribution. This suggests, at least for some parts of the organisation, authoritarian structures and leadership, as those in power can decide on the success of those in the organisation with limited room for others to critique.

“I don't think we have enough of an open culture to deal with the tough questions.”

“You don’t have the ability to confront.”

“She's somebody who's not scared to talk and to say you're wrong, but and all this needs to be done. So I think, it’s not everybody who would take lightly to that."

“If somebody has a negative experience with you, and that individual happens to be an executive director, you’re marked for life. You are marked for life. So, no matter what you do, it

will never be seen as anything good, and there's no possibility of you progressing, because that one *individual has marked you, that* one *individual has the power to turn everybody else against you. It's..mafia."*

In addition, some leaders have no knowledge of how they are being perceived as a leader or a colleague. This shows that asking and giving feedback on a regular basis, whether formal or informal, is not part of the culture, and that there are no systems in place to give feedback in different directions. Feedback mostly happens during performance management and is top-down.

[When talking about how she is perceived by others] "I don't know. I don't want to lie."

[When talking about how she is perceived by others] "I wouldn't know."

Not getting feedback from different people you are working with about how you perform makes it harder for someone to perform well, especially when it is also unclear what is expected from you, which is the experience of some of the women. This combined with men more often getting the benefit of the doubt however they perform, with women having to perform better to be seen as equally competent, both in this and other organisations (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017), it is more challenging for women to live up to those unclear norms.

"So it's not very, you know, the rules of engagement or the boundaries aren't very clear. So, you know, if you do *take a decision, you could possibly be reprimanded because of the decision that you've taken, but if you* don't *take it, it could also mean that you could be reprimanded, because you should have thought about it. So yeah, it does add an element of uncertainty, you know, as to what and how you need to function within your area."*

"There's a constant standard that is presented, and if you don't meet what they think *without them being open about what it is exactly that they want, it creates challenges for you, so you're almost working in a situation where you're anticipating that it might not be good enough. So it adds anxiety in your delivery of stuff. So that's where the* additional *effort from a woman's perspective comes in, because it seems like the male side is like an easier acceptance of the information that is given. […] For men, to get away with it."*

There is a performance management system in place, but the ‘feedback’ that is given this way is top-down. It is perceived by many in middle management as competitive, one-sided, used as a stick and to reprimand people. The words that are chosen by different women to describe the system suggest that performance management is about controlling people, abuse of power, punishing people, and putting people down, instead of validating and improving the performance of people in a positive environment with possibilities for mutual respect and critique.

“It's been a total disaster doing the performance management with it, it is totally competitive.”

“The values are used as a stick. The values are just used as inappropriately, It's never to reward anybody, it's always to, you know, make an example or, it's punitively used.”

[When talking about performance evaluations]: “It’s very much, you know, a stick approach.”

“Let's take the performance management system, we know that by default you can do whatever you want to, if that individual who you report to determines that you've not *done very well, you won't get it!”*

"From my manager, my performance speaks for itself.”

Related to the way the performance of people is valued, when there is a mismatch or an issue between a person and a job or line manager, the person is described as the misfit or seen as ‘at fault’, not the organisation, the line manager or the match. The blame is put on the person, without the possibility of the organisation or the manager (those with more power) being at fault, or concluding that there is simply a mismatch with no one to blame. It confirms the idea that feedback and performance reviews are not used to enable and uplift people.

“..whether I or whether it's my own personality that's at fault…”

“..to also acknowledge in an organisation that sometimes somebody is a misfit for the job”

Performance is strongly focused on achieving goals, although it is not completely clear what these goals are, they seem to be related to ‘hard’ measurables, expressed in

numbers (KPI's). Achieving goals is also linked to good leadership (by senior leaders). Leading your team very well does not seem a goal or achievement in itself. Performing well means delivering results. It is defined in terms of reaching targets and not necessarily in how well you work together, how well you enable your team, or how strong your the team is. Again, masculinity is dominant, as the culture of the organisation supports a masculine view on performance.

"As long as you deliver, it doesn't matter the people that you've stepped on, the annihilation in character, the amount of hurt that is caused, does not matter*. As long as it gets done."*

"You are measured against the results, not about the process how you got to the results."

"In terms of if we're appointed to do the job, we've got to get the job done. But we do have different ways *of getting things done…so the question is, to what extent does the work environment embrace the fact that men and women think and function differently, but that doesn't mean not towards the same end result. The deliverables* must *be the same."*

Networking

There is a lack of informal networking, which is expressed as a concern by many participants. They'd love to interact more with colleagues, but find it difficult to do so due to the structures. It also makes it harder for them to get things done and perform optimally. In addition, networking is crucial for women to be promoted or successful in their work, as informal networking can lead to mentoring relationships, which can in turn increase the chances of promotion. It is harder for women to build mentor relationships, so lacking opportunities for networking within the organisation is an impediment to them (Pheko, 2014).

"I don't think the structure is conducive to interaction."

"In the past I used to know who to contact…"

"We don't actually have a forum where we get together…"

"What I wish the NRF had more of opportunities for us to get together more."

“I think that's a potential for us to get to know each other and work with each other. Currently, we have meetings in our offices, and it's about the business and then we go our separate ways. And I don't think that contributes significantly to the concept of one NRF.”

Emotions

Emotions need to be contained within the organisation. You can’t show emotions such as crying, and, especially as a woman, you have to present yourself as tougher than you are (although not too tough). The notion that emotions should not be expressed in the work place originates from the myth of binary dualism prevalent in Western thought that opposes rationality to emotions with the belief that rationality should dominate the supposedly disruptive emotionality in organisations. Rationality is linked to masculinity and emotionality to femininity, whereby the masculine is then logically dominant to the feminine (Kuepers & Weibler, 2008). How emotions need to be contained or expressed is culturally situated, and generally the discourses around emotions aim to preserve white, male dominance (Benozzo & Colley, 2012). In the context of South Africa, with organisations originally designed for white men, containing emotions can therefore be deemed masculine, white and Western.

“And so the lesson that I learned then is, as a woman you wear a mask. And I always say you go behind close doors and you shed your tears and you put your lipstick *on and you put your* head *up and you* walk *out of there.”*

“…one other thing is to also be positive, and then the next thing is just to be strong, you know, and the fourth thing is to be able to put down your facts. And in that way, you’ll be able to achieve your goals.”

Containing emotions is also an aspect of emotional intelligence (EI), a concept designed by Goleman, that received considerate critique from the scientific community for its weak but exaggerated construct validity and its use of rhetoric (Cox, 1999; Kuepers & Weibler, 2008). Emotional intelligence is mentioned as something positive and something to strive for, it is linked to a sense of maturity, and as something that is more easily or naturally learned and done by men, and by women who have ‘matured’

enough. This reinforces the idea that the way people within the organisation should manage emotions is according to a masculine standard.

"I do think that there is a certain emotional intelligence which they [men] have than girls, much earlier, they are trained maybe. In terms of, you know, holding on to what they say *and not, you know, than girls, in my view."*

"They [men] rein in, they can control*, and hold back for, you know, to get what they want. They will still give feedback, but in a much more comfortable way, so that they still get what they want from you in terms of being seen to be leaders who can lead others."*

"I think men are almost, they are taught how to be almost like strategically go back and not to express too much, while I think that is my natural mode."

"I have had to learn over the years to be more controlled."

English as norm

Most of the participants did not speak English as their native language. (All interviews were done entirely in English.) The accents, the degree to which they are able to understand and communicate, and use English grammar correctly, varied. But even though English may not be their first language, it is the language of the organisation. This adds challenges to performing well, and to how people of colour are being perceived and treated.

