

Empowered Powerlessness in Production Environments

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The research encompasses the study of the lived experiences of empowered, senior women managers (executive, board and senior management levels) within environments producing materials or finished goods in South Africa. Production environments, with respect to this research, have included mining, food and beverages, pharmaceutical, Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and healthcare, which are all experiencing increased global competition. It assesses the working relationships of these managers with their male colleagues, often characterized as prejudiced and biased environments, and the feelings of powerlessness that have arisen for the women as a result of these relationships. Despite the transformation of women in the modern workplace, women still feel alienated, locked-out, not taken seriously, and do not have sufficient support structures to turn to, as they continue to represent a minority in technical working environments—environments where progress is slow and not evenly spread.

Introduction

Women in Senior Management Positions

During the last century, the makeup of women and leadership in the world has significantly transformed. Despite the increase in representation of women in the business environment, women leadership opportunities are still unequal compared to

those of men. Barrett (2009) claims that the world has changed as a result of women's struggle for equality, but with this change complexities in inter-gender relations have arisen. Another contributing factor to the increase of women in leadership positions is the recognition that women provide an array of skills different to their male colleagues,

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which can help organizations adapt to the rapidly changing work environment (Boud and Garrick, 2012; OECD as cited in Trzcinski and Holst, 2010).

In South Africa, the changing environment is accompanied by a number of pressing issues in the societal and economic spheres (Vassilopoulou *et al.*, 2013, p. 17):

- Historical privilege (from colonialization and Apartheid) and post-democracy privilege.
- Gender-related issues, including the gendered nature of work (particularly in the private sector).
- Complex ethnic issues such as the emerging post-Apartheid identity, including whiteness.
- Exclusion and economic gate-keeping.
- Alliances and political gate-keeping.
- The rupturing and reorganizing of struggle unions, as they define their new roles in forwarding the agendas of the working class and poor.
- Diversity issues relating to the changing demographics of the country (including immigrants, the role of religious institutions and religious choice, and fluid sexuality on a personal level).
- The worrying effects of economic and social exclusion (such as violent crime and psycho-social unworthiness).
- The challenges relating to the significant poverty gap (two-tiered society, with a marginalized economic poor versus world-class economic minority).

- Current educational and skills gap, and urgent need for rapidly ramping up development, and how this is being hampered by historically skewed financial and racial structures and practices.
- The tensions relating to embracing multiculturalism (dominant mode in democratic South Africa) versus shifting to a more integrated society in which the nation supersedes culture.

In South Africa, out of a population of 56,5 million at the end of 2017, there are more women (51.1%) than men (48.9%) (Stats SA, 2017a), but they remain relatively unrepresented in positions of authority and power, despite South Africa's Constitution and The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill which calls for 50% representativity in decision-making positions. For every 100 employed individuals in the entire workforce, 44 are women, according to labor data released for the second quarter of 2017 (Stats SA, 2017b). Women fill 44% of skilled posts, which includes managers, professionals and technicians, but in the most senior position, the figure has not shifted much since 2004 (as shown in Table 1 from Grant Thornton, 2016).

Table 1 shows that women held only 23% of senior positions in South Africa in 2016, down from 27% in the previous year. More worrying, the Grant Thornton 2016 survey reveals that 39% of local businesses do not have any women at all in leadership positions

Table 1: Percentage of Women in Senior Management Roles

	2004	2007	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
SA	26	29	28	27	28	28	26	27	23
Global	19	24	24	20	21	24	24	22	24

in South Africa. As a result, from January 2017, all listed entities needed to have a formalized policy on the promotion of gender diversity at board level, and had to disclose how they are performing against this policy. The 2018 national target for black women board members is 25%, as is the target for representation of black women in executive director positions (and not just in non-executive roles, which has been the previous preference in private company boards around South Africa).

Oakley (2000, p. 329) indicated that sex ratios and gender imbalance exhibit a great influence on group behavior within organizations. The more skewed the ratio, the greater the difference in the behaviors of the group in terms of 'dominants' and 'tokens' (women are often regarded as tokens and therefore are subjected to greater levels of on-the-job scrutiny). She adds that "the old boy network is slow to change" (p. 321), which further contributes to marginalization of senior women leaders from this network. Additionally, Trzcinski and Holst (2010, p. 9) argue that, despite women occupying leadership positions, there is an underlying societal assumption that household responsibilities and commitments "remain the domain of women", and it is this assumption that results in discrimination (Cross and Linehan, 2006).

Power and Production Dynamics – Men Versus Women

The power relation between males and females within the business environment is complex and has presented in many different ways. Vázquez-Carassco *et al.* (2011), during their multi case study, indicated that generally women presented with less competence in

reengineering, computer, financial and operational skills than men, and that women are generally less confident and less aggressive, yet more cautious, than men. Multiple disadvantages include the failure to plan their career, build effective networks, be assertive and be confident (Riger and Galligan, 1980 as cited in Hall-Taylor, 1997). Oakley (2000) also shared that women felt that they lacked the same levels of performance reviews in comparison to their male colleagues, which served as an obstacle to further promotions within their working environments. Even though women are still fulfilling the nurturing role at home while balancing this with their professional lives (Okpara, 2006; and Chovwen, 2007). Trzcinski and Holst (2010, p. 3) argue that if males would occupy such positions in home production, they would be stereotyped and subjected to isolation and social disapproval. Oakley (2000) shared that generally in working environments men felt uncomfortable with women as senior managers, because they associate the powerlessness that they feel in the presence of women managers to fearfulness or powerlessness with mothers. This syndrome has been described as "flight from the mother" (p. 328). This has been further confirmed by various women in executive positions where they have shared their experience of male colleagues feeling uncomfortable or intimidated by their presence. They also indicate that males are more affected by unemployment in comparison to women, and feel less well when exposed for a period of time to "non-market" type work (p. 19). Women also still face alienation, resulting from the glass-ceiling effect, the transparent, yet unbreachable, barrier which prevents women

from rising to the upper rungs of the organizational ladder, regardless of their qualifications and experience (Waldstrøm and Madsen, 2007), as well as feelings of differentiated treatment due to persistent pay discrepancies (Williams *et al.*, 2006). In South Africa, Stats SA (2015) estimates women, on average, to earn 23% less than men. It is also important to note that despite the experiences reported, the motivation to change these perceptions of gender inequality depends on a number of factors that include, amongst others, “women’s subjectivities, personal histories and perceived concepts” (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003, p. 425).

