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Women in leadership- Experiences of advancements,
stereotypes and discrimination in a corporate
environment.

Declaration: I, Kayleigh Baxter, hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Honours in Business Management degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of women in relation to advancement, stereotypes, and discrimination in a corporate environment. Women in the workplace are not equally represented when compared to men and women are still underrepresented as leaders in the 21st century. An interpretivist, qualitative approach was used in this study. This study aimed to answer these research questions. Firstly, how females in corporate environments feel about the nature of the corporate environment. Secondly, to what extent are females in the corporate environment supported in order to advance their careers. Lastly, do women working in the corporate environment feel that they are treated equally and equally compensated when compared to male employees. Through a focus group the following theme were identified: The 'Harsh' Corporate Environment, Family Responsibility, Limitations to Career Advancement, Salary Discrimination and Male versus Female Support. Overall in the 21st century women in a corporate environment find the nature of the corporate environment harsh and these women were still subject to indirect discrimination. Women are still held back by stereotypes and because of this they battle to advance in their careers.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Title

Women in Leadership - Experiences of advancements, stereotypes and discrimination in a corporate environment, a South African perspective.

1.2 Contextualisation/background

A distinct lack of women in leadership positions, has been identified in South Africa as well as throughout the rest of the world. The 2017 Women in Business report, as cited by Thornton (2017), established that 28% of senior roles in South Africa are held by women, in 2004 the figure was at 26%. This shows no significant change in the number of women in senior roles. Of that 28 % of women who hold senior roles, only 3% of the women are CEOs. Furthermore, 31% of companies in South Africa have no women in senior positions at all (Hammond, 2017). Prompted by these findings, this research aims to explore the experiences of women who have been in leadership positions within the corporate environment and will aim to provide insight into the possible reasons for a lack of women in senior roles. Particularly this research looks at the way in which they were able to advance in their careers, as well as whether or not they were subjected to stereotypes and discrimination. In corollary, this research will explore, in particular, and through the use of a focus group, the question of whether or not women in the workplace are still being held back by stereotypes and discrimination in the 21st century.

1.3 Rationale

This study will specifically explore the experiences of women in a corporate environment in the hopes of gaining insight into the reasons for lack of women in leadership positions when compared to the number of men in leadership positions. While it can be argued that some progress has been made, overall women still remain poorly represented in many high-level leadership positions (Bryman *et al.* 2014). When women are successful in attaining positions with high status, they still remain disadvantaged when compared to men. Smith's 2002 research (cited in Bryman *et al.* 2014) showed that women hold positions in leadership which entail less authority than those of men. This research did take into account job status, education, and experience of men when compared to women. Importantly, South Africa appears to be reversing gains made in improving gender progression in the workplace (Skade,

2016). The percentage of women in leadership roles, in South Africa, decreased from 27% in 2015 to 23% in 2016 (Skade, 2016).

In the workplace, women are often subjected to subtle discrimination by both sexes. This discrimination usually refers to gender discrimination (Wolfe, 2017). Discrimination against women can come in the form of sexual harassment, withholding promotions based on gender, giving a different job title to a woman and preventing women from participating in training opportunities (Finn, 2017). At the current growth rate of progress female representation in the professional and managerial ranks will only reach 40% globally in 2025 (Medland, 2016).

1.4 Problem Statement

Women in the workplace are not equally represented when compared to men and women are still underrepresented as leaders in the 21st century (Bryman *et al*, 2014). The underrepresentation of women in leadership can be seen globally, nationally and locally (Bryman *et al*. 2014). This can be seen when analysing the top-level management within a business organisation. The Fortune 500, a list of the largest companies in the United States in relation to revenue, is compiled annually (Bryman *et al*. 2014). In the list, women make up 16% of corporate officers and 15% of corporate boards. In Europe, women hold 11% of the positions in the highest decision-making bodies of the large corporations (Bryman *et al*. 2014). Of the top 10 highest paid CEOs in South Africa, not a single one is female and 9 out of the 10 are white males (Nedu, 2015). Gender discrimination in the workplace continues to be a major problem despite the passing of time (Merriman, 2009): Sexual or gender discrimination occurs whenever an individual is treated differently on account of their gender and may affect anything from hiring decisions to promotions (Merriman, 2009). Relatedly, sexual harassment, a form of gender discrimination, is also experienced in the workplace (Merriman, 2009).

1.5 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women in a corporate environment and how this influences female's advancement within an organisation in South Africa.

This research will be using a thematic analysis approach to uncover women's experiences. The result will be an insight into women's experiences and how women believe these experiences hinder their advancements in the corporate world.

1.6 Research Goal and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women in corporate environments and how those experiences may impact the advancement of women within an organisational context. A group of women will be interacting with one another as well as with the researcher through a focus group in order to uncover the woman's individual experiences, through a thematic analysis. In the research, gender and leadership in business will be described generally as the gender equality in business and what are the experiences women's advancement in business. The result will be a descriptive picture of the experiences of these women.

Research question:

- What are the experiences of women in leadership roles in relation to the influence of stereotypes and gender discrimination on their advancement within the corporate environment?

Sub-questions

- How do females in corporate environments feel about the nature of the corporate environment?
- To what extent are females in the corporate environment supported in order to advance their careers?
- Do women working in the corporate environment feel that they are treated equally and equally compensated when compared to male employees?

2 Literature review

2.1 Conceptualisation

This research is interested in women in leadership and their experiences with regard to career advancements, stereotyping and discrimination in a corporate environment.

Advancement, in terms of this study, refers to the career advancement of women in particular. Advancement within the context of career development refers to the upward path of an individual's career and an individual's growth within an organisation (McKay, 2016).

Discrimination in its usual sense means treating a person unfairly because of who they are or because they possess certain characteristics. Discrimination in terms of this study will usually refer to gender discrimination against women. This discrimination against women can come in the form of sexual harassment, withholding promotions based on gender, giving a different job title to a woman and preventing women from participating in training opportunities (Finn, 2016).

Gender stereotyping is defined as an overgeneralisation of characteristics, differences, and attributes of a certain group based on their gender. Gender discrimination is the assumption, within a workplace environment, that there are jobs they are "inadequate" for women and as a result. Women are under-represented in higher-status, higher-paying occupations (Nobullying.com, 2016).

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

The problem setting has shown there to be a clear lack of women in leadership, despite some progress. A theory for the lack of women in leadership is the glass ceiling theory (The Economist, 2009). The expression, "the glass ceiling" first appeared in the Wall Street Journal in 1986 and was then used in the title of an academic article by A.M. Morrison and others published in 1987 (The Economist, 2009).

Researcher Hindle (2009) looked at the persistent failure of women to climb as far up the corporate ladder as might be expected, going on their representation in the working population as a whole. The idea behind the expression was that a transparent barrier, a glass ceiling, blocked them. Invisible from the bottom, when women started their careers, it prevented them attaining equality with men later on (Hindle, 2009). This theory helped explain the fact that in large corporations in Europe and North America,

women rarely came to account for more than 10% of senior executives and 4% of CEOs and chairmen (Hindle, 2009).