"White males are allowed more leniency. […] I just think that it could possibly be that 'nothing good could possibly come from a non-white', you know, in terms of idea, or it could be a language thing, it could just be that articulation of your standpoint is a lot better, from a white male perspective, because they're not so far removed from the English language, as opposed to, you know, a black individual. […] You comparing your level of ability to communicate and understand with somebody else who does not necessarily have the same background, the same level of education, and now you're expecting them to function, like the way you function. We set unnecessary or high levels of expectation, because we expect *people to be able to* think *like we do."*

In order for these women to perform they have to adapt to the 'English' standard of the organisation. The way the organisation operates does not adapt to them and the plurality of cultures that these women grew up in. They had to become more English to

function. And it seems in order for them to do that they lose a bit of their own culture. This is consistent with what Canham (2014b) argues. In order for black women to get access to a position of senior leadership they have to adapt to the organisational standards and culture, or else they will be seen as too disruptive and not get or be able to stay in this position. This also shows that neo-colonialism is happening, for "the colonies are required to ape the coloniser in order to obtain approval and be deemed competent" (Canham, 2014b, p. 160).

Interviewer: How do you ethnically identify? Or culturally?
"A mixture of identity. Naturally, I was born Xhosa. Within the work environment I'd say it's more English. A mix, I cannot say I've retained my Xhosa identity. It's a whole lot of influences based on the environment that I'm in."

Woman-friendliness

When asked about whether the culture is woman-friendly, the responses would relate to numbers and percentages of women in the (top of the) organisation, and in policies that are accommodating for pregnant women and mothers. (These policies would also be beneficial to fathers, if they would take (more) care of children, but no one mentioned that, indicating that men are often not seen as the primary caretakers).

"Out of the six individuals [at group executive level], two are women."

"We have a high percentage of women. It's those intangibles."

"We've got good examples of females that could progress."

"I don't have any women issues, to be honest. I don't, my children are grown up, they are not even here, and I'm by myself, I sit here until eight sometimes, or even nine, so I'm more like a man, in that respect."

A woman-friendly organisation was only once associated with the organisational culture, even though sexist jokes and harassment do occur, which are tangible woman-unfriendly experiences. Less specific gender-related experiences about the

organisational culture, such as hierarchy, harassment, and ‘hard’-ness, as described above, are generally not associated with a woman-unfriendly culture or organisation.

“I think they’re culturally not enabling.”

4.1.6 Motherhood

In the organisation and in society at large, among different age, racial and ethnic groups, women are, and are seen as, the primary caregivers of children, at least until children reach secondary school age. It is often not even questioned that fathers can do this as well, either equally shared or as primary child-minders.

“When I come home at night, I'm still expected, the food must be there”

“A good caregiver is very important and I suppose it can be the father, but I think it's still the way it is, I think in most is that the mother is the one…”

“There wasn't much support at that time [when she was pregnant]”

“When I get home I do all of that, I have to cook, bathe them [the children] and should they go to sleep, they're wearing the pyjamas and they're in bed.”

“It’s my responsibility [the children]. He [husband] is a chauvinist, it’s that whole male thing. […] He’s not the type of person that understands. […] He’s very *traditional.”*

“To be honest I've only seen children come to work with women; I've not seen men bring their children.”

Having children is regarded as an obstacle to the careers of women. Most women leaders interviewed either don’t have children, or used to have someone else primarily care for her/their children. Only one woman is the primary parent for her young children, and it negatively affects her work, and possibly career prospects within the organisation.

The women are also very aware of the difficulty of combining young children with a career. One decided not to have more children because of this, and someone else

explained how it used to be difficult to balance duties sometimes. The issue of guilt in this context came up several times as well: feeling guilty for taking leave to be a good mother versus guilt for not being at home and lacking as a mother. It is also more difficult for less senior leaders to manage different duties, as they still need to 'prove' themselves, whereas the senior leaders, for whom it would be easier as they have proven themselves, are too old to have young children. Interesting to note is that the interviewer didn't ask specifically about children, but it came up in nearly every conversation (especially in the context of a woman-friendly culture, and work-home balance), suggesting the issue of children and motherhood is an important aspect and consideration of being a woman leader.

[When talking about family and children] "If you want to be the best and you want to be good and then the fact that you are a female, you will have to make choices."

"I stopped having children partly because of my work pressures."

"I saw when I said I'm pregnant again and those responses of 'so soon'."

"You either put in a very *good support system, or you juggle."*

"…how different it felt when they [her children] were older…"

"…but when you come here, you're still expected to perform…"

"Sometimes we were constrained by the fact that my children were young. I found that I was able to explore the leadership role much more once my children were much older. […] It was because, when the children were young, unless you had a very good support network, and even though with a support network, when the children are young, you are just, I was thinking about being, you know, homework and school and there's just things you have to do, and so travel, extensive travel for me, didn't feature, because I would try and be home kinda thing."

"I think some of it is like guilt, you know, you're a mother*, and you need to be there, and maybe they won't survive if you're not there, I don't know, but part of it is you want to be there."*

"You always have that stereotyping, you must be, you know, kind of like your child's future is hanging on you, if you mess up there, it's big time."

"There is enough leave. […] But in the sense of guilt to take it."

[When talking about balancing home and work duties]: "You still have to navigate spaces, but you have a little bit more leeway at a senior level in how *you navigate, because you are* assumed *to be able to manage your time."*

4.1.7 Work-home balance

Work-home balance is an issue for some of the women. The work-home balance is mostly associated with caring for children or family, not so much with time for hobbies, relaxation, social life, doing sports, etc. Using the term work-life balance would have been better, but even that expression wasn't usually associated with anything other than family. Even when the work-home or work-life balance is an issue (with too many hours working and not enough time to rest), some wouldn't associate these issues with the term 'work-home' or 'work-life' balance.

"I think in the work environment there isn't any recognition for work-life balance, for the women."

"Maybe that is the issue, but you gotta keep delivering at a standard, and at a pace, and so the pressure remains. And sometimes now I'm finding it, you know, pfew, it's a bit pressurised, because I'm trying to navigate this other space of personal life."

"But I get tired, I really get tired."

"The time, the work-life balance sometimes is not, isn't because really, you can't do this thing and still be able to exercise and still be able to to eat healthily and, you know, all those things, so, it affects you negatively."

The concept of work-home balance was differently interpreted, making properly researching it complicated, because most black/African people define 'home' as where they or their family are originally from, such as a certain province, not their 'home' or house in Pretoria where they'd spent most of their time. The word 'home' in this context is taken very metaphorically in the sense of 'where your family is' and 'family obligations', not the time and place that you don't spend on and at work.

"I stay by myself, so, there's no such a thing as work-home balance for me."

4.1.8 Stereotyping

In the organisation it is often assumed that women and men behave and lead differently, either because of cultural engraining, experiences and upbringing, or due to their physique or nature. These differences are being generalised, essentialised and universalised. The problem with this strict binary gender role thinking is that it results in assumptions, expectations and prejudice about how women and men should and do behave, not giving individuals enough leeway to be in roles matching their personality, interests and skills. It limits women and men in what they can do and how they are being perceived when taking up certain tasks or applying for certain jobs. With leadership defined in masculine terms, it is harder for women to be seen as competent in a leadership role. Carli, et al. (2016, p. 246) explain that “incompatibility of gender stereotypes with stereotypes about occupational and other social roles are the basis of prejudice and discrimination against women in those roles”. This role incongruity theory is a great tool to explain prejudice and discrimination against women leaders and why gender stereotypical thinking creates extra challenges for women who are or aspire to be leaders.

“It comes down to the fact that we think and we react differently as men and women. There's no getting away from the fact that we think and we act differently. But at the end of the day we need to get to the same point.”

“But that's not in the psyche of a male leader in general.”

“I think females are just nurturing, more nurturing by nature…”

“Men tend not to do so well there.”

“I think a woman might sometimes apply, you're a bit more emotive, emotive management skills. You know, whilst the man will be somewhat very task-orientated.”

“Whereas men are very circumspect about what they say, because they are looking at what results it will give for them….and usually that then is not about the system advantages; it's about them *and their development…. I don't think women have been trained to be focused on their development more than the advantages and the success of others. So, as a girl child, the way*

you are raised it's not about you *and you getting ahead, it's about making sure that everybody else gets ahead and there's harmony and there's caring for others, there's, you know, all those things, which would ensure that, before you look at your own benefits, you look at others' benefits and the whole overall… It appears to be stereotypes, but it's true! In most instances men are in control of what they say so that they get what they want…. I've led men and it's seldom that you are going to be irritated by a man saying something."*

"[When asked whether she thinks these differences between women and men are universal]: "I would think so."