Technological advances have catapulted the need for higher skills, including more intellectual type skills. Similarly, Sarros and Santora (2011), as cited in McCann (2008), confirmed that there are increased demands on the manufacturing sector. Despite the need for new leadership skills and the ever-increasing demands in production environments, sexual discrimination against women still exist. Gutek (2001, as cited in Dainty *et al.*, 2006, and Krishnan and Park, 2005) indicate that industrial/manufacturing environments have minimal representation of females. The study that Dainty *et al.* (2006) conducted focused on women discrimination in construction industries confirmed that despite having more female construction graduates, women were “seriously underrepresented” (p. 109) in construction environments in the UK and Australia, with the existence of covert discrimination. Their study also revealed that women felt marginalized by male managers and their inability to penetrate male networks often caused disillusionment. Dedeeolu (2010) also

supported this claim whilst studying women in garment industries in Turkey. He concluded that workplace relations constituted gender ideologies, which often presented as inequalities between males and females. In relation to this, Chowwen (2007) concluded that these types of male-dominated environments were complex and posed barriers to acceptance and satisfaction for women leaders. Vázquez-Carrasco *et al.* (2011) argue that there is no clear female management style and, hence, there is a temptation to adopt a male managerial style in order to succeed at a senior level, because that is the traditional leadership markers of success. They indicate that these masculine styles encompass, amongst others, a sense of authoritarianism, sophisticated and crass bullying, as well as individual careerism. In contrast, Leonard and Goff (2003) and Eagly *et al.* (1995), as cited in Vázquez-Carrasco *et al.* (2011), indicated that women are equally as effective as men in leadership roles but, in one of their case studies with a motor industry, displaying less abrasive authority may constitute a disadvantage. In relation to this, Kellerman and Rhode (2007) argue that, in managerial contexts, most individuals that make decisions see women as more suited for human resource type responsibilities rather than line responsibilities for profit and losses.

Experiencing Empowered Powerlessness

According to Vassilopoulou *et al.* (2013, p. 17), in deciding to research a particular power dynamic within the emerging South African working landscape (due to the economic empowerment of previously marginalized groups under Apartheid), Namhla Mniki-

Mangaliso and Kurt April at the University of Cape Town coined the term: “empowered powerlessness” to denote how emerging [younger and mainly first-generation] African black executives who are part of the population majority, in general, and female black executives, in particular, were being placed in top, senior executive positions in private- and non-profit organizations but without the necessary authority, as opposed to the real power still residing with their mainly (minority population) white boards of directors/trustees.

The demand for skilled capacity in South Africa has brought to light interesting racial/ethnic, cultural and gender dynamics, which are most noticeable in:

- Skilled foreigners/immigrants (empowered) working in the country in senior jobs (empowered) but finding that they are not fully accepted (powerlessness) and do not enjoy the ‘closeness of friendship history’ (powerlessness) to be close to the real decisions (powerlessness).
- Identity blurring (powerlessness) for, and non-acceptance (powerlessness) of, South Africans who were educated (empowered) and trained (empowered) in the West and returning to the country.
- Senior (empowered), but younger, black executives working in the presence of more junior, but older, black staff (cultural powerlessness).
- Senior (empowered) women, who have the education (empowered) and experience (empowered) to run manufacturing and production facilities, corporate entities, government departments, and impactful not-for-profits, still being viewed as ‘less

than’ (powerlessness) by both male senior colleagues and/or more junior male staff.

- The lack of self-esteem (powerlessness) and ‘presence credibility’ (powerlessness) associated with senior executives (empowered), white and black, who started and run very successful companies (empowered) but never reached high levels of tertiary education (powerlessness).
- Individuals with rural education and backgrounds (powerlessness) working in urban areas/cities, and not being accepted fully (powerlessness) because of their backgrounds, accents, inability with the English language and lack of ‘city smarts’.
- Senior (empowered) women who experience entrenched patriarchal assumptions and expectations both at the workplace (powerlessness) and at home domestically (powerlessness).
- White folk (historically empowered) in senior public sector roles (empowered) who are encumbered to the whims/wishes/visions of the dominant political elite (powerlessness), who are almost exclusively black, and do not always have their best interests at heart (powerlessness).

It is important to document the experience of Empowered Powerlessness (EP) from the perspective of women, primarily because the story has not been adequately told in South Africa. Social studies informs us that giving utterance to under-represented voices brings visibility, legitimacy, and validity to the groups’ experience. For instance, Aspers (2009) and Scott and Howell (2008) all stress the importance of doing research from an emic point of view, giving primacy to the experience

of the research participant. Failure to give voice to an experience is to perpetrate the myth that such an experience does not exist. Given the large numbers of emerging female professionals and executives in South Africa, it is an omission that their experiences in South Africa's corporate environment are neither fully documented nor told. Such a silencing further perpetrates the power imbalances which exist between established corporate executives (most of whom are still white and male), and the emerging women executives.