Several concepts have been presented to explain the glass ceiling:

The time factor. First-class female graduates have not yet had time to work through the pipeline and reach the top of the corporate hierarchy (Hindle, 2009). It has been suggested that although in modern times women have left the household to pursue careers, women have not yet been in the corporate environment long enough to work their way to the higher-level positions. Qualifications for a senior management post usually include a graduate degree and 25 years of continuous work experience. In the early 1970s, fewer than 5% of law and MBA degrees were being awarded to women, whereas now women gain over 40% of all law degrees in the United States and 35% of MBAs (Hindle, 2009).

Motherhood. Sometimes the blame for the glass ceiling is laid at the door of motherhood. Women tend to be more distracted from their career path by the need to stay at home and rear children (Hindle, 2009). The nature of the corporate environment is not conducive to women who tend to bear most household responsibilities. They are unable to undertake the tasks required to reach the top; for example, extended trips abroad, long evenings “entertaining” clients and changing plans at short notice (Hindle, 2009).

A lack of female role models. In 1997, Rosabeth Moss Kanter suggested that because managerial women are so often the token females in their work environment they stand out from the rest (cited in Hindle, 2009). This makes them (and their failures) much more visible and exaggerates the differences between them and the dominant male culture. It is then possible that fewer women are encouraged to enter into the corporate environment as they see fewer women doing so. This contributes to the lack of progress for women in business.

Time as factor, motherhood and a lack of female role models all contribute to the “glass ceiling” for women. These elements impact on the experiences of women in the corporate environment. The corporate environment is currently not welcoming to women as they are perceived to be less committed to their careers when they are unable to work the long and extended hours due to the fact that they have families. The

lack of women in leadership roles are making women leaders stand out to those in corporate, therefore any mistakes they make are magnified. This is unfair and could be perceived as gender discrimination as men are not under the same scrutiny as women.

While there has been a progression of women in business, the glass-ceiling phenomenon is proving peculiarly persistent (The Economist, 2005). The top of the corporate ladder remains stubbornly male, and the few women who reach this level are paid significantly less than the men that they join there (The Economist, 2005). This is despite the fact that companies are trying harder than ever to help women to climb higher through diversity programs. Diversity programmes promote a representation of minorities in business, women are included in this minority (The Economist, 2005).

2.3 Review of the Current Literature

Discrimination and Stereotypes

Discrimination is the selection of an individual or individuals for unfavourable treatment on the basis of: gender, race, colour or ethnic or national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, social class, age, marital status or family responsibilities, or as a result of any conditions or requirements that do not accord with the principles of fairness and natural justice (Unesco.org, 2017).

The debate around whether or not women are still being discriminated against in the 21st century has led to a number of studies and research papers being written with a view to gain an understanding of this issue. The research of Bryman *et al.* (2014) becomes relevant in this regard, as they draw on a number of surveys conducted by economists and sociologists which compare the wages and promotions of males and females in the workplace.

These studies adjust a woman's salary in terms of the hours they work, their family responsibility and the company's structure; these factors account for women's lesser advancement and lower wages (Bryman *et al.* 2014: 108). However, these variables provide an incomplete picture of the gender gap between men and women; most social scientists conclude that gender discrimination accounts for (at least a portion of) the remaining unexplained gender gaps (Bryman *et al.* 2014: 108).

Bryman *et al.* (2014) further explain that discrimination against female leaders derives from commonly held stereotypes about men and women, and prejudice in the evaluation of female leaders (Bryman *et al.* 2014: 108). Eagly and Karau (2002), as well as Heilman (cited in Bryman *et al.* 2014), believe that female leaders are subject to prejudices due to the fact that stereotypes about women are incompatible with stereotypes about leaders.

However, in contrast to research presented by Bryman *et al.*, researchers FuentesFuentes, Ruiz-Arroyo, Bojica and Welter (2015), explored how business relationships improve innovativeness in women-owned firms. Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.* (2015) contribute similarly to the literature on women entrepreneurs and innovation by showing how women's close business contacts are relevant to innovativeness.

Furthermore, the research suggests that when women entrepreneurs are perceived to be stronger then innovativeness is stronger (Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.* 2015). Their research found that women entrepreneurs who recognise social stereotypes may feel less empowered. As a result, they may choose to embrace the development and fostering of close relationships (Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.* 2015).

Cuadrado, García-Ael, and Molero's (2015) study on gender-typing of leadership in Spain found that men and women alike support the 'think manager- think male' stereotype. This hinders a women's access to managerial positions unless legal and structural measures in organisations are put in place (Cuadrado *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, their research determined that for gender-typing in managerial positions, female managers are perceived as possessing more masculine than feminine characteristics and that this perception was stronger among the female than among the male participants (Cuadrado *et al.* 2015). It can be seen that many researchers have focused on stereotypes relating to women in general. However, limited research has focused exclusively on stereotypes relating to employed women seeking to advance their corporate careers. This research project specifically focusses on filling this gap by exploring the experiences of employed women in the corporate world and their experiences with discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace.

Advancement Challenges Faced by Women

In 2001, McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook (cited in Bryman *et al.* 2014) found that women advance more slowly where men hold a clear majority and where advancement depends on male networks. The 1995 United States Merit Systems Protection Board (cited in Bryman *et al.* 2014) states that the risk of women being sexually harassed increases in traditionally masculine occupations and in environments with a high percentage of men.

The demand for long hours is more challenging for women than men because of their typically greater domestic responsibilities. The unfriendliness of many corporate cultures and male networks and the frequent refusal of desirable assignments to women tend to block the advancement of women and contribute to their relative absence from leadership positions because the structure and norms of organisations implicitly favour men (Bryman *et al.* 2014: 112).

Kay Lakhi (president and CEO of Alyfe Wellbeing Strategies) stated that powerful women committed to making an impact in the world are often left overwhelmed, exhausted and uninspired due to inequality, which is further compounded by the role of women in their families and the differences in capital available to women for their own companies as compared to men (Lakhi, 2016).

Martin and Barnard (2013) posit that women who work in male-dominated occupations face challenges that differ from those who work in more gender-balanced and female-dominated occupations and that these challenges affect their retention and career success. The researchers further determined that women in male-dominated occupations often work in conditions that do not cater for their unique needs because of entrenched gender-biased organisational cultures (Martin and Barnard, 2013). Furthermore, Martin and Barnard (2013) believed that in male-dominated industries women need be provided with tangible physical support and female-focused policies, visible career opportunities, challenges to entice their personal drive for achievement and different ways of recognising their success (Martin and Barnard, 2013).

Gardiner and Tiggemann (1999) focus on the mental health of employees in different gender dominated industries, whether it be female-dominated or male-dominated. Women in male-dominated industries reported worse mental health when they utilised

an interpersonally oriented leadership style, meaning that they worked collaboratively with their colleagues. Their findings suggested that both gender and the gender ratio of the industry influence leadership style, stress and mental health, and as such contribute to our understanding of the barriers to women working in senior management roles in male-dominated industries (Gardiner and Tiggemann, 1999).