"As a woman you are much more approachable than a male leader."

4.1.9 Culture

The societal culture affects how people within the organisation interact. The gender inequality that exists in society is reflected in the experiences of women in the organisation. Interestingly, women from different ethnic and racial backgrounds described similar issues and experiences in the sense that they all come from male-dominated cultures. There are different nuances though. An African/black participant was specific about African/black and white men, making an important distinction, whereas the white female did not and emphasised other things.

"It does feel that we, because of, you know, the past experiences in terms of discrimination. In the past, there was this feeling that, you know, men have to be respected, and as a woman, whether you do have knowledge, you do have skills, you know, you were not given that respect and you were not given that trust. […] Because for me, it was a culture. Men felt that, you know, they need to overpower the women. […] It was written in their minds.

"And culturally, especially from the African culture, we've got this thing of, you know, men need to be respected, more than women. So, even the African men, they've got that belief that, you know, if I'm a man, whether you are a good leader, or not a good leader, as long as you are in that position, then automatically you'll be respected."

"…with white males, there's this thing of looking at you and undermining you.."

"Just because we are a male dominated society still, I feel that a lot of the time, that they [men] would come into positions and assume *that position, you know, immediately, just from a level of, and I would say dominance…And I don't know that females always do that."*

“I'm an Afrikaans female, so in our, females are told, you know, you must always, you must be quiet, don't talk too much, or don't don't rock the boat.”

“The way you brought up and the way you're in your default mode, maybe, what is expected of you, into what is culturally appropriate. Cause you cannot put yourself just behind this and [say] ‘this is neutral, I'm neutral here, the ground is neutral.’ You come from somewhere and the way you see things from somewhere, and the way you're gonna behave in a certain circumstance is conditioned by that.”

4.1.10 Views on organisational challenges

The assumption exists that sexism and other negative experiences in the work place are normal for any organisation. This may be a useful coping mechanism to deal with difficult issues by accepting it, but it does not help in making positive change happen, especially since it is not necessarily true that every organisation is the same and that sexism cannot be reduced.

“Women have to be more articulate in what they say, more powerful in how they get stuff, and perhaps shout a little bit louder for them to be heard, but is that not the case in all organisations?”

Even when something is not intentional discrimination, it can still be discrimination. For example, when someone needs to use a lift and it can’t be used, it is a form of exclusion and needs to be addressed in an organisation that aspires equality.

“It's not about her being discriminated, it's just that that's how the building is structured.”

“It's not so much discrimination, but it's about, we tend to migrate to our comfort zones.”

Experiencing challenges in the organisation is sometimes seen as an individual problem instead of a structural issue of inequality. Although it is true that if nothing structurally changes you have to deal with it as an individual, it is also true that it is much more effective to address the underlying structural issues and try to solve it from an individual perspective.

“Every institution will have its politics, you've got to learn how to manage those individual relationships.”

“She was the only person complaining.”

4.1.11 Social identities and the sense of not belonging

Most women interviewed experience at least on one axis of social identity a sense of not belonging. They feel like an outsider within the organisation in some way, based on their social identities. This is either because of language (not speaking South African languages), nationality (being an immigrant and not originally from South Africa), race, gender, level of education, age, or the area in which they work (social versus natural sciences). Some even experienced it due to several social identities, or an intersectionality of those identities, that are regarded as ‘different’. Some accept this as the way it is, not feeling too inhibited by it, even though it does inhibit them to some extent. For others it is experiencing a constant struggle of ‘proving’ they are capable and working harder, or a strong awareness that they are not ‘getting ahead’ because of that.

“To a certain extent I will still be outsider”

“There's a very strong anti-‘race x’ sentiment in the organisation.”

“My race is probably counting against me, and my age.”

“I’ve been exposed to xenophobic jokes, or comments.”

“And always you have to do extra culturally to fit in.”

“I always have to show character before I'm received.”

“…so I just fought twice as hard.”

“You always have to prove yourself.”

“Sometimes I feel undermined. […] I think it’s because of me being a woman, me being African, and yes, the position as well, the level that I am. Probably a combination of those things.”

“You feel you are not being respected, because you are a woman, and then you start losing, you know, that courage.”

4.2 Enabling factors and navigating the challenges

This paragraph focuses on how the participants navigate the challenges they experience. It is about how they make being a woman leader in a male-dominated environment work for them and how they also oppose and attempt to change this environment, thus enabling other women as well. This paragraph looks at how they understand being a woman leader in a positive way and what it is that facilitates these women or works to their - and other women’s - advantage.

4.2.1 Awareness

All women interviewed have awareness, knowledge and vocabulary about gender and diversity issues within organisation. This is thanks to a raised awareness within the organisation and the diversity workshops that they participated in. The organisation itself is also seen as and appreciated for being, or trying to be, gender-aware. Most participants mentioned that the NRF is definitely trying when it comes to gender equality. This helps to open up conversations and can make change possible.

“The environment is, like I said, always been largely male than female, you have *to navigate your space in, we have to navigate, you have to* navigate *that space, you can’t float in that space, is how I would say it to you, you need to be* aware..*”*

“But you have to be very aware, and be able to put your point across, and make your statement, you know. I think if you don't*, it would be easy to be overrun by a a male voice… And I don't mean voice as in one person, but I just mean the collective voice of the males.”*

“It hasn't gone much more than you picking up these nuances, and that's why I keep saying you've got to be aware.”

“We're an organisation who's gender aware, and our working on addressing gender parity and representation in our business.”

“But it is an organisation that is aware, *you know, it's gender-aware, I think.”*

“So we’re also looking at the composition of our panels. Whether our panels are balanced. Because it's both male and female views that must come to the party, not just who are the experts in the field.”

“They really recognise it from a CEO level, and it's something I think they work towards.”

“The NRF tries. […] So it's keen to do the right thing, and which is encouraging.”

Part of this awareness is seeing issues for what they really are. Sexist jokes aren’t about a sense of humour, they are about disrespect.

Interviewer: “Have you been exposed to sexist jokes at work?”
“Not that much, because I think the people that I'm working with respect me.”

The participants are also very capable of expressing and are aware of a lot of organisational issues and challenges that they can’t always immediately link to gender issues, but that are problematic for them nonetheless. They have a mindset of wanting to work towards an organisation that is not only gender-equal and accomplishes social equality on all identities, but they also have a desire for a better organisation in general, such as working together optimally.

“It’s a challenging place to work.”

“I wish that was different.”

“We need to build different organisations. With a more responsive, and more supportive, […] respect, regard, inclusivity, more responsibility, ability to express myself. Those […] are relational*, you know, and we don't do much about it.”*

“But with disability, I don’t think we’ve tried enough.

4.2.2 Taking responsibility

All senior leaders, and several middle managers, feel very responsible for what happens at the NRF and how it functions as an organisation. They identify very strongly with the organisation and feel they *are* the organisation. This is expressed in using 'the NRF' and 'we' interchangeably. This is helpful and empowers them in bringing change where it is needed.

*"**We're** an organisation…"*

*"..to make sure that **I ensure**.."*

*"I **am** the organisation...you* own *the organisation with its whats and all, you can't be just distant."*

4.2.3 Diversity as fairness

Diversity and gender equality are seen by several women as an issue of fairness, equality and equity, and is not argued for as a business case. This is beneficial for making the organisation more diverse and attaining gender equality within the organisation. Using the business case to promote diversity depoliticises the issue of equality and can have a reverse effect when it would be more economically sound to not strive for diversity (Noon, 2007).

"It has to be a good combination, and the combination has to be fair, it has to be equitable. So we need males as well as females. […] A diverse culture."

"So we're also looking at the composition of our panels. Whether our panels are balanced. Because it's both male and female views that must come to the party, not just who are the experts in the field."

4.2.4 Legal advantages

Some women experience the legal environment in South Africa as an advantage. They feel that laws, such as the Employment Equity Act, are there to help them advance, to create equality, and to protect women from discrimination.

"...with these new laws, the EEA, you know, they're enforced."

"There are laws in place, which protects us as women."

"The laws and the country, you know, it's protecting women and, the country does want to give women an opportunity, you know, to be in leadership positions."