Most of the feelings of powerlessness experienced by women stem from an array of different experiences (Okpara, 2006). These experiences include, in addition to underrepresentation, and less remuneration (Dann, 1995; and Trzcinski and Holst, 2010), an array of subtle forms of discrimination (Hemenway, 1995). Hemenway (1995) further goes on to reveal that when a company has more of a particular gender, the company culture takes on that of the dominant gender. This is referred to "boundary heightening behavior by dominants" (Oakley, 2000, p. 329). Wolfram *et al.* (2007, pp. 19-20) further support this, and indicate that female managers are "judged more negatively" and are deemed to be "less qualified" than male managers, resulting in a gender stereotyping of the minority gender. The perception of discrimination against women with respect to performance management, in relation to male colleagues, was found to be untrue; however, in a study by Millmore *et al.* (2007) the process was deemed fair where female managers were seen to be better performers than males. Male behavioral cultures contribute to women feeling isolated and unwelcome, and can manifest

in various ways (Kellerman and Rhode, 2007). These ways include bullying mannerisms, sexual jokes, negative biases, and devaluing remarks. In male-dominated environments, inputs and voices by women are often "stifled" (Oakley, 2000, p. 322), and Weyer (2007, p. 485) also comments that inequalities can be expressed as "more favorable traits" towards males than females. Similar feelings of being 'invisible', having 'no voice', and 'being marginalized' emerge from Chovwen (2007) when he researched barriers to success for women in Nigeria. One of the participants in the study described the male dominance as a disease and that she often felt, and was treated as, an outsider. Closely related to this is another form of discrimination (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003), where discussions of female issues are suppressed. They describe this as an "absence of equality" (p. 422) that alienates women in business environments. The researchers further add that the disempowerment of women can range from complicity to resistance and women being treated with less "professional respect" (Wolfram *et al.*, 2007, p. 29) and therefore finding it difficult to feel completely accepted.

As early as 1997, Hall-Taylor argued that women were contributing to their own marginalization in companies by adopting soft skills as a feminine attribute. She also commented that women were not good, particularly, at building networks and support systems, and chose to subordinate their careers to their families. One of the contributing factors to this is that most companies do not address the care-giving responsibilities that most women have in comparison to male colleagues (Trzcinski and Holst, 2010). Related to this, Oakley (2000, p. 325) suggests that

women are less likely to “blow their horn”, and hence are less likely to be recognized (and that this differential behavior is seen by CEOs as weak or “having nothing meaningful to contribute”). In contrast, however, Oakley (2000) argues that women are forced to change the manner in which they speak, making it more command-orientated so that it is perceived as stronger and more controlling. On the other hand, Barrett (2011) argues that this is sexist, and makes women feel uncomfortable and inauthentic, and that they are continually penalized for not conforming to male-type behavior and attitudes. Kellerman and Rhode (2007, p. 7), on the other hand, believe that by adopting the male model of communication, women often have difficulty in enlisting respect and support from co-workers and more junior staff. They draw a comparison of women being seen as difficult and considered “dragon ladies” when this happens.

Data and Methodology

The main phenomenological research was qualitative and inductive in nature, and sought to understand the feelings of alienation and powerlessness, the extent to which it was experienced, and the senior female respondents’ sense-making of the phenomenon itself (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The assumption was that senior women leaders were experiencing disempowered feelings in production areas, and that this was not widely known, as well as the murky notion that support forums existed. Similarly, the level of awareness by male colleagues has not been adequately researched and hence the researchers sought to unpack this through this study.

The process of triangulation was employed for the data collection for this study. Data was collected from both women and men currently and previously occupying senior roles within production environments. All candidates were presented with a consent form which advised them of the confidentiality of the information shared. The purposive collection of information was carried out using a semi-structured interview guide for current or previous senior women leaders within manufacturing environments. Fifteen (15) recorded, face-to-face interviews took place (each 1 hr long), as this aided transcription and subsequent analysis; additionally, a questionnaire (see Appendix) was used to collect data from seventeen (17) preselected male candidates who consented to participate in the research, in order to assess their awareness and understanding of the prevalence of this phenomenon. The interview guides were constructed in a manner that supported the sharing of experiences from the participants relating to the feelings of powerlessness, its prevalence and the support strategies and coping mechanisms that senior women managers have turned to during these “powerless” times. Similarly, the survey was constructed in a manner with specific questions to test the level of awareness of the subject and their possible contribution to these marginalized feelings. A five-step data analysis process (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006) was used: firstly, familiarization and immersion (developing “ideas and theories” of the topic from the detail solicited from the interviews and surveys); then review, interpretation, analyzing notations and data from the candidates’ interview responses and surveys. The qualitative data analysis computer

software program, namely ATLAS.ti®, was used to analyze the interview data due to the high amount of information received, using: Open Coding (assessing data and breaking them down), and then followed by Axial Coding (making a set of connections between categories, linkages to contexts and consequences and simulating patterns). This was then followed by a process of Selective Coding where the dominant themes were encompassed into core categories, thereby creating a central point of focus in the analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Conditional relationship diagrams were summarized as prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and cited in Scott and Howell (2008), who advised that by answering a set of questions of ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘how’, ‘when’ and ‘why’ one can put together patterns of these categories and concepts. With respect to the survey results, key concepts and data were summarized from the information shared, and key components of the research and relevant family categories were compared with the survey results.

The approach taken was to perform both interviews, as well as conduct surveys, to gain

information relevant to the topic, and through the process of coding and interpretation meet the intention of the research accordingly. A total of 15 senior female manager candidates were interviewed using a semi-structured interview process and, 17 senior male manager candidates were surveyed. They shared their current-, as well as their previous, experiences on the topic via this process. The interview candidates were drawn from various sectors within the production industry: 26.67% of the candidates were from the confectionary industry, 13.33% from the FMCG sector, 13.33% from mining, 20% from the over the counter pharmaceutical industry, 13.33% from the petrochemical industry, and 13.33% from the pharmaceutical industry.