A comparative study conducted by Maseko concluded that women do have the potential and the abilities to lead, but they face a vicious cycle of challenges (2013). These challenges are both internal and external, including social and gender stereotypes. The issue of balancing a woman's household duties and her workplace functions have significantly impacted on women's lack of leadership success (Maseko, 2013).

The literature clearly shows that there are a variety of factors that make the advancement of women in business extremely challenging. The focus of this study is to take the theory a step further by exploring individuals' experiences and perceptions of the corporate world through a focus group and a qualitative study.

Gender Traits and Characteristic Differences Affecting Leadership

Bryman *et al.* (2014) found that the biggest gender differences occurred with regards to agreeableness and neuroticism. Agreeableness is a personality trait manifesting itself in individual behavioural characteristics that are perceived as kind, sympathetic, cooperative, warm, and considerate. Agreeableness is a trait that is more readily identified in women. Neuroticism is a personality trait characterised by instability, anxiety, and aggression. Neuroticism is a trait that is more readily identified in men (Bryman *et al.* 2014). However, research has proved that neither of these characteristics bears any relevance to leadership (Bryman *et al.* 2014: 105).

Women showed more extraversion, however when the study assessed the various components of extraversion, findings were mixed: Women surpassed men in warmth, positive emotions, gregariousness, and activity, but men surpassed women in assertiveness and excitement seeking. Overall research has shown that neither gender has a leadership advantage based on their personality (Bryman *et al.* 2014: 105).

Patel (2013) provides an overview of the gender differences in leadership and business. This research attributes the lack of women in leadership positions to the barriers they face in business, including a lack of confidence, authority, leadership identity, gender biases, career paths and scrutiny.

Women should, according to Patel (2013) look for ways to empower themselves in order to be desired and needed in business. Women in business will provide a more diverse workforce which will lead to improved decision-making. Women need to take personal responsibility to reach their goals by investing in themselves to create their own personal brands and overcome challenges (Patel, 2013) Patel (2013) suggests that women need to:

- Acquire skills to become more confident and assertive;
- Become aware of communication rituals;
- Learn negotiation techniques;
- Invest in their technical competence, cultural and emotional intelligence;
- Embrace authentic leadership styles;
- Find mentors and sponsors;
- Encourage proactive investment to build own brand equity;
- Join or create networks and circles of influence;
- Be part of the solution to drive change.

Indeed, Stelter (2002) believes that men and women lead differently in addition to being "followed" differently and that this is evident in interpersonal relationships, social role expectations, as well as in differences in perception and styles. This research further states that in order for an organisation to be successful they need to not only understand leadership in terms of gender, but also its contribution to the workforce and organisational effectiveness (Stelter, 2002).

The literature is contradictory when it comes to determining the way in which women lead; while some may show that the way in which women lead has no impact on their leadership ability (Bryman *et al.* 2014: 111), other literature gives advice to women about how to lead in the same manner in which a man does (Patel, 2013). This research conducts a focus group that hopes to provide clarity as to whether or not

women believe they are suitably equipped to lead in a business environment, an insight found to be currently lacking in the available literature.

The current literature available has a number of insightful and educational studies that range from quantitative to qualitative. However, there are few studies that make use of in-depth interviews and focus groups, resulting in a lack of insight into women's experience in the corporate world. Relevant to this current problem, the research submitted by this study attempts to fill the evident gap regarding insight into women's experiences in the corporate world.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm

According to Bryman's 2010 work (cited in du Plooy-Cilliers 2015), a paradigm refers to a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted. There are three dominant traditions, namely; positivism, interpretivist and critical realism (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). Positivists maintain that science must be based on empirical data produced by direct observation. Interpretivist aim to gain an in-depth understanding of multiple realities (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). Lastly, critical realism researchers tend to start their research with a critical analysis of existing knowledge on a subject, then moving to consider the structural relationships at play (for example, the relationship between the media and the government) (du PlooyCilliers, 2015).

The research paradigm that was used for this research was interpretivist. This study examined the experiences of particular women in leadership positions in terms of their advancements and their exposure to stereotypes. The best-suited paradigm for this study would be through attempting to gain an in-depth understanding of these women's realities.

Interpretivists assert that researchers should describe and study meaningful social actions (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). Interpretivist studies are concerned with understanding human behaviour. In this study, there is an objective to explore female leaders and their experiences. The selected paradigm for this research is interpretivist. By utilising this paradigm this study is allowed to be flexible and more personal to the participants' experiences (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). By using this paradigm, space is created to capture each of the individual's experiences and to make sense of their reality, specifically relating to women in leadership.

The aim of an interpretivist approach is to gain an in-depth understanding through many hours of interaction with the participants (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). The aim of this study is to understand and interpret these experiences of female leaders rather than to predict or generalise. Therefore, in terms of this study, the most suited paradigm is interpretivist (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015).

3.2 Design Approach

Research approaches are the plans and procedures for research that range from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2015). The three research approaches are advanced: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2015). The process of qualitative research involves the emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis building inductively from particular to general themes, and the researcher's interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2015).

The research approach for this study is qualitative research. This study involving the advancement of women of in the workplace into high-level positions is of an exploratory nature (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). Qualitative studies are used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015), therefore it is most suited to this study focussing on women's experiences of their ability to advance in the corporate world. By using a qualitative approach, research can provide insights into the problem and possibly help to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015), as is the intention of this study.

This research will utilise a deductive approach, examining the problem generally at first and then more specifically. This is known as the "top-down" approach to research as it begins with the theory of a topic (in this case, women in leadership), and results in specific data gathered from exploration of the topic (in this case, the individual experiences of women in the corporate world) (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015).

A particular group of people was used in this study to reveal their perceptions around the advancement of women in the workplace. The research approach needs to be one that is of a descriptive nature rather than a predictive nature, hence the study is suited to the qualitative approach (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). By using a qualitative approach, there is an opportunity to observe, record and interpret nonverbal communication of the participants (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015). In order for this research study to be successful in understanding the experiences of females in the workplace, there needs

to be a relationship between the researcher and the participants and this is only possible through a qualitative study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2015).

There are very few current studies exist which make use of focus groups. The researcher of this study gains insight into a women's experience in the corporate world and an understanding as to there are decreasing numbers of women in the business environment. This allows the research to fill a gap that is not yet filled by current studies.

3.3 Population

According to Wiid and Diggins in 2013 (cited in Pascoe 2014: 105), the population is defined as "the total group of people or entities from whom information is required."

The population of this study includes any women who have worked in and have had experiences of a corporate environment. The population parameters refer to the shared characteristics and the size of the group (Pascoe, 2014). The population is too large to have access to as a whole. This study's population parameters: the women must live in Durban and they must have experience in the corporate environment.

However, the women need not still be in the corporate environment.

3.4 Sampling

Non-probability sampling is used when it is almost impossible to determine the entire population or in cases where it is difficult to gain access to the entire population. In this study, non-probability sampling was used. The sample was selected from a list of the accessible population (Pascoe, 2014).