4.2.5 Views on leadership

Contrary to the dominant view of the senior managers interviewed, the middle managers have a more gender-balanced view on what good leadership means. Their view on leadership is focused both on results and on people (although mostly on people) and on teamwork. Since senior leaders don't ignore the people aspect in leadership (even though they think good leadership is more about results), together they could redefine what good leadership means in a way that is considered both feminine and masculine. This can potentially lead to a standard of leadership that does not prefer one gender over another.

"My definition of a good leader is somebody that creates an enabling environment, and makes it possible to bring out the best in your team. That's what I think a good leader is. To provide the necessary direction and advice, but also recognising that your team is made up of people and making sure that you're able to bring out the best in each member of your team." (middle manager)

"I think people think that I'm hard, they see me as a person that gets things done, and they also see me as a person that jumps in with them." (middle manager)

"[Good leadership is] if you are able to inspire people you are working with." (middle manager)

“Good leadership for me is the ability to grow people beyond what they think they can be.” (middle manager)

“You give people an opportunity to add *their views, and you give people an opportunity to be able to* share *amongst themselves ideas, which is at the end of the day, for me, becomes the real important [thing] for the organisation, because then it doesn't become a one man show, but a team thing, and it makes an organisation as well to grow.” (middle manager)*

“[Good leadership is] creating an environment where the person feels 'this is my opportunity to soar’.” (middle manager)

“I believe so much in working with others that I cannot leave them behind in any of these stages.” (senior leader)

Most women interviewed are very aware of the fine line that exists between using ‘masculine’ behaviour to make their points come across and be effective leaders, and not overdoing it. They are aware of the risks of being either too ‘feminine’ and ‘soft’ or being too ‘tough’, with both behaviours resulting in not being able to be the good and effective leader they want to be. This awareness helps them to be more successful leaders.

“And if you become more assertive, then you obtain the reputation of being a tough person. […] If I have to compare myself with my male colleagues, I call myself a softy.”

“You gotta be aware of it, as a female, so that sometimes your hardness is seen as, you know, from that role. You're tough*, you know, where tough is not seen to be a compliment.”*

Many of the women work(ed) very hard to get where they are now or where they want to be. They are aware that their hard work needs to be seen in order to advance in the organisation, but they mostly do it for themselves, because they like to grow and take on new challenges. It does help them to get ahead in the organisation.

“I was always drawn into projects that were outside of my job description.”

“…and then obviously you just work bloody hard.”

“I will do *until you recognise what I’ve done.”*

There is an awareness of the lack of vision for leadership, and how problematic it is to not recruit from amongst themselves. Some of the leaders see the need and are actively working to change this. This is particularly helpful when done by senior leaders with this insight who have more power to change it. Introducing training opportunities for leaders is also helpful.

“How do we take a cohort of middle managers and evaluate *them for leadership potential, and how do we get to a point to say 'you are ready for senior management’.”*

“I wanna commend the NRF, because this year they reinstated a management development programme.”

“I started to train people… […] Managers could see that, you know, this person has been in this position for quite a long time, you know, we train this person on this and this, and this person, if there's a position, then, we can be able to promote this person. […] And then, since then, I've had about four, five promotions. So you can see, now, that there's a change."

4.2.6 Changing organisational culture

Most, if not all, of the women can or do have a positive influence on the organisational culture, whether consciously or unconsciously, and there are plenty of ways they have an impact the organisation.

One person connects the culture actively to the values of the organisation and also takes responsibility for creating a positive culture.

“..to make sure that I ensure that the values of NRF are being lived..”

Hierarchy

The hierarchy within the organisation is being challenged in different ways, at least by some of the women. There is a general awareness of it, and an unhappiness about it. Some of the women are not scared to speak out against injustices or other issues in the organisation (even though there is a risk involved), or they simply ignore power plays, which are ways of objecting to the hierarchy. Others use hierarchy to their

advantage to create positive change, thereby diffusing power. For example, when there was an issue of excluding some people, this leader made sure she copied the responsible executives into her email, and the issue was immediately resolved. The hierarchy is also being challenged by leaders asking feedback from those who report to them and caring about what these people think. This means they want good work relations especially with those reporting to them, regardless of formal performance evaluations, that are top-down. Or by installing committees and making work a team effort, not placing the power with one person. Another way hierarchy is being challenged is by focusing on innovation, on how to improve what they are doing, regardless of hierarchical issues. Strong hierarchical organisations don't create a lot of room for people taking initiative and therefore to be innovative. Most of the women are not necessarily interested in making a career in an upward, hierarchical way. They just want to do the best job they can and get better at it, they have other (academic) interests and projects on the side, or they see a lot of meaning in the work they are currently doing.

"I really have not bought into this idea of hierarchy, in the NRF, and I'm, I would say, I'm part of the resistance, against the hierarchy in the organisation."

"I recognise that although hierarchy exists, one must find a way to navigate around it, so I never consider that I can't, under any circumstance, just go and speak to that CEO, if I feel like it to, you know? And so, I think that has served me well, because they know who I am, and if I have any questions, I get to freely engage with them on it."

"Wherever possible I raise the issues, because I realise sometimes our policies are out of sync with our values."

"I ensured that we have committees. […] You give people an opportunity to add *their views, and you give people an opportunity to be able to* share *amongst themselves ideas, which is at the end of the day, for me, becomes the real important [thing] for the organisation, because then it doesn't become a one man show, but a team thing, and it makes an organisation as well to grow."*

"I am not more valuable, and my ideas are not more valuable than yours, but also that if our ideas differ, we can be ok to talk about it in this space."

"Leadership is about being a group…"

“I used my social capital.”

“Because we work in the science landscape, and our intention is to promote and support research and knowledge generation and innovation. But, within the organisation the rules can be very hierarchical.. […] The policies have not caught up with technology and yet we're supposed to bean organisation that's, you know, pushing the boundaries.”

Performance & feedback

A number of women are criticising the performance management system. One refuses to score someone badly during performance reviews, because her seniors want to use this to dismiss this person. Several women have learned to simply ignore negative performance reviews or feedback, because they believe it is more effective to not let the opinions of others define or affect them. Others find it important to get feedback from colleagues and those that report to them, and ask for it specifically in constructive ways, because they want to learn and improve their own performance and that of the team. Some feel they can be open and honest about giving and receiving feedback, others feel they need to create a safe space to do so.

“I’ve got good feedback..[…]..a colleague who reports into me now, and we’re having a bit of a tussle space…”

“I've often being pressurised to say, but you must perform and score this person as he's not performing, because this and that happened. That's firstly for me wrong, […] you don't only want to do incidents, because that's bias.”

“My performance is not that piece of paper.”

“I've stopped focusing on other's appreciation of me, and focus on what I think I've done well. Because if I have to look for appreciation from external people, I'll be a very *unhappy person in this organisation. […] If you constantly want somebody else to appreciate what you've done, you're gonna end up losing who you are, because you're gonna be knocked down so many times, so you have to find coping mechanisms to be within this organisation.”*

“If I'm going to sit down and, you know, what others feel about myself, then I won't be able to achieve my goal.”

“It wasn't me that was wrong, it was just our fit is wrong, and actually, then I found a way to cope with that.”

“I invited them [people that report to her] to either give me feedback electronically or to slip a note under my door, because I'd like feedback. And what I appreciated about that exercise is it helps you to see where your blind spots are. […] So I made the necessary adjustments, and I'm glad *I made it.”*

“From staff levels, I feel respected. I feel they do appreciate the fact that I’m also serving…”

“I’ve asked them [people that report to her, for feedback]. They had no issues with me, that I'm a good leader.”

“So I do get feedback, I am actually quite appreciative, and I do feel it is good that I still get feedback, because nobody is scared of me, but they also come with me when they're in trouble.”

“I raise anything that I feel is not right.”

“Wherever possible I raise the issues, because I realise sometimes our policies are out of sync with our values.”

Networking

Several women expressed a strong desire for more networking opportunities within the organisation, whether formally organised or informally established through enabling structures. They consider this to be beneficial in creating a positive organisational culture, for working better together, for their own work quality and effectiveness, and for career perspectives, which is also what the literature confirms (Pheko, 2014). Some of them are also actively working to make that happen, not only for themselves but also for others.