Figure 1 indicates the race profile of these candidates: 40% White, 26.67% Colored (mixed race), 20% African Black, and 13.33% Asian senior female managers. Similarly, the age distribution of the candidates was as follows: 33.33% lay in the age categories of 46 upwards and 26-35 years, respectively, 26.67% lay in the age category of 36-45 years and 6.67% in the age category of 20-25 years (Figure 2).

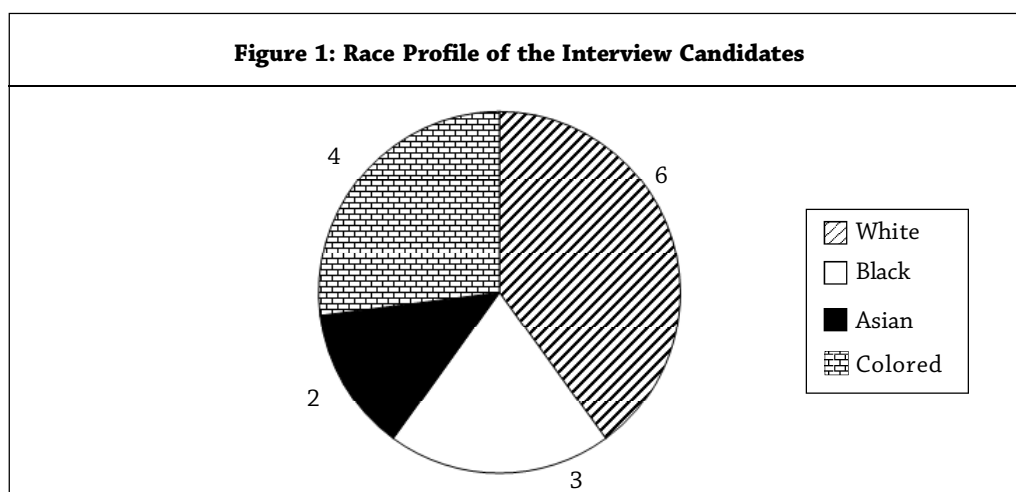
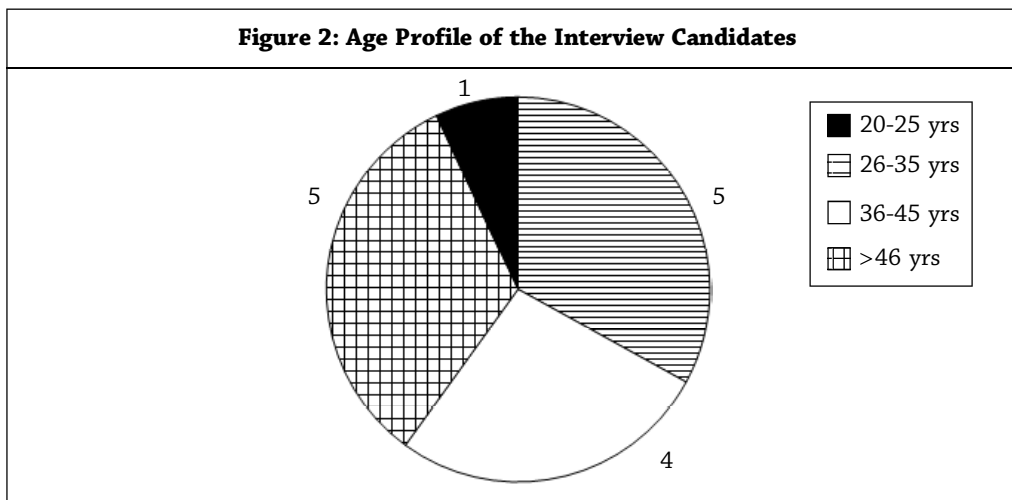


Figure 2: Age Profile of the Interview Candidates



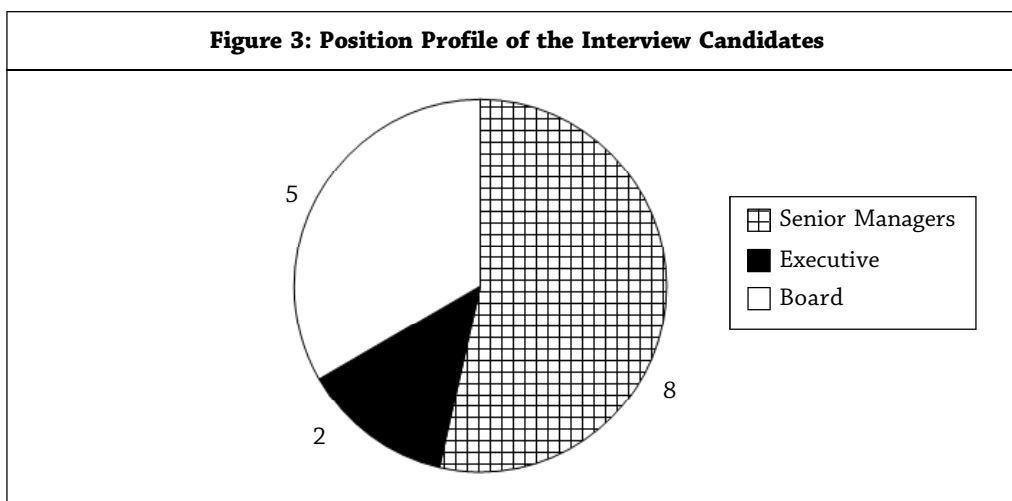
The interview candidates comprised of 53.33% in senior manager roles, 33.33% occupied positions at the board level, while 13.33% occupied executive positions (Figure 3).