A purposive sampling includes the chosen elements based on the list of characteristics (Pascoe, 2014). All women will have to be from Durban, South Africa and they must have worked in the corporate environment for a number of years. This study will particularly choose to include women who left the corporate environment based on the challenges they have faced. By narrowing the sample in this regard, the research question ('What are the experiences of women in leadership positions in terms of their advancements and their exposure to stereotypes?') is more likely to be answered effectively (Pascoe, 2014).

This sampling technique will be used due to the fact that it is fast, inexpensive, simple and the subjects are readily available. The intended sample size for this study are two

women who were in the corporate world and have subsequently left. The sample that was originally proposed for this project was 4 women, however, due to time constraints and access to the women the final sample size was two women. This is still appropriate for a qualitative study of this nature.

3.5 Data-collection Method

The qualitative data collection method for this research was originally planned to be in-depth interviews with the participants. This was because it would allow the participants to give their views, opinions, and beliefs about female leadership and discrimination in the workplace (Strydom and Bezuidenhout, 2014). However, due to the participant's wishes as well as time constraints, this research made use of a focus group. This method still enabled the women to give their views, opinions, and beliefs about female leadership and discrimination in the workplace (Morgan, 1988).

The questions in the focus group were open-ended. The focus group acted as a group interview that determined attitudes, behaviour, preferences and ultimately the experiences of the women. Focus groups become relevant and useful to this type of study as they explore the various experiences of women in the workplace (Strydom and Bezuidenhout, 2014). The focus group was semi-structured to allow participants to deviate and provide their individual experiences while maintaining a focus on answering the research question of their experiences in the corporate environment (Morgan, 1988).

Several key questions were asked in order help to define the areas to be explored, but the researcher and/or participants were allowed to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail. By conducting a focus group, it provided the study with a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena that would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Morgan, 2009).

The advantage of the focus group data collection method is that it allowed debate and discussion among the participants. This provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the women's different and similar experiences in corporate (Strydom and Bezuidenhout, 2014). Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to collect evidence about the feelings and opinions that were shared and experienced by the women. The greatest advantage provided by the focus group is that the participants were able to

build on and contribute to each other's thoughts and experiences; this led to discussions that would have otherwise not occurred (Strydom and Bezuidenhout, 2014).

One of the challenges in recording focus group data is knowing who is speaking at any particular time since often multiple people speak in overlap (Morgan, 2009). This was overcome by an audio-recording of the focus group and note taking throughout. Note taking is important as it enables capture of non-verbal data (Strydom and Bezuidenhout, 2014).

3.5.1 Focus Group Questions

- 1) What inspired you to enter into the corporate field of your choice?
- 2) What qualifications did you need to have to enter your desired field and what were your job requirements?
- 3) Once you were in the corporate world, how were you working hours? Did you feel you were equally compensated for the hours worked when perhaps compared to other employees?
- 4) Do you feel that the corporate environment is conducive for women?
- 5) Do you think that, as women, you were judged for your ambitions within the workplace?
- 6) What representation of females within the company occupied leadership roles?
- 7) Did you feel that there were personal limitations that prevented you from obtaining your initial goals?
- 8) Research suggests that, given the current environment, women can face different challenges in the workplace — challenges that can make it more difficult to access opportunities, networks, resources etc. In your view, what are some of these systemic challenges and/or what role can male advocates and managers play in addressing these challenges?
- 9) What ultimately prompted you to leave the corporate environment?

3.6 Data-analysis Method

This study used thematic analysis in order to analyse the data that was collected through the focus group. Thematic analysis is a popular method that is used in most qualitative research (Wigdorowitz, 2016). The attractiveness of thematic analysis is that it provides an easily interpretable and concise description of the emergent themes and patterns within a dataset, usually as the foundational phase of interpretation (Wigdorowitz, 2016).

Braun and Clarke's 2006 work (cited in Wigdorowitz 2016) provides a six-step process that allows for the identifying, analysing, and reporting qualitative data using thematic analysis. In order for the researcher to be fully immersed and actively engaged in the data, they begin by transcribing the interactions and then reading (and re-reading) the transcripts and/or listening to the recordings (Wigdorowitz, 2016). Through codes, themes begin to emerge which the researcher then uses to combine, refine, separate, or discard the initial (hypothesised) themes (Wigdorowitz, 2016).

Transcription of the focus group held with the participants will be done by the researcher, providing an opportunity to include non-verbal expressions in the transcribing process (Bezuidenhout and Cronje, 2014). Coding of the collected focus group data requires careful scrutiny in order for meaningful sections and items to be uncovered. The data collected will be grouped according to the research questions asked, specifically the experiences that led the women to leave the corporate world, and this forms part of the coding process that will take place in analysing the research.

Thereafter a development of themes was seen in the data collected, these themes were then grouped together. Thematic coding is the process of data reduction by means of identifying themes (Bezuidenhout and Cronje, 2014). It is possible that these themes could relate to the themes that were discovered during the literature review, namely: discrimination and stereotypes, advancement challenges faced by women, as well as gender characteristics and traits, this is deductive coding (Bezuidenhout and Cronje, 2014).

4 Findings and Interpretation of Findings

4.1 Findings and Interpretation

4.1.1 Thematic Analysis of Focus Group

The thematic analysis process that was applied to the transcripts identified key concepts that were evident in the data. These themes are viewed as essential in determining an understanding of all the participants. These categories have been labelled as:

- i. The 'Harsh' Corporate Environment.
- ii. Family Responsibility.
- iii. Limitations to Career Advancement.
- iv. Salary Discrimination.
- v. Male versus Female Support.

There are aspects of the participants' understandings that overlap across these categories. The thematic analysis process undertaken for this research project demonstrates an effective interpretation of the understanding and attitudes of the participants. The focus of the analysis was to identify and link relevant concepts together, rather than to focus on the isolated concepts

Profiles of participants:¹

Jessica: After three years of her studies towards becoming a Chartered Accountant, Jessica fell in love with marketing. She worked in corporate from 1995-2012. Her experience ranged from the banking industry to marketing for the motor industry. Since leaving the corporate world she is now a business consultant. She is married and is a mother of three. Jessica is an Indian female.

Rena: Rena started her career in banking straight out of school and worked at the same bank (S BANK) for 30 years. Her experiences were largely influenced by the fact that she is an Indian woman and worked at the bank during Apartheid. She has since retired from the corporate world. She is married but chose not to have children. **(i. & ii.) The 'Harsh' Corporate Environment and Family Responsibility**

¹ Names of people and companies have been changed to protect identities of those involved.

Jessica: *There is still so much more we can do to make the corporate environment conducive for women. Before I left corporate I just knew I wanted to do something where I could be with my kids and watch them grow.*

Jessica is a mother of three. For her, the corporate environment and balancing a family life was very difficult. This can be seen when she talks about leaving the corporate world in order to pursue a career that provided her with the flexibility to be able to see her children grow up. A factor that influences the glass ceiling for women advancing in their careers is motherhood. The blame for the glass ceiling is laid at the door of motherhood (Hindle 2009), as women tend to be more distracted from their career path by the need to stay at home and rear children (Hindle, 2009). The nature of the corporate environment is not conducive to women who tend to bear most household responsibilities. They are unable to undertake the tasks required to reach the top; for example, extended trips abroad, long evenings “entertaining” clients and changing plans at short notice (Hindle, 2009). Jessica felt that once she had children she no longer had the time commitment and flexibility that her workplace demanded.