“I think that was one of the things that also led to much more interaction with different people, and it's a way for your talents or your skills to be more visible in the organisation.”

“What I wish *the NRF had more of opportunities for us to get together more.”*

“So I had to get to know a lot of my colleagues. […] It was good to get to know people who worked in different areas of the NRF. […] So I joined a tea club, I joined a book club, and.. And so, I really appreciated that. […] There are *a lot wonderful people who work at the NRF.*

“So we decided to form a book club…”

“Our monthly staff meeting […] had grown a bit stale. […] The staff meetings were a lost opportunity for engagement with the NRF. […] ..to make the staff meetings more meaningful. […] So staff meetings have now become events that are very intellectually stimulating, and that you would hate *to miss.”*

4.2.7 Expressing emotions

Most participants laughed regularly and did so mainly in the context of critique, painful examples, and disturbing experiences. Laughing seemed to be used as a coping mechanism, either to lighten up the space when it could get a bit ‘dark’, or because laughing is a more acceptable emotion to deal with difficulties than screaming or crying. Only one participant would never laugh when it wasn’t funny, but use a soft and low voice when talking about sensitive issues.

Although expressing emotions (especially negative ones) is not acceptable within the organisation, emotions are being expressed, albeit behind closed doors. It is by some of the women believed to be healthier to express them. Emotions are also being acknowledged and investigated as to what caused them. They are connected to challenging social interactions and not viewed as an individual problem of, for example, not being competent or strong enough. Recent research also acknowledges the social aspect of emotions; they are not private (Ahmed, 2004), and they are being influenced by the social environment (Kuepers & Weibler, 2008). So their perspective is indeed a healthy and balanced view on emotions and may facilitate expressing emotions more publicly in the near future. This has the ability to challenge the status quo of the masculine, white and neo-colonial concept of containing emotions, because “corporeal expression is transgressive and potentially transformative” (Canham, 2014b, p. 156).

“And so the lesson that I learned then is, as a woman you wear a mask. And I always say you go behind close doors and you shed your tears and you put your lipstick on and you put your head up and you walk out of there.”

“Somebody reduced me into tears in a staff meeting."

“When you've cried, your body releases chemicals, which enables you to think *more clearly, thereafter.”*

4.2.8 Mentoring

Mentoring is recognised as a crucial element of learning, developing and progressing in an organisation. It helps many of these women to recognise their own strengths, to go beyond what they think they can be because others see something in them, to gain confidence, and to develop themselves. By many of these women, mentoring is seen as an advantage of being a woman leader, so that they are in a position of mentoring other women. They also experience it as an advantage of being a woman when having a female line manager, so they have the advantage of being mentored because they are both women. Several challenges with male mentors were mentioned, and therefore, mentoring is preferably done between people of the same gender. So having female leaders that can mentor other women seems crucial in advancing women in the organisation. This is substantiated by the literature: mentoring is essential for the advancement of women, which often happens through networking, which is generally harder for women in a male-dominated environment (Pheko, 2014; Bain & Company, 2017; Canham, 2014). So women mentoring each other is beneficial.

“Advantages of being a woman leader....I would say that I appreciated the fact that I have a woman line manager. I think that for me has been very useful, because in the past I've had male mentors, who have taught me a lot, but I think it's made a difference to have a leader who is a woman, I have appreciated that. And I also see myself then as a role model for the women on my team, to help them see that the world is their oyster, and that are opportunities out there […] So, we should be careful not to hold ourselves back.”

“I had somebody, a female mentor, who actually, we worked together and she was the one that actually, and I still see her today as the first person that saw my potential.”

“I was fortunate enough to have had some strong mentors and they were both male and female, which was interesting, you know, when I look back on it, in the sense that, people who gave me things to do without me having thought that that was my capacity, so I think that's so important in the sense that other people identify strengths in you that you haven't yet, to cross those particular boundaries for yourself.”

“The support that I've got from my manager has led me to where I am.”

“I think that speaking to a woman who's been through the system is useful.”

“I’ve managed to develop my confidence which is more important than anything.”

“I've worked with them [senior women leaders] and I enjoy working with them, and they're also developing me[…] Their *wish is to see me at that level one day.”*

Gender in mentoring is an issue in the culture of this organisation and of society. Professional relationships between people of different genders seem complicated and are often related to sexual issues (real or alleged) and assumptions by others. The NRF recently had a case of false allegations of inappropriate sexual relations between a male mentor and a female employee, showing that work relationships between women and men are not necessarily assumed by all as purely professional, making mentorship between people of different genders more challenging. This can be different in other organisational cultures. The women interviewed want this to be different for their organisation as well. Some see it as natural that mentors have to be of the same gender, just to avoid issues, others are challenging this assumption, because they have seen how it can work well and how it can enable women.

“When it comes to mentorship, and also the fact that, as women, when you're considering getting mentorship, gender does *play a role. So whereas a man can have drinks after work with his mentor, you have to consider that that image can create a certain impression, if you are now having drinks with your* male *mentor.”*

“I know that as a woman, you need mentorship *to grow, and it's very unhelpful, when that's misconstrued as improper relationship.”*

“And where a man tries to be emotive, often it seems as though that he might have something with the woman, in the work place. And that's a big problem in South Africa. […] It’s a lack of education, some people think, they don’t have the capability to make a good judgment.”

““I was fortunate enough to have had some strong mentors and they were both male and female…”

Mentorship is also related to learning how to deal with a world of men in senior management. It indicates again that men dominate and are the norm, and that women need to adapt to the male standard. It is enabling though for women to learn from other women how to navigate this challenging space and be able to be effective, while also being aware of how masculine domination is problematic.

“So having a mentor who is a woman, and who can help you understand how to navigate and deal with the male ego.”

4.2.9 Actively advancing others

In addition to these women being passionate about mentoring, they also posses an immense willingness and passion to enable other people. They use the power they have to make sure others are being advanced and facilitated, especially those that are (previously) disadvantaged. This demonstrates that when more women, and for example black or disabled women are being placed in positions of power, it may advance the disadvantaged, such as (black) women and disabled people. This is not unique for this organisation. Canham (2014b) also found in his research that a black woman in a position of power deliberately advanced other black people into leadership positions.

“By joining this organisation I ensured that, you know, two more black females are appointed in the management team.”

“I'm somewhat immediately inclined to want to give service to black companies.”

“But with disability, I don’t think we’ve tried enough. […] Disability has not gone into the consciousness of people. […] We don't actually create a space where it can be discussed. So because I'm very aware of it, I make them *aware of it.”*

“I used my social capital.”

“I realised how significant a role I could play in creating an enabling environment for others, who maybe did not as strong a voice as I have.”

“And I was not doing it just for me.”

The NRF also decided at a certain point that a vacant executive position *had* to be filled with a woman. This did not only improve the gender balance in the executive team, it can also improve the gender balance in the whole organisation on the long run. They also seek a better gender balance for the panels they organise.

“I think the the CEO was very clear that she wanted a woman in this team.”

“So we’re also looking at the composition of our panels. Whether our panels are balanced. Because it's both male and female views that must come to the party, not just who are the experts in the field.”

In addition, many of the women interviewed are passionate about developing people, and the NRF provides opportunities for this as well. One senior leader expresses her desire to empower young people to become (senior) leaders, contradicting the idea that (senior) leaders have to be old. Not only will this create more age equality, it will also advance women and people of colour. Another leader focuses on older people who have experience but not the right qualifications because of previous disadvantages.

“And make spaces for women to get that experience, you know, and create the spaces for the younger people to come up, and not for them to take as long as I took.”

“I've worked with them [senior women leaders] and I enjoy working with them, and they're also developing me[…] Their *wish is to see me at that level one day.”*

“I felt I need to develop them.”

“You need to develop people, that is what you as a manager and a leader supposed to do, to make them feel good and get the best out of them.”

“So, I do see my self as a leader. Because I've also made change in the lives of the people that I've appointed. So in fact, I feel very positive about it.”

“Whatever I do, then I transfer the skill.”