Through the process of analyzing the interview responses, using the software program AtlasTi® 5, a total of 91 codes were determined, with 455 quotations linked accordingly. The codes which indicate the common thoughts and opinions by the interview participants are depicted in Table 2. Upon analysis of various codes,

emergent themes were determined and a total of ten (10) family codes were allocated which are as follows:

1. General Information
2. General Powerlessness Experiences
3. EP Experiences
4. Different Privileges for Male Managers
5. Female Managers Encouraging EP
6. Women Manager Reactions
7. Male Managers' Level of Awareness
8. Underlying Reasons for EP
9. Alleviating EP
10. Types of Support

Figure 3: Position Profile of the Interview Candidates



Accepting Alienating Behavior as the Norm	Direct Threats	Legacy of Women Role
Acknowledge Achievements/ Trust Capabilities and Competence/Grow Up	Disempowered as a Result of Less Experience	Male Chauvinistic Behavior
Adequate Support Structures Exist	Disempowered as a Result of Race	Male Circle Acceptance: Based on Key Performance Indicator Delivery
Assess Intrinsic Empowerment Tools as a Support Structure	Easier to Trust Male Managers	Male Lead Style Adopted to Be Effective
Be Authentic	Exclusion: Work Male Activities	Male Managers Support Female Managers
Books as Support Structures	Family and Friends: Support Structures	Male Managers: Embrace Diversity
Challenge Then Disengage	Feelings of Disillusionment	Males Trust and Relate to Males Better
Change Lead Style: Effective	Female Managers: Do Not Support	Management Style Resulting in EP
Change Lead Style: To Be Included	Female Managers: More Disempowering Than Male	Men: Be Open to Learn/ Change Mindset
Children and Family Responsibilities: Contribute to EP	Forming Relations Reduces Disempowered Feelings	Men: Start with Self
Collaborative Working Environment	Frustrated, Annoyed and Helpless Feelings	Mentorship and Coaching: Support Structures
Collusion with Other Men	Higher the Corporate Ladder Higher EP	Moaning and Moping
Company Education Drives to Alleviate EP	Honest Direct Conversations to Alleviate EP	Mocking and Challenging Self-Confidence
Competence and Character Questioning	HR: Support Structure	More Confident and Stronger Personalities: Less EP
Crèches and Chore Support Structures	Ineffective or Non-Existent Support Structures	More Experience and Specialized: More Empowered
Cultural Differences Relating to Disempowerment	Insecurity Over Ability	More Female Managers Than Male Managers at Senior Levels

Table 2 (Cont.)

Culture of Organization Determines EP	Intentional and Unintentional Disempowerment	More Male Managers Than Female Managers at Senior Levels
Current or Previous Colleagues as Support Structures	Intentional Isolating Behavior: Power Plays	Need for Female Manager Support
Derailing and Criticism of Work	Internalize Experience	Networks of Women
Different Privileges: Male Managers	Lead Style Not Changed	No Gender Power Dynamics
Organizational Culture of Support	Left/Felt Like Leaving Company	No Preferential Treatment for Male Managers
Other Women Experiencing EP	Legacy of Discrimination, Racism and EE Roll Out	Not Challenging Powerless Behavior
Overanalysis of Issues	Speak Out/Challenge if Experiencing EP	Not Heard, Respected or Taken Seriously
Personal Experiences Encourage EP	Stronger More Confident Women: Less EP	Women Should Keep Emotions Intact
Personality Power Dynamics	Unintentional Isolation	Women Work Harder to Prove Themselves
Powerless as a Result of Age Differences	Women Associations: Support Structure	Women Work Harder to Prove Themselves
Production Environment: Not for Women	Women Create their Own Barriers	Women: Inferior Gender
Seek Alternative Approach When Disempowered	Women Managers Spoken Down to	Women: Weaker
Self-Talk: Support	Women Self-Assessment: To Alleviate EP	Women's Associations as Support Structures
Sheltered Male Upbringing Social Conditioning and Religious Divide	Social Initiatives: Support Structure	Yoga and Spiritual Methods: Support
Note: Empowered Powerlessness will be captured as "EP".		

Results and Discussion

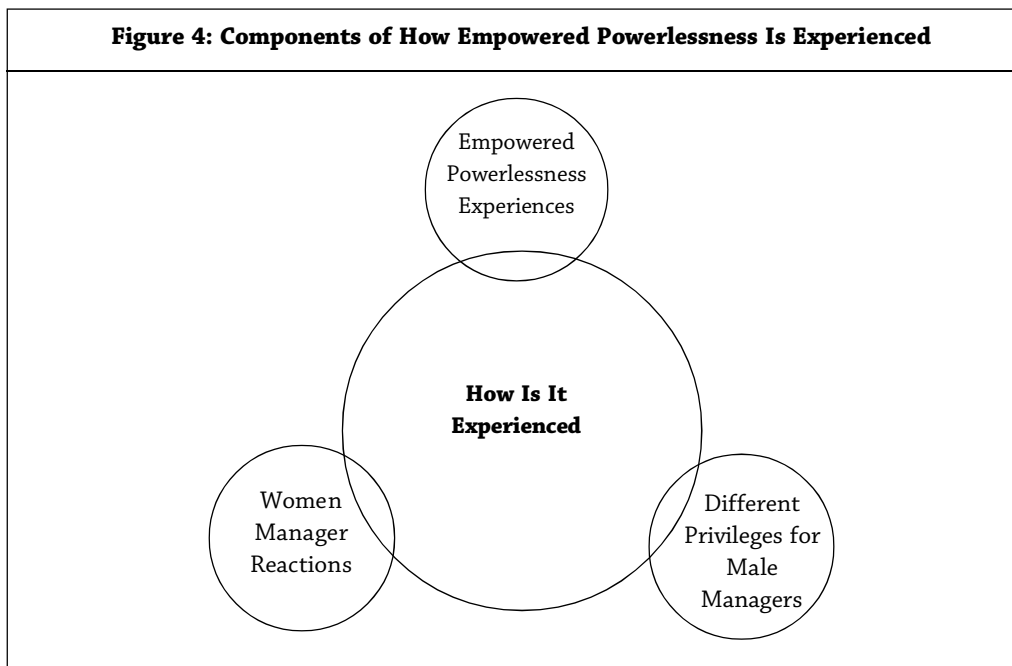
How Do Women Leaders Experience Empowered Powerlessness