Jessica: *When I was a single woman it was fine, but once I had children it's not conducive. I found it very difficult with my first two kids, once they were born it was literally pop them out and hand them to granny while you head back to work. I remember my son was only 6 weeks old, and I was called to a Strat meeting in Joburg. In-between meetings I would go and breastfeed my child and then return back to the room for the meeting. Becoming a mother became a limitation in my career, I knew what my goals were but I couldn't achieve them at that point.*

Jessica talks to a particular instance when she was called to Johannesburg for a meeting while she was on maternity leave. This was the time for her to bond with her baby but the corporate world that she worked in demanded her attention. She mentions leaving the room to breastfeed and then returning to continue with the meeting. This particular instance clearly shows the difficulties that are faced by women in the corporate environment who choose to have a family. The issue of balancing a woman's household duties and her workplace functions have significantly impacted on a woman's lack of leadership success (Maseko, 2013). The demand for long hours is more challenging for women than men because of their typically greater domestic

responsibilities. The unfriendliness of many corporate cultures and male networks and the frequent denial of desirable assignments to women tend to block the advancement of women and contribute to their relative absence from leadership positions because the structure and norms of organisations implicitly favour men (Bryman *et al.* 2014).

Jessica: *I didn't watch my eldest grow up, he wasn't fazed by me, to be honest, and on the weekends he wouldn't want me. So as a mother I thought is this really worth it?*

Jessica in this example talks to the fact that when she did have time off or availability, her eldest son was not interested in her. This shows how little she was involved due to her demanding career. For many employees, their duties as parents or caregivers of children, dependents, the elderly or sick family members sometimes conflict with the rigid requirements of their workplace (Cole and Curtis, 2004). Work and family conflicts are a serious issue for women in business; faculty members, particularly female faculty members, find themselves performing a balancing act in order to fulfil the expectations attached to both family and academic roles. A survey of faculty members at Ohio State University published in 2003 found that female faculty members were more likely to have dependent-care responsibilities and to express dissatisfaction with their ability to integrate work/life issues than their male faculty counterparts (Cole and Curtis, 2004).

Even women who choose not to have children find the corporate environment very “unforgiving.”

Rena: *In corporate, you are forced to mix with who the business chooses and sometimes these people may bring you down, not build you up. The corporate environment is very harsh, it's not forgiving. I'm not a person who can be controlled, so I found it very difficult in the corporate world where they always controlled what you did. To get into corporate you have to be compliant, you can't bring in your own flavour or even sometimes your own thoughts. If you wanted to speak out then there was no time and place for that.*

Rena felt that her biggest limitation in a corporate environment was her personality and her need to speak out and express herself. She found the environment very difficult to operate in as she was constantly forced to be compliant and felt there was

no room for her own thoughts or ideas. Gardiner and Tiggemann focus on the mental health of employees in different gender dominated industries, whether it be female-dominated or male-dominated. Women in male-dominated industries, such as Rena's case, reported worse mental health when they utilised an interpersonally oriented leadership style, meaning that they worked collaboratively with their colleagues (Gardiner and Tiggemann, 1999). Their findings suggested that both gender and the gender ratio of the industry influence leadership style, stress and mental health, and as such contribute to our understanding of the barriers to women working in senior management roles in male-dominated industries (Gardiner and Tiggemann, 1999).

(iii). Limitations to Career Advancement

The question posed to the participants by the researcher was whether or not they felt that as women they were judged for the types of ambitions they had in the workplace, for example, striving for top positions.

Jessica: *All the time [laughs]. All the time you are judged for it. Also, you look at, in the bank, there are different levels, correct me if I'm wrong, but remember your level 13, they were very much male-dominated. There were also just some opportunities that you were ring-fenced for males in my experiences when I went into corporate post-Apartheid.*

Jessica's statement in this regard speaks to the "glass ceiling theory" and shows that at top level management there is very little transformation and an overall lack of women in leadership positions. Hindle (2009) looked at the persistent failure of women to climb as far up the corporate ladder as a reason that might be given for their representation in the working population as a whole. The idea behind the expression was that a transparent barrier, a glass ceiling, blocked them.

Rena: *Totally.*

Rena agreed with Jessica with regards to top level management being male-dominated and further reinforced the existence of the glass ceiling theory. McKay (2016) referred to career development as the upward path of an individual's career and an individual's growth within an organisation. For women in business, this advancement tends to be halted at the higher leadership positions. In accordance with research, according to

Jessica and Rena, the existence of the glass ceiling is a reality in corporate. Previous research by Bryman *et al.* (2014) identifies time as a factor that limits females in advancing their careers. The demand for long hours is more challenging for women than men because of their typically greater domestic responsibilities. While this research may be relevant, a person like Rena chose not to have children thus leaving her with an opportunity to focus on her career. However, Rena still felt that there were opportunities in corporate that she, as a female, would have simply not been considered for.

Jessica: *Then you remember they appointed Nicki, to sort of transform that level. Just to tick the box sort of.*

Rena: *Cosmetic changes.*

Jessica: *Exactly, even level 12 was dominated by male. Sometimes you would see the position come up and you would know that you are suitable.*

Rena: *And capable.*

Jessica: *You are qualified and you would have the experience but you would think why I should apply when you know that will go to a male anyway.*

Through the focus group between Rena and Jessica, it can be seen that they were limited in areas that they could advance within banking due to the fact that they are women in the corporate world. They both speak to the fact that certain positions were simply not given to women, and that these positions tended to be higher up in the corporate hierarchy. This was real for both women as they say that when certain positions opened up they would not even apply as they anticipated rejection based on their gender. Jessica and Rena went on to further discuss that when a woman was employed in a higher leadership position, it was simply a “cosmetic change” in order to “tick the box.”

Researcher: *And does that still exist right now?*

Jessica: *Oh yes I still think so. But not on the scale that we had previously. I think it's much better and I think that is because it's been forced through legislation like the BEE codes. That has forced them to change, and even though that is still cosmetic change it's now done. When the codes came out*

they then start to appoint Indian females to make up the black number and Indians males. But now with the new codes, it has to be African male and African female so again we will see the transformation. It would have stayed the same, happily, if the legislation hadn't come in. They needed that push.

When the researcher probed as to if they felt that this was still occurring in the corporate world today, Jenifer stated that while there has been an improvement overall, the progress remains cosmetic. It seems through these statements that the corporate world is set in its way and in order for change to come about it needs to be enforced through legislation, such as the BEE codes. In 2001, McPherson *et al.* (cited in Bryman *et al.* 2014) found that women advance more slowly where men hold a clear majority and where advancement depends on male networks. An overall lack of advancement of women in business is further entrenched by males holding a clear majority, as women find difficulty in advancing in male-dominated networks. South African Express CEO at the time, Inati Ntshanga, stated that through BEE codes they were working hard to ensure transformation within the aviation industry (TransformSA, 2016). The aim of the airline is to develop a diverse and empowered workforce, with a special emphasis on women (TransformSA, 2016). This is an example where transformation through BEE codes can be seen, supporting what Jessica said with regards to BEE.