“I think there's something that the NRF should also link into, in terms of development, especially to people that, you know, were affected by this past Apartheid. I don't think they are doing much in terms of RPL, recognition of prior learning. Because there are people that are well-experienced, you know, but they need to go through the RPL. Because, the NRF is doing a lot in terms of training and development, but I think most of its focus is on the youth, and not on the older ones.”

“What the NRF on a positive *offers you, is the opportunity to* further *your education. We are very accommodating of people and encouraging of people pursuing postgraduate training. We do have a NRF study support, we do have a management development programme, we do have short courses. […] I think that the NRF affords and supports and gives people the space to develop.”*

“Good leadership for me is the ability to grow people beyond what they think they can be.”

4.2.10 Work-home balance

Several of the women are aware that the work-home or work-life balance is not ideal for the people that report to them. This is often related to experiencing challenges themselves in, for example, combining motherhood and work duties, or because they know what their employees go through because they show an interest in them. They are invested in making this balance, and work in general, more enjoyable for them, enabling women and others to experience a better balance, to be more motivated, and to perform well at work. Making it easier for people to perform at work when taking their private situation into account is another example of these women empowering others, especially women.

“I tend to be very conscious if I've got females that have young babies and, there's, no matter what, if there is a problem with your child, you must go.”

“That is the way the work should be, it should be a place where you feel comfortable.”

“The majority of the time I don’t [work all the time], I switch off, I go home, and deal with whatever I need to deal with later on.”

“If I consider what I have to deal with...it could be worse for them. […] If maybe the workplace was more emotionally inclined, we got more work done. […] I think we need to recognise that people spend the majority of their time here.”

A few women do experience a positive work-home balance. It’s either in their home situation: they do not have children, they have time to do other things than work, and/or they have a very supportive home situation. Or it has to do with work: they don’t work to much, or they have a supportive manager.

“My husband is very *supportive of me. […] He understands my position. […] He doesn't have issues. […] So I don't have to choose in terms of kids. […] My husband is always there. He's also taking care of them. So it's something that we are doing together.”*

“And I also have a very understanding manager.”

4.2.11 Challenging stereotypes

Although most of the women do hold, at least to some extent, generalised, essentialised and universalised views on differences between women and men, not all of them believe these stereotypes to be true. Some argue that personality is a more important determinant of behaviour, and others simply won’t believe in stereotypes as they regard them as non-beneficial to both women and men. Some may notice some gender differences in leadership, but connect it only to physical differences (such as bonding over pregnancy and periods).

Not stereotyping also extends to the role they see for mothers. It seems there is a shift happening in recognising that a man can just as well raise children as a woman.

“I'd hate to think it's just because I'm a woman… I would not want that to be my defining character. […] I fight against the notion that women just think about the people and men think about the finances and the IT, you know, that kind of differentiation for me is just total nonsense. […] I don't buy into that demarcation of women belong here and men belong, I just think these leadership positions, I think they are many more women who should be able to lead and sit around board positions than currently are *the case. […] Because that's my interest, I don't* link *that to my gender..“*

“It's my personality thing, I'm not attributing it to a female thing.”

“I tend to always think 'no, I want to be seen as a person, and not as a this or a that’."

“This mothering thing. And so, I, you know, I don't see that it's specifically a female thing. I've seen some of my guy colleagues who, and some of the younger managers, male managers in the environment, who take on these roles.”

[When asked about differences in leadership between women and men]: “I cannot say there’s much difference. […] It depends on an individual.”

“I would say I pay less attention to gender in looking at differences in leadership styles, and more attention to other characteristics.”

“I think that I have conversations with the women on my team, and sometimes it is different at a personal level, than I would have with the male members of my team.”

4.2.12 Limited effects of Apartheid

The participants grew up for the most part during Apartheid, but none of them seem to have internalised the racism and sexism that were so prominent during that time. They were either from dysfunctional families (that weren’t able to engrain strict gender roles), or had parents that were middle class and promoted their daughters to become anything that wanted, let them have big dreams, and encouraged them. They didn’t grow up with a strong sense of being different because they were a woman or black, but believed they could become who they wanted. Some of them weren’t even that aware of Apartheid until they became adults. This is very interesting, because according to Fanon (1968), internalised racism, which is extremely common among people of colour, is a very important factor in maintaining racism and inequality.

“So the whole idea of that there's someone who can think that they are above me in any way, both in terms of being scared of losing my job tomorrow, being scared of, you know, so all those things, you find out that most of them, are not there. Because of the environment that one grew up in, of security, of assurance, of firmness, of assurance, of resources.”

“My shaping was mostly by my father and my mother...more than it was that I can talk about specific incidences or shaping influences on the outside. And I think that has been very helpful in my own way of thinking. […] I always believed I could do anything.”

“She [her mother] was instilling feminist thinking. […] My early years just weren’t defined in a gender specific way.”

*“I would say [as a child, during Apartheid] 'oh, I'm gonna buy this house here, not too far from here', and my dad never said to me that you'll never be able to, because of the colour of your skin, because the country is...*never*. So I've, I don't know what that's like.”*

“The direct impact of Apartheid, it was not so evident, at that stage where I was.”

There was one exception of a woman leader who was severely disadvantaged by Apartheid. She did not have a lot of opportunities because of insufficient schooling, being poor, and taking care of siblings when she was still young. But she has been able to use these experiences to her advantage and to advance others.

“Such things, you know, they did have an impact on me. But, they also assisted me, you know, in becoming a very strong person. […] I’m more on to changing other people’s lives.”

5. REFLEXIVITY

My role as a researcher in this project is not objective. I bring my own motives, background, appearance, intersectionality, values and beliefs into this project. This is not detrimental but can be useful for the research. It does not mean that my research is invalid - objective research does not exist - but it does mean that my positionality should be transparent in how it affects this research project (Moya, 2011). Who I am is especially influential in the aim of this project, during data collection, and in the data analysis.

5.1 My intersectionality

My own intersectionality is relevant when I do research, especially when I am also studying intersectionality (Davis, 2014). I am a white, middle-class, highly educated woman with a Dutch nationality who mostly grew up and was educated in the global north and Western world. I am able-bodied, heterosexual and married, with no children. Most of my identities, except my gender (and maybe the fact that I do not have children), are on the dominant side. This could be an impediment for doing my research because it is more difficult for privileged people to recognise privilege and power (Johnson, 1997). However, by living in South Africa for the last couple of years, and by critically studying diversity, power and inequality in the context of South Africa, I think I am capable of recognising power and privilege, at least to a large extent. I have learned to adopt a more de-colonial and critical-of-Western-thought point of view, with the capacity to understand the experiences of gay people and people of colour, who generally consider me an ally (once they know me). I am, however, also aware that I am still learning, that I cannot speak from many personal experiences, and may well have some blind spots when studying the marginalised and less privileged.

5.2 Project aim

My reason for wanting to study this topic is political (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002); it is because I am a woman and because I am a passionate advocate for gender equality. Critical research needs to result in increased social justice (Cannella & Lincoln, 2012) and I want to use my research to increase social justice and reduce inequalities, especially those based on gender, but also for other social identities.

With my passion for gender equality it is important not to fall in the trap of using gender research to demonise men (Ratele, 2014), but while reflecting on this issue I realise this has not been a problem. I think this is because I did not interact with men at all, I always looked at the women's personal experiences, the bigger picture of the organisation and society, and masculinity in general, and not the behaviour of particular men.

5.3 Interviews

While conducting interviews I had a significant effect on what was being shared because I was continuously interacting with the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). One such effect is the power inequality that exists between me and the participants (Harvey, 2003; Riessman, 2005). I do, however, think this was notably reduced by a number of aspects of my positionality, making the interviews more equal and similar to a dialogue. I entered their organisation, which is their comfort zone and not mine. All participants were highly educated professionals (many higher educated than me), knowing what research entails and what to expect from it. I am a woman doing research on women. I think I was able to position myself towards them as a junior researcher, with knowledge about organisations, who takes them and my research very seriously, who tried to relate to them, and who intends to create positive change through my research.

During the interviews I noticed myself sometimes almost slipping into my role of organisational consultant instead of researcher. With eight years of experience in that role and 'interviewing' people with the intention of helping them find HR-related

solutions, it was sometimes difficult to only collect information and not try to advise them.