Empowered Powerlessness Experiences

There were a number of experiences that were shared by the female interview participants relating to feelings of powerlessness,

frustration and exclusion from their male manager colleagues (Figure 4). The majority of the feelings expressed centered on women leaders not being taken seriously enough, feeling disrespected and not being heard. Age was another dynamic that came up often where women felt more disempowered with older,

Figure 4: Components of How Empowered Powerlessness Is Experienced



“stubborn” male managers that were set in their ways. The majority of the survey candidates, interestingly enough, believed that internal gender relations occurred mid-to less frequently within production environments. This question was posed in terms of the nature of the occurrences that contributed to women managers’ feeling disempowered. They also strongly indicated that the inequality in gender numbers and insecurity on the part of women leaders contributed the least to women feeling disempowered. Interestingly enough, 41% of the survey candidates indicated that non-collaborative male-dominant circles existed within production environments, and 21% declared that women managers were not included in problem solving discussions with male colleagues. Similarly, Dainty *et al.* (2006) agree that women feel marginalized by male managers, and their inability to penetrate male networks often causes disillusionment.

The sense of awareness (or lack of it) voiced by male managers compared to what women experienced indicates a disparity in opinion. This disparity relates to what encourages disempowered feelings amongst the women leaders (Table 3).

Different Privileges for Male Managers

Women managers shared experiences of preferential treatment that male managers get in comparison to themselves (Table 4). This included experiences of more remuneration for the same job, differences with the performance management process and monitoring indicators, and a general trust of male managers rather than female managers within production environments. It is clear from the sentiments of the survey candidates that this was not the general feeling of male managers.

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the male managers surveyed believed that women were treated the same way as male managers within

Table 3: Conditional Relationship Summary for Empowered Powerlessness Experiences

Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Empowered Powerlessness Experiences	Feelings of powerlessness, isolation, exclusion and marginalization	When relating with male manager colleagues	Team meetings, project sessions, leadership forums, board meetings, after work activities	Lack of trust, women seen as inferior and weaker, males relating to males more easily	Collusion, not being heard, respected, taken seriously, expected to work harder, undermining organizational culture, age and culture clashes, male activities exclusion	Frustration, insecurity, leaving the organization, work harder to prove themselves

Table 4: Conditional Relationship for Different Privileges for Male Managers

Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Different privileges for male managers	Preferential treatment for male managers	When relating with male manager colleagues	In the workplace—in different circumstances	Male managers form relations with males more easily. Males are trusted more than females	Stronger bonds formed with male managers than female managers, exclusion from male work activities (rugby, golf, soccer matches), increased remuneration for men, different performance standards for men	Anger, frustration, isolation, leaving the company

the production environment, whilst 29% felt that this was not the case, and the 12% remaining participants were unsure.

According to the academic literature, one of the ways in which this gender bias presents is in the form of pay discrepancies (Solomons, 1990, as cited in Oakley, 2000).

Women Manager Reactions

“Women manager reactions” have also been included in this section as women leaders interpret certain lived experiences, and react

accordingly. A number of women leaders shared their various reactions and have included internalizing the experience, challenging the behaviors, working harder to prove themselves to others, and then disengaging. Only 24% of the survey candidates felt that women had to work harder than male managers to be recognized as effective managers. Interestingly enough, 12% were not sure if this was the case. One of the common reactions highlighted during the

Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Women manager reactions	Various feelings or actions taken by senior women leaders when feeling disempowered when relating to male colleagues	In the workplace, after hours, when relating to male colleagues	In workplace (meetings, daily interactions, after hours, at home with family and friends)	Women feel overcome by emotions as a result of feeling marginalized and disempowered by male managers. This results in them reacting in a certain manner	Challenge then disengage, internalize feelings, work harder to prove themselves, feelings of disillusionment, annoyance and helplessness, accepting behavior and not challenging	Various: Change behavior, ignored and no change, better working relations with male colleagues, women are included and respected

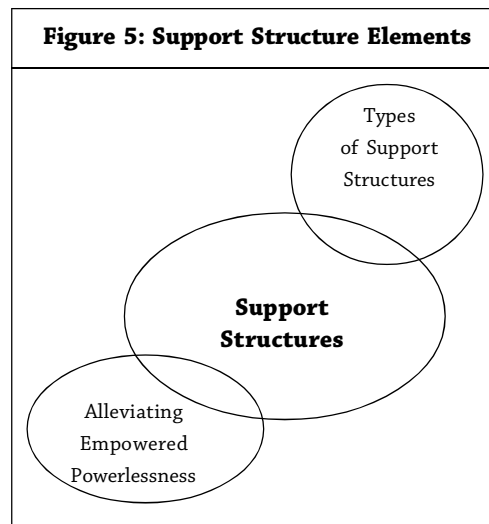
literature review was that women end up leaving the organizations as a result of these disempowering experiences (Oakley, 2000). This was not the case during the research interviews and discussions, where the most common reactions were to internalize feelings, and also for women leaders to develop a determination and will to work harder and prove their male managers and colleagues wrong (Table 5).