Researcher: *Do you think you had any personal limitations that prevented you from achieving your initial goals in the corporate world?*

Jessica: *... for me, it was becoming a mother. I didn't watch my eldest grow up, he was not fazed by me to be totally honest. He was raised by my husband and his gran. I never experienced any of his firsts, when he got his first tooth when he took his first steps, nothing.*

Jessica felt that before she had children she was committed to her work and had the flexibility that enabled her to excel in her career. Once she had children her priorities changed and she could no longer meet the demands of the corporate world without it taking a toll on her family life. The problem arises when young adults try to balance work and family, and women end up carrying nearly all of the caregiving

responsibilities (Iyer, 2017). If women put much more hours into these household activities than men, this greatly disadvantages women in the workplace (Iyer, 2017).

It is unrealistic to expect gender equality if workplaces demand that women be available all the time.

(iv). Salary Discrimination

Researcher: *Once you were in the corporate world, how your working hours were and did you feel you were equally compensated for the hours worked when compared to other employees in the workplace?*

The question posed by the researcher elicited a range of responses and some key points were brought to light.

Rena: *I started at 420 rands a month 35 years ago at the bank and so that was what the salary was and I know my colleagues earned a lot more than me but we were subservient in that we just sat back and accepted it and didn't speak up because of the environment that we worked in.*

As previously mentioned Rena started her career in banking during Apartheid, therefore her initial response with regards to her salary could have had more to do with her being Indian rather than a woman.

Rena: *... and it's somewhat changed I would say 25 years into working for the bank. Nothing changed before that.*

According to Rena this did change, however, the word “somewhat” signifies that this change was not drastic. It is fair to then assume that males, particularly white males, continued to earn more than her.

Jessica: *I didn't have anything to compare because salaries are not a transparent thing anyway. So at the end of the day if you are happy with that and you got an offer so you accepted it how you compare to everybody else you have no idea.*

Initially, when asked about salaries Jessica responded that salaries were not transparent and ultimately it was up to the individual to decide whether they were happy with their salary. Often individuals remain passive when faced with the unknown

and remuneration is one such unknown. A certainty is that there is, in fact, a gender pay gap. The size of the gap depends on, among other factors, the country, industry, job role and level (Bosch, 2015). The South African gender pay gap is estimated, on average, ranges from 15% to 17% (Bosch, 2015). Jessica went on to reflect on a time when she was offered much less than she felt she deserved.

Jessica: *Women are not seen as the breadwinners. It's the man who is the breadwinner. I remember when I started at D Tyres, the HR Manager he actually said to me that this was our offer, it was R5000, I came from S Bank in 1997 and A Bank and working as a contract worker I made a lot of money so he says the offer is R5000 and I said, "How can you justify that?" He replied saying well just looking you live with your parents and you don't need more as you have someone supporting you.*

Although initially, Jessica said that salaries were not transparent, she then gives an example of an unfair salary offered to her due to the fact that she was a woman. It can be seen in this example that in business women are not perceived to be the breadwinners and therefore they do not get paid as much as men. Jessica was offered a salary based on her circumstances rather than her abilities and experiences. The reasons for the gender pay gap are multiple. Some would argue that it would be impossible to eradicate gender pay differences completely. Issues such as the perceived number of hours that women work and the value that is placed on their labour, like nurturing and being supportive, is not regarded as having a high economic value (Bosch, 2015). Women are often seen to be less loyal to the company and more likely to exit the workplace in their childbearing years (Bosch, 2015). Employers may, therefore, perceive the long-term value that a woman would add to an organisation as lower than that of a man who does not have care obligations outside the workplace.

Rena: *... see my husband was already climbing the corporate ladder at T, all of them in the corporate world at the bank always assumed that because he was going up I needed to stay down... He (my manager) called me in after the interview and says, "You know what you are so suited for this position," at this point I was already doing the job, "but you don't NEED it because your husband can support you so it's okay that you stay where you are and continue to earn the salary that you are earning."*

Rena further enforced the experiences for women in her reflection of when she was turned down for a promotion. Rena was told at the time that although she was suited for the position, a job that she was in fact already performing, they did not feel that she needed the job as she was sufficiently supported by her husband. This shows discrimination towards Rena. The debate that surrounds the issues of whether or not women are still being discriminated against in the 21st century has led to a number of studies and research papers being written with a view to gain an understanding of the extent of discrimination against women. Bryman *et al.*'s (2014) research becomes relevant here, as it conducted a large number of surveys comparing wages and promotions of males and females in the workplace. These studies usually adjust a woman's salary in terms of their hour's work, their family responsibility and the company's structure and these factors account for women's lesser advancement and lower wages (Bryman *et al.* 2014). However, this variable only accounts for a portion of the gender gap between men and women, and most social scientists conclude that discrimination accounts for at least a portion of the remaining unexplained gender gaps (Bryman *et al.* 2014). Bryman *et al.* further explains that discrimination against female leaders derives from commonly held stereotypes about men and women and prejudice in the evaluation of female leaders (2014: 108). Eagly and Karau (2002), as well as Heilman (cited in Bryman *et al.* 2014), believed that female leaders were subjected to prejudices due to the fact that stereotypes about women are incompatible with stereotypes about leaders.

v. Male vs. Female Support in Corporate

Researcher: What are some of the ways you have benefited from working with male advocates who have helped you to advance your career? Were there any males you helped you along and took you under their wing?

Jessica: *All the time. You have those gems, absolute gems. I will never forget at D Tyres... my boss... was just tough and he liked discipline but he brought out a different side and different talents in me. I started writing all the articles for our PR, the PR agency just didn't understand the business...I would be the MC for conferences...he pushed me out of my comfort zone and that was amazing.*

Jessica had a few males throughout her career that guided her in excelling. She reflected on the fact that even when she didn't think she was suitable for a task, they would see that she was capable. This shows that males in the corporate environment have a real opportunity to help women in business and have the opportunity to transform companies into diverse teams. Workplace gender inequality is a problem that primarily affects women, but it is not solely a woman's responsibility to solve. In a system that privileges men, male workers have an obligation to help women get ahead. The way that Jessica's boss at the time pushed her out of her comfort zone enabled her to continue to excel in her career and eventually have the confidence to have her own business as a business consultant. This collaborative advocacy for gender equality in the workplace is not only beneficial to women, it also allows males to bring their full selves to work, while also making good business sense through inclusion, as studies have found that a diverse workforce fosters innovation and a productive work environment (Dupere, 2015).

Jessica: ... *there were lots of males guiding and pushing you along the way. Sometimes it also brings out the worst in you but it develops your character.*

Jessica acknowledged that not all male influencers were positive, but through all interaction, she was able to grow and develop herself.