I enjoyed doing the interviews and it seemed the women I interviewed enjoyed them as well and were willing and open to share about anything I asked them. One of them expressed she enjoyed the interview and mentioned I was a good listener. Most interviews took longer than planned and participants shared beyond what I asked, indicating they were eager to share. I think they were comfortable with me for a number of reasons. The first one is because I showed signs of active and attentive listening, such as nodding, responding with words that showed I heard and understood, and paraphrasing what they said. After the first interview I noticed during transcription that sometimes if I disagreed with the person my response or tone of voice sounded a bit critical on the recordings. I therefore decided that I would always respond positively to whatever anyone would say in the following interviews, making it easier for them to share their thoughts on anything. The second reason is that I asked more in-depth questions related to what they were saying and through that trying to better understand them. Thirdly, I was very open and candid without reservation or awkwardness in my questions, which I think made it easier for them to also respond openly, frankly and comfortably. And fourthly, I chose to start with a very open question about their experiences, giving them the chance to share whatever they felt like sharing and not necessarily be led completely by me.The downside of this was that during some interviews, I had the impression that the participant was trying to almost take over the direction of the interview instead of being led by my questions. I especially noticed this with senior level leaders. But I chose to let this happen to see what would come up. I did not want to cut them off but I wanted to give them the feeling that they could share anything they wanted. The only times I was critical in my questions was if I needed to understand what they were saying and to make something clear and explicit instead of remaining vague to me. Lastly, I enjoyed all the interviews and I valued, respected and liked all the women I interviewed and appreciated everything they shared. They could probably sense that, which helped them to share without restraint.

I was prepared that my whiteness could be an obstacle in interviewing women of colour, especially with questions related to race or ethnic background. Black women do not necessarily seek a 'coalition' with white women to fight sexism, because of the fear that their experiences as *black* women will be overlooked (Canham, 2014). But I did not experience any inhibition or discomfort there. I asked about Apartheid and racial issues, and all women seemed very open and comfortable talking about it. I think my candidness and sincere interest facilitated this, but it could also have been because most of them recognised me as a foreigner. (Some asked me explicitly where I was from upon hearing my accent; others would have at least picked up the foreign accent.) Generally, my experience is that, with regards to issues of race, non-South African white people are perceived a little more positively than South African white people. It presumably also helped that they knew I come from the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies, that they are positively familiar with, assuming that I would be understanding about racial concerns.

I experienced and showed various emotions during the interviews. On the one side certain emotions may have helped the participants to feel comfortable, for example when I laughed with them. On the other hand, I noticed myself feeling irritated sometimes because of things they were saying. I was not annoyed with them personally, but with some of the problematic views they would share, normalise and not be aware of. I am not sure they noticed this or interpreted it as such, because they did not seem inhibited to continue sharing. Sometimes I showed a little anger when they shared experiences of people or situations around them being difficult or inhibiting them. I think this helped them to feel acknowledged.

5.4 Data analysis

During the data analyses my positionality enabled me to see certain patterns clearly and other issues possibly less clearly. Familiarity can help to understand the context, but non-familiarity can facilitate recognising certain discourses because they are not 'normal' to me (Terre Blanche, et al., 2014a). Tazanu (2012) discusses the

advantages and disadvantages of being an outsider versus an insider as a researcher. During this stage of the research, I considered myself somewhat more of an outsider than an insider, which I think was beneficial for doing a thorough and critical analysis. The characteristic that makes me feel most like an outsider is my Dutch nationality and the fact that I am socialised in a culture different from South African cultures.

On the one hand, being somewhat of an outsider made it a bit more challenging to analyse within a broad scope of the socio-historical context. The social, historical and current context of South Africa is relatively new to me, as a foreigner that moved here just over two years ago. So to include the history and consequences of Apartheid, and to recognise intersectional issues and systems of suppression related to gender, race, ethnicity and age within this context was relatively challenging. It could also limit my understanding of how things that do not seem to work to me, do work in this culture and context.

On the other hand, being from another country proved to be an advantage during the data analysis. It was easier for me to recognise certain discourses, because they are not familiar to me. Observing cultural differences helps to be critical of discourses, ideas and practices that are normalised in one culture. Discourses normalise, making them hard for people accustomed to them to recognise and critique them. Because certain ideas and practices that are normalised in South Africa are not normal for me, I could identify and analyse them more easily. There are some significant differences between the cultures I observed at the NRF and in other South African organisations and Dutch organisational cultures, and this has an effect on how I did my analysis. The culture in the Netherlands, both generally and in organisations, is one of the least hierarchical in the world, both in my experience and according to research (Den Hartog, et al., 1999; Hofstede, 2001). Respect is not based on one's position, but needs to be deserved and should be given to people at every level in an organisation. As a leader you cannot simply exert your power because employees will not accept that. It is a culture where consensus needs to be reached, and where employees at different hierarchical levels, including those at lower levels, are consulted when important decisions are being made, because realisation of decisions will not happen if they are

not accepted by everyone in the organisation (Den Hartog, et al., 1999). Dutch culture is also very low in masculinity (Hofstede, 2001). Men generally do not need to prove their masculinity, gender roles are not as strictly defined, and people are generally more interested in liking what they do than in being defined in terms of success and winning. There is even a tendency to deprecate those who want to stand out as high achievers (Den Hartog, et al., 1999). Leadership in the Netherlands is defined in more feminine terms than I generally encounter in South Africa. Dutch leaders are predominantly focused on enabling their teams, and leadership scores high in a participative style (Den Hartog, et al., 1999). I have observed that a transformational leadership style is most common, which defines good leadership with both “feminine” and “masculine” traits (Eagly, et al., 2003). These cultural differences made it easier for me to recognise where the organisational culture of the NRF was hierarchical, driven by power, control and competition, and masculine.

6. CONCLUSION

With leadership roles and organisations historically designed for and to suit white men, it can be challenging for women and people of colour to be successful and appreciated in organisations (Dodds, 2012), especially in organisations that have not sufficiently addressed the issues that cause inequality. The NRF is unfortunately no exception, but it is at least trying to be aware and to improve. The aim of this research is to expose inequalities, thus destabilising current power structures, and analyse how the NRF can be an organisation where women have equal opportunities, participation, status and power to men.

The central issue analysed is that the NRF has a masculine culture that expresses itself in various ways and prevents gender equality. An important aspect of the masculine culture is hierarchy. Inequality and differences based on gender, age, level of education, race, and level within the organisation are normalised, essentialised and maintained. There is a clear definition of who matters most, whose voices and feelings are most valued in the organisation, and who can dominate others, namely the senior leaders (who also happen to be relatively old), those with the highest level of education (and not necessarily those with the most relevant education), those who look and behave English/Western, and men. This leads to others feeling undermined, needing to work harder to fit in, and lacking a sense of belonging. The culture of the NRF currently aids in the exclusion of women, people of colour, non-Western people, disabled people, and people without a PhD. These people are easily overlooked because they don't fit the norm. The norm defines what is seen as successful, normal and naturalised. The equivalent of successful, normal and naturalised leadership is masculine leadership. The norm of the masculine leader is perpetuated by discourses and through stereotyping. These are also expressed and sustained (at least partly) by some of the women leaders in the organisation. The performance system contributes to rewarding those who act according to the norm and policing those who don't.

The NRF does have the potential to be a more inclusive and diverse organisation, thanks to people in the organisation who are aware, feel responsible,

challenge normalised discourses and stereotypes, work towards a more equal organisational culture, acknowledge responsibilities outside work, use a wider definition of leadership, and live out inclusive values with recognition for the marginalised. The dominant discourses around leadership and culture are being destabilised by them, presenting opportunities to change them.

6.1 Recommendations for equality

There are several recommendations I'd like to make for the NRF as an organisation to increase equality based on this research.

Addressing the masculine organisational culture of the NRF is essential. By tackling organisational culture issues, such as hierarchy, patriarchy, power plays, and being hard on people, more equality can be achieved, not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of race, age, disability and level of education.