Support Structures

Types of Support Structures

Eighty percent (80%) of all the senior women leaders interviewed felt that there were not enough support structures (see Figure 5 for elements of support structure) within the production environment for women leaders to turn to. The rest shared experiences of having mentors and coaches, provided for by their respective companies to assist them with disempowered feelings.

When asked what their personal support and coping mechanisms were, participants shared an array of options. This included family



and friends, reading coping books, seeing coaches and therapists, turning to spiritual methods (like yoga, meditation and mindfulness practices), involvement in sports activities, sympathetic and positive self-talk, involvement in art outlets, women’s organizations, other female managers and progressive human resource departments, amongst others (Table 6). Some of the women indicated that assistance with household chores/responsibilities, that they generally

Table 6: Conditional Relationship for Support Structures

Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Types of support structures	Structures, platforms and activities that senior women leaders solicit or engage in to support them when feeling disempowered	During work hours and after hours	Work settings, (offices, meeting rooms), coffee shops, conference rooms	To allow women to put things into perspective, get advice, to vent and share feelings	Mentorship, coaching, books, female networks, women organizations, spiritual methods, social initiatives, self-talk, female managers, human resources, family and friends, intrinsic tools, company education drives	Frustration, insecurity, leaving the organization, work harder to prove themselves

are regarded as responsible for in the home, also provided support. This is confirmed by the literature, where in addition to current leadership roles, women are still fulfilling the nurturing role at home and often have to balance their professional life with their family commitments (Okpara, 2006; and Chovwen, 2007). It would seem obvious, therefore, that this would constitute a fundamental support structure for women.

In contrast, the majority of the male survey candidates (53%) felt that there were enough support structures within the production environment to support women who felt disempowered. A startling 29% felt that production environments did not have to invest more in building integrated and collaborative management teams that focused on effective gender relations.

The results shared by the interview candidates are supported by the literature, where it was stated that despite it being in the organization's best interest to enhance

women leadership roles in relation to rights and experiences (Schein, 2007), companies are "still struggling to create a diverse organization free from discrimination" (Meyer and Boninelli, 2004, p. 134). It was clear that this was the case from the interview candidates' experiences.

Alleviating Empowered Powerlessness

Coupled with support-type platforms and options, questions were posed to candidates both during the interview and in the survey on ways to alleviate this concept of EP amongst senior female managers. Advice was given to both male and female managers, as well as to organizations.

Female participants asserted/believed that women needed to stay true to themselves, remain authentic, and let their work speak for itself. There needed to be a degree of self-awareness and self-examination, particularly with regard to one's values, in order to assess the deeper reasons for disempowering behavior and feelings of disempowerment.

Honest direct conversations and challenging the perception of their experiences also assisted in systematically eradicating this marginalization of women leaders. Being confident and believing in one's own ability were two other options shared. Men needed to be more open to, and inclusive of, various forms of diversity (particularly gender diversity) and willing to change their mindset and be willing to be transformed by the experiences and perspectives of those they consider the 'other'. Additionally, organizations should encourage inclusive cultures, and be assertive in challenging disempowering attitudes and behaviors toward female managers, in particular, and female employees, in general (Table 7).

Candidates that were surveyed shared similar advice for male managers, in that they should respect women managers and be able to "appreciate diversity" and be "inclusive of diversity". Some of them also stated that male

managers should "visibly support female managers" and create a "management culture of mutual recognition". This is one of the challenges in South Africa, in that the country is struggling to build truly inclusive workplace cultures, equitable remunerative environments, rise above the pervasive misogynistic hegemony, and throw off the shackles of its colonized workplace mindsets. Academic literature advises that these can be overcome by providing individual development programs for people (particularly around unconscious biases, stereotypical thinking and flawed mental models), by providing group processes as outlets for sharing lived experiences and narratives, and ensuring that all organizational policies/procedures are aligned with progressive, inclusive workplaces (Dann, 1995; Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997; Chase, 2005; Cross and Linehan, 2006; April and Shockley, 2007; and Robertson, 2013).

Table 7: Conditional Relationship for Alleviating Empowered Powerlessness

Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Alleviating Empowered Powerlessness	Actions and manners that can contribute to alleviating EP experiences, by senior women leaders in production	Daily interactions within the workplace and in personal time	Workplace settings, after hours meeting places, social sessions/meetings	In order to build a more collaborative, integrated diverse working relationships between male and female managers in order to add more value to the organization	Display authenticity as a female manager, form strong bonds, focus on KPI delivery, honest direct conversation, assess intrinsic ability, self-assessments, males to be open to learn and accept diversity, be confident and gain experience, keep emotions intact, build an organizational culture that does not support EP, challenge EP Experiences	Various: change behavior, ignored and no change, better working relations with male colleagues, women are included and respected

Male Manager Level of Awareness

One of the intentions of the research was to evaluate the extent of awareness of male managers, in terms of women feeling disempowered as a result of male manager behaviorism.

Of all the male candidates surveyed, only one candidate felt that women could be feeling disempowered in production environments; eleven candidates were unsure if this was occurring and five were adamant that women were not disempowered at all. In contradiction, when various (possible) male disempowering behaviors were presented for frequency ratings, six candidates (35%) felt that none of them occur in their work environment, whilst 41% of the participants believed that non-collaborative male-dominated circles were in existence. It appeared that, despite knowing that these circles exist, male managers did not believe that this contributes to feelings of disempowerment.

In addition, what also supports a level of awareness is that 53% of the male managers felt that women leaders may feel disempowered as a minority gender in the production workplace. A further 29% of the candidates felt that this may be the case in their specific production environment. This further confirmed that male managers have some level of awareness of disempowered feelings amongst their female colleagues, but the extent of their awareness was still unclear.