Rena: *With me, it was a little bit different, a lot into my career nothing of the sort of males helping and pushing you. No encouraging. Only about 10 years into the career I had one guy that was very encouraging [name inaudible] so he did encourage me and because of that I was the first ever Indian female that was appointed as a credit controller, first ever.... But honestly speaking he was the only one, everyone else was threatened by my capabilities because in every department that I moved to me was always achieving more than expected so I was a threat to everybody.*

As previously mentioned, Rena worked in banking during Apartheid and therefore she was treated differently on two bases: she was a female and she was an Indian. Based on those factors she was given very little leadership and guidance in her first decade of working. However, eventually, her potential was seen through a male in her workplace and Rena as able to become the first female credit controller in the entire

bank. She needed someone to open a door for her. Her drive and commitment in the workplace made her a force to be reckoned with, and she largely felt as she progressed she was given very little guidance as people saw her as a threat.

Jessica: *That is such an interesting question because on reflection every time I changed and grew in the corporate world it was because of a male and not women... But it was always a man and never a woman who helped me grow.*

This was a very interesting point that Jessica brought up and it was not something that has been seen or mentioned in any previous research. Jessica felt that women were less likely to help other women in business to grow, perhaps due to the fact that they had to work extremely hard to get to those high levels of management. Alternatively, senior women are committed to the advancement of other women, but they don't necessarily know what needs to be done. Leaders are perceived as strong, assertive, and confident but women can face backlash and can be seen as aggressive for not complying with feminine stereotypes. Bryman *et al.* (2014) found that women showed more extraversion, but when the study assessed the various components of extraversion, findings were mixed: Women surpassed men in warmth, positive emotions, gregariousness, and activity, but men surpassed women in assertiveness and excitement seeking. Overall then, neither gender experiences leadership advantage due to personality traits. The majority of companies have minority female groups, and as such, women may be more likely to see other women as competition rather than allies in achieving their individual goals.

4.2 Quality and Rigour

This study is of a qualitative nature and its aim is to gain an understanding of women's experiences in business. The aim of this study is not to generalise to a broader population. Therefore, the research needs to be trustworthy, rather than valid and reliable (Koonin, 2014). Trustworthiness is divided into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interprets the data that was provided by the participants. In order to ensure that the findings are credible, the data from participants in the focus group will be accurately interpreted. Others who examine the research will likely come to a similar conclusion to that of the original researcher

and this makes the research confirmable (Koonin, 2014). Findings in this study were credible because they are believable from the participants' perspective.

Transferability is the ability of findings to be applied to a similar situation and deliver similar results. Transferability in qualitative research is synonymous with generalisability, or external validity, in quantitative research. Transferability is established in this study as the research study's findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Koonin, 2014).

Dependability is important to trustworthiness because it establishes the research study's findings as consistent and repeatable. Through the guidance of a supervisor, an inquiry audit ensures dependability (Koonin, 2014). The outsider to the data has examined the processes of data collection and data analysis and the results of the research study. This was done to confirm the accuracy of the findings and to ensure the findings are supported by the data collected. All interpretations and conclusions were examined to determine that they are supported by the data (Koonin, 2014).

Confirmability refers to how well the collected data supports the findings and interpretation of the researcher. Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. Other researchers who conduct similar research are likely to come to similar conclusions, thus confirming this research.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Research Question, Research Problem and Research Goal

reflection

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women in corporate environments and how those experiences may impact the advancement of women within an organisational context. Through the focus group of Jessica and Rena this was able to be achieved. Both women had extensive experiences of the business world for women and through thematic analysis these experiences were used to effectively address the research question. The result of the focus group was a descriptive picture of the experiences of these women.

What are the experiences of women in leadership roles in relation to the influence of stereotypes and gender discrimination on their advancement within the corporate environment?

- How do females in corporate environments feel about the nature of the corporate environment?
- To what extent are females in the corporate environment supported in order to advance their careers?
- Do women working in the corporate environment feel that they are treated equally and equally compensated when compared to male employees?

Females are held back by stereotypes and they are still being subjected to gender discrimination, to an extent. This can be seen in the theme that was identified 'Limitations to Career Advancement'. The corporate environment as it currently stands is not conducive to women and even more so not to new mothers. There is still a lot more that needs to be done to address this problem, these are addressed in recommendations. The women from the focus group successfully identified how they were guided and supported in advancing their careers and how they felt about their overall treatment during their time spent in a corporate environment. The focus group

and thematic analysis of the data was able to answer the research questions successfully and the experiences of the women in the focus group were explored.

5.2 Recommendations

Diversity Training

There is an underrepresentation of women as leaders in the corporate world, an issue that has been attributed to gender stereotypes and discrimination as well as a women's domestic responsibilities (Bryman *et al.* 2014). As the business environment becomes more Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA), there is a greater need for the development of female leaders in an organisation. The extent to which organisational structure and culture make it difficult for women to rise into higher-level leadership positions needs be analysed (Bryman *et al.* 2014). However, as an organisation diversifies and included both males and females in decision making to tackle this VUCA environment they will be more successful (Bryman *et al.* 2014). Companies need to be educated on the benefits of having a diverse workforce. Taking a proactive approach to diversity and cultural competence has a range of advantages for a global business (O'Niell, 2016). Some of these include enhanced customer focus and customer satisfaction, a wider pool of talent to draw from, a broadening of the skill base, enhanced creativity, increased understanding of the marketplace, increased productivity and enhanced reputation (O'Niell, 2016). Business, in the current state, consists of a majority white male cohort who may be fearful of women upsetting their company dynamics and culture, thus education on the benefits of diversity will encourage them to transform their organisations over time.

Provisions for Mothers through Child Care Centres, Long Maternity Leave and Flexible Working Conditions

As this research has shown, mothers tend to find a corporate environment most challenging when starting a family. Therefore, there needs to be an investment in improving the business environment and support for new mothers. Some accommodations are simple while others are more complex (Norris, 2015). The key is handling each situation individually and creatively, maintaining open dialogue with the employee on how best to support her and help her do her best work — all the while

keeping her health, well-being and ideal physical environment top of mind. Managers can support affected employees' quality of life by educating themselves and providing common-sense accommodations (Norris, 2015). Companies such as Google and Facebook have implemented benefits that are primed to help out parents. These include child-care centres, 18 weeks of paid leave for moms, and \$4,000 in "baby cash" is given to employees with new babies (Barney, 2015). Facebook recently began paying for egg freezing under a \$20,000 benefit to cover fertility treatments. This shows that big companies are seeing the importance of a diverse workforce, indicating the value placed in their female employees (Barney, 2015). New mothers could be given provisions to allow them to have flexible working hours in their first months back at work. This could include flexible start and finish times as well as opportunities to work from home following their maternity leave.

Female Support Structure and Networks

In 2001, McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook (cited in Bryman *et al.* 2014) found that women advance more slowly where men hold a clear majority and where advancement depends on male networks. There needs to be an introduction of more support structures for women in business as well as more opportunities for women to network with one another. The Businesswomen's Association of South Africa (BWASA) is a successful example of this. The BWASA is the largest and most prominent association of business and professional women in the country. It plays a key role in highlighting the current status of women in leadership and acts as a lobby group that advocates on women's business issues in an effort to transform the economy. The Department of Trade and Industry in South Africa has set up a Gender and Women Empowerment (GWE) support structure. The mandate of the unit is to provide targeted support to women enterprises through programmes and policies that ensure and accelerate the sustainable participation of women in the mainstream economy. These types of initiatives such as the BWASA and GWE will help address issues that women are facing in business while also providing networking opportunities to women.