Reducing the organisational hierarchy, in its various expressions, and based on different social markers, can have a great effect. Similar treatment for senior leaders and lower level employees when it comes to respect, valuing input, IT hardware, and quality of work spaces. Creating an environment where feedback is easily given to anyone, to peers, those you report to, and those who report to you, without fear of repercussions, and with the intention of helping others to grow.

Making more use of the values that the NRF already defined will be helpful. They are good values, and need to be more incorporated into the culture, work processes, performance evaluations, and procedures. They need to be lived.

Creating more ways of interacting, networking and mentoring would be very beneficial. Networking and mentoring are important means of learning, being successful and rising in the organisation.

Reconsidering what good leadership means and creating an inclusive vision on leadership is important. Critically evaluating whether a certain age or educational degree is an absolute necessity or not. Defining leadership in both feminine and masculine terms, not only focusing on achieving results but at least as much on how to

enable people and teams to perform their best. Encouraging transformational leadership, which is a more ‘communal’ and people-oriented style of leadership (as opposed to transactional leadership), that incorporates feminine attributes and is more congruent with feminine role expectations, making it more easily adopted and performed by women. Transformational leadership is also recognised as the most effective style of leadership (more so than the more masculinely defined transactional style) and although less commonly used in more senior levels of the organisations (which can explain the different views by middle management and senior leaders at the NRF), it is equally effective at all levels of the organisation (Eagly et al., 2003). So defining good leadership at the NRF in more feminine terms will be beneficial to both the performance of the organisation and (more) women in leadership positions.

Adopting more “feminine” aspects into views on leadership will also open up the possibility of greater variation in leadership styles. This is helpful for a variety of people who don’t exactly perform according to the norm that is mostly male, white, “old”, and Western. It creates space for challenging the norm, by, for example, the expression of emotions, defying stereotypes, a greater emphasis on work-home balance, and ways to incorporate other cultures, making the organisation and leadership roles more welcoming for those who don’t fit the dominant norm.

Addressing work-life balance can make a difference. Most employees have (and should have) a life outside of work, and should be able to balance work and life. Combining motherhood with a career is challenging and with a current shift to more fathers (and same-sex parents) taking responsibility for children, it is crucial to develop work rules, policies and a culture that facilitates parenthood. Even when people do not have children to take care of, a good work-life balance is crucial for committed, happy, motivated and productive employees, which benefits the organisation as a whole.

6.2 Recommendations for further research

One important conclusion from studying intersectionality is that internalised sexism and racism barely existed in the women interviewed. Even though they grew up

in a society that was permeated with racism and sexism, they viewed themselves differently. It would be very interesting to investigate the relationship between non-internalised racism & sexism and women of colour in leadership further.

It is difficult to draw a conclusion on the intersectionality of age, race, ethnicity and gender, so more in-depth research, with more participants, on intersectionality and leadership experiences would be useful.

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Appendix A: Invitation email

Dear …,

I am a student pursuing a Master's degree in Critical Diversity Studies at the University of Witwatersrand. I am conducting a research to study the experiences of women in leadership at the NRF.

I am inviting you to participate in this research, which will involve a one-hour, individual interview about how you experience being a woman in leadership at the NRF. The interview will consist of specific questions I will ask you regarding this. The interviews will take place at your work location, or if you prefer, somewhere of your choosing.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no negative consequences. If at any time you discontinue participation, what you have shared will be discarded. The results of this research study will be published, but your name will not be used. Your identity will be kept confidential.

This research study can be beneficial to you as it aims to (better) address gender inequality in organisations and at the NRF in particular. This study cannot guarantee that any of the things you mention will change or improve per se.

Attached you can find the informed consent form, with more information about the study and participation.

If you'd like to participate, you can let me know by replying to this email. Could you please do so before DATE? In your reply email you can also let me know where you would like to have the interview and when you would be available in the next 2-3 weeks.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me or my supervisor.

Kind regards,

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076-606 3949

Professor Melissa Steyn (Supervisor, NRF Chair in Critical Diversity Studies)
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011-717 4199/4418

Appendix B: Interview questions

Introduction questions

1. How old are you?
2. How do you racially identify (e.g. black, coloured, white, Indian, etc.)?
3. How do you ethnically identify (e.g. Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, etc.)?
4. At what level of the organisation are you a leader (e.g. junior, mid-level, senior, etc.)?
5. At what NRF location do you work?
6. How long have you been working at the NRF? And how long in a leadership role? (Career description)
7. What field are you working in (e.g. academic, support)?

Questions about experiences as a (woman) leader

8. What are your experiences being a leader at the NRF?
9. Do you feel or think it is different being a leader as a woman compared to men?
10. Do you experience difficulties being a woman leader? If so, what difficulties?
11. Do you experience advantages being a woman leader? If so, what advantages?
12. Can you describe how you were able to become leader? And the difficulties or advantages you experienced? Do you think being a woman played a role in this? And what about other social identities?
13. Do you see or experience differences in leadership between women and men?
14. How do people in your personal/private environment (such as family & friends) see you as a leader? Are they supportive? How is the work-home balance? Etc.

Questions about organisational culture and (woman) leadership

15. How would you describe the organisational culture of the NRF?
16. Do you feel the culture of the NRF is woman-friendly? Please explain and expand.
17. How would you define good leadership? Do you see yourself as a good leader?
18. How does, in your view, the NRF define good leadership or what are NRF's values related to leadership? Do you agree? Does it match with your leadership style?
19. How are you being perceived as a leader by others in the organisation? Do you think your gender plays a role? And other social identities?
20. Have you been exposed to sexist jokes at the NRF (by colleagues)? How often?
21. Have you experienced discrimination or harassment within the NRF? Please describe what happened. (Can be gender-based but also based on something else)

Intersectionality questions (if not already discussed/mentioned)

22. Do you think your age, and being raised during/after Apartheid, influences your experiences as a leader?
23. Do you think your race or ethnicity influences your experiences as a leader?

Appendix C: Informed consent form

Wits Centre for Diversity Studies
Master's Research: Women in Leadership

INTRODUCTION
You are invited to join a research study that looks at the experiences of women in leadership at the NRF. The reason for this study is the gender inequality that exists, both in numbers and in experiences, in organisations in general and the NRF in particular.

Please read this consent form carefully before you decide to participate in this study. The decision to participate or not in this study is up to you.

WHAT YOU ARE ASKED TO DO
You will be interviewed individually by the researcher about how you experience being a woman in leadership at the NRF. The interview will consist of specific questions the researcher will ask you regarding the subject. You are free to answer the questions as elaborately as you wish, or indicate that you do not wish to answer certain questions.

TIME REQUIRED & LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS
The interviews will be one hour and will take place at your work location, or if you prefer, somewhere of your choosing.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION & RIGHT TO WITHDRAW
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or penalty. Should you choose to discontinue participation, any information already collected will be discarded.

The researcher also has the right to remove you from the study for any reason. This can be done without your consent.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Your identity will be kept confidential by not referring to you by name or any other indication that may lead to identifying you in the research report.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed and the interviewer will also take notes during the interview. The recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be saved in different locations (online and on a computer), with passwords and by a code name (and not your name) known only to the researcher.

Your name, your participation and what you share will not be discussed with anyone else. What you share can be quoted in the research report, but only if it does not indicate it is you.

RISKS
There are no known risks in participating in this study.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY
The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of women in leadership in order to (better) address gender inequality in organisations and the NRF in particular. Everything you share can be useful in achieving this purpose. This study, however, cannot guarantee that any of the things you mention will change or improve per se.

If you are interested, you can request a summary of the research report.

INCENTIVE
There is no incentive or remuneration for participation.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits

CONTACT DETAILS IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY

Anneke van Heek (MA Student Researcher):
annekevanheek@gmail.com, 076-606 3949
Prof. Melissa Steyn (Supervisor, NRF Chair in Critical Diversity Studies):
melissa.Steyn@wits.ac.za, 011-717 4199/4418

AGREEMENT

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign the form below. Your signature will indicate that the research has been explained to you, that you understand about the research, that you agree to participate in the research, and that you agree to be recorded during the interviews.

Participant's Name: (Print) _____

Place _____ Date _____

Signature _____