5.3 Heuristic Value

Recommendations for further study generally propose follow-up studies or replication studies, this is the heuristic value of the study.

An important aspect that came through in the thematic analysis of the focus group is that women tend not to support other women in business. This was not something that had been validated by the literature study. Therefore, this could be adequately address in a further study that uses this as the research question.

This study focused specifically on women's experiences in a corporate environment. In order to gain a further insight into the underrepresentation of women in business, a further study could use men in leadership positions as the sample in order to understand their perception of women as men. This could be done through a qualitative study.

Further researchers could look at increasing their sample size and including individuals from all race groups. This would provide a more all-inclusive view of the experiences of women in a corporate environment. This research was limited by the fact that the sample only included Indian women.

Both women from the focus group happen to come from the banking sector, a service industry. Therefore, an avenue for further research would be to conduct a similar study using women from a different sector to draw comparisons

5.4 Ethical Implications

It is important that as the research was conducted it caused no harm to any individual participating in the study, which is why ensuring confidentiality was a key factor in this study. Furthermore, there was be no harm caused to the reputations of any corporations that may be mentioned by participants when talking about their experiences in the corporate world (Louw, 2014). This was ensured by name changes of all people and companies mentioned or discussed. The transcript of the focus group was only seen by the supervisor and the researcher of this study.

All participants that agreed to form part of the study will be provided with a form stating their informed consent to the study of the experiences of women in business. The participants were given the option to remain anonymous, and the researcher ensured that all information provided by the participants will be reflected in a true and fair manner. This was ensured by giving the participants the opportunity to read over the findings and interpretations of this study (Louw, 2014).

All participants of the study have voluntarily consented to their participation and at no point were the participants coerced into participating.

All participants of the study had the following rights:

- The right to participate in this study about the experiences of women.
- The right to know the purpose of the study: Before the focus group, participants were given a brief overview of the study to ensure they were willing to participate in a study of this nature.
- The right to know and understand the findings. After the findings and interpretations were finalised, participants were given the opportunity to review the findings.
- The right to withdraw from the study at any point in time. (Louw, 2014)

The identities of participants were protected in the study. As a final consideration in the study, an assurance that no harm will be caused to others who are not involved in the study or those who are indirectly involved in the study, was made (Louw, 2014).

Finally, there are no violations of any community standard in this study.

A consent form has been attached in order to sufficiently inform participants on their rights should they choose to partake in the study.

Importantly:

- All women participate in this study voluntarily.
- There will be a safe storage of all information collected from the study.
- All female participants could withdraw from the study at any point should they no longer be comfortable participating.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Limitations are described as constraints or limits in a research project that are out of the researcher's control (Enslin, 2014). A large limitation to this study was time constraints. A qualitative study of this nature requires hours and hours of data analysis, this left a shorter amount of time to interview a larger number of participants. Another limitation was finding more than two people to participate in the focus group; this was due to the commitments that the participants had and their own personal time constraints. However, in this qualitative study, the sample size of two participants in the focus group was sufficient. The constraint that stemmed from this is that both participants are Indian females and therefore the data is not diversified over different race groups. Furthermore, both participants were from a banking background and these findings are then based on the service industry only, rather than a variety of industries in business. It is possible that findings from other industries could differ from this study.

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Annexure A

EXPLANATORY INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

To whom it may concern,

My name is Kayleigh Baxter and I am a student at Varsity College, Durban North. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Kogie Moodley about the experiences of women in business and the factors that may influence them to leave the corporate world. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the underrepresentation of women in leadership.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because of your experiences in the corporate environment. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct a one on one in-depth interview with you.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experiences in a corporate environment as a female. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is purely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews,

but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Varsity College, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Honours in Business Management. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Kayleigh Baxter
0837836149
Baxterkayleigh1@gmail.com

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Kogie Moodley
Kogie.moodley@telkomsa.net

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Kayleigh Baxter about the experiences of women in business in relation to advancement, discrimination and stereotypes.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

1. I agree to be interviewed for this research.
2. My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.

3. My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
4. I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
5. I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

Consent form for audio-recording/ video recording

I, _____, agree to allow Kayleigh Baxter to audio record my interviews as part of the research about the experiences of women in business in relation to advancement, discrimination and stereotypes.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

1. My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
2. The recordings will be stored in a password protected file on the researcher's computer.
3. Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.

Signature

Date

Annexure B

Data collection method

Interview Questions

- 1) What inspired you to enter into the corporate field of your choice?
- 2) What qualifications did you need to have to enter your desired field and what were your job requirements?
- 3) Once you were in the corporate world, how were you working hours? Did you feel you were equally compensated for the hours worked, when perhaps compared to other employees?
- 4) Do you feel that the corporate environment is conducive for women?
- 5) Do you think that, as a women, you were judged for your ambitions within the workplace?
- 6) What representation of females within the company occupied leadership roles?
- 7) Did you feel that there were personal limitations that prevented you from obtaining your initial goals?
- 8) What are some of the ways you have benefited from or worked with male advocates in advancing your career?
- 9) Research suggests that, given the current environment, women can face different challenges in the workplace — challenges that can make it more difficult to access opportunities, networks, resources etc. In your view, what are some of these systemic challenges and/or what role can male advocates and managers play in addressing these challenges?
- 10) What ultimately prompted you to leave the corporate environment?

Annexure C



RESM8419_2017_HBC1_VCDN1 - RESM8419_VCDN1

Assignment 5 - POE

Kayleigh Baxter on Tue, Oct 17 2017, 11:33 AM

14% highest match

Submission ID: ac501a6d-3252-456a-8a44-3d85f0468315

□ **Kayleigh Baxter_Hons Thesis_edited v1 new.docx**

Word Count: 14,408

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Kayleigh Baxter Kogie Moodley Research methodology:

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28 June 2017

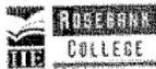
Student name: Kayleigh Baxter

Student number: 14004843

Campus: Varsity College Durban North

Re: Approval of Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Management Proposal and Ethics Clearance

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.



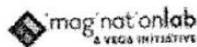
Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and we hereby provide you with ethical clearance to proceed with your data collection.



There may be some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. If this is the case, feedback will be provided to you in writing. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor.



In the event of you deciding to change your research topic or methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure that all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued in such instances.

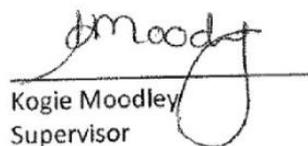


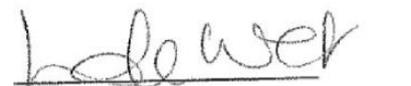
We wish you all the best with your research!



Yours sincerely,




Kogie Moodley
Supervisor


Leigh de Wet
Campus Postgraduate Coordinator

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