From the interview results, as highlighted earlier, the majority of senior women leaders felt that male managers were not aware of their disempowering behavior and hence when they behaved in an alienating manner, it was unintentional. A small portion of the interview participants indicated that it was both

intentional and not intentional. The remaining women interviewed felt that male managers displayed intentional isolating behaviors when they were “playing power games” with their female colleagues. It is clear that male and female managers have slightly different opinions on the level of awareness of this concept and ensuing behavior (Table 8).

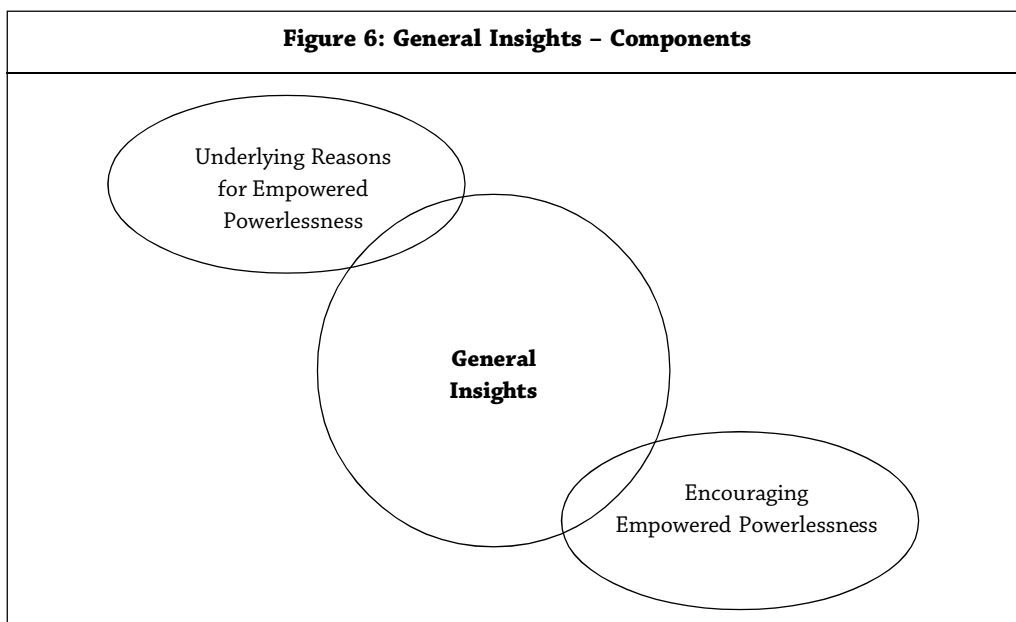
General Insights

Underlying Reasons for Empowered Powerlessness

Closely aligned to the objectives of this research project, conditional relationship diagrams have been completed for EP as well as women leaders’ behaviors that may be encouraging this behavior in the production workspace.

Interview candidates, following the discussion around intentional or unintentional disempowering behaviors by their male colleagues, shared their insights into the reasons for this phenomenon (see Figure 6 for components of general insights). Many of them felt that it was due to the legacy of discrimination and racism in the country and, as a result, managers were still learning to overcome their biases and to work constructively with diversity and ‘others’ in the workplace, which included females; the manner in which employment equity and black economic empowerment were rolled out in the country was done in a “token” manner which encouraged the marginalization of women and, particularly, women of color; women felt that when men did well it was viewed so because of merit but when it came to women doing well, other reasons were voiced; women felt that men were given opportunities based on their ‘potential’ whereas

Table 8: Conditional Relationship of Male Manager Level of Awareness						
Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Male Manager level of awareness	Extent of awareness by male managers, of women's feelings of disempowerment due to male behaviors and words	In the production work environment	During work interactions and engagement	As a minority gender in technical environments, women feel excluded from male-circles of influence; Males not aware how they affect their colleagues; Males in denial	Women alienated and disempowered by men's attitudes and behavior; Women belittled, consciously and unconsciously, by men's words; Feelings of exclusion; Impact the confidence of women	Raise self- and other awareness of implications of one's behavior on others; Voice feelings of exclusion and resultant impact of one's behavior and workplace engagement; Role of real- and perceived power at the workplace; Awareness of difference between formal authority and social power



women were given opportunities based on their 'work experience'; women felt that more "chances" were taken on men than on women when promoted to senior roles; women felt that men were given more challenging assignments in the production workplace; other women felt that men saw women leaders

as mothers and housewives first, mainly due to social conditioning and ignorance, and as a result it "felt natural" to exclude women in the workplace unthinkingly. In contradiction to this, the male managers who were surveyed unanimously indicated that they did not see the main roles of women as "domestic and

child-rearing” (Table 9). Literature states that women, in the main, are still fulfilling the nurturing role at home (and are expected to do so), and therefore have to balance their professional life together with their family commitments as they are augmenting household earnings (Okpara, 2006; Chovwen, 2007; McLellan *et al.*; and Mahasha, 2016), and that men have greater access to senior executives and Board members than women do and this aids in assignment allocation and “chances” being taken with them (Lyness and Thompson, 2000).

Personal experiences, accumulated over many years and in various contexts, had a great deal to do with the way senior women leaders

felt when relating to male managers. Survey candidates also felt that insecurity had played a significant role with 12 of the candidates, believing it occurred frequently. This is supported by the literature: “women’s subjectivities, personal histories and perceived concepts may affect the way they interpret what they believe to be disempowered behavior” (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003, p. 425; and Holvino, 2010).

Lastly, previous religious division was shared as a possible underlying reason for disempowered behavior from male managers.

Encouraging Empowered Powerlessness

Despite there being many experiences encouraging disempowered feelings by senior

Table 9: Conditional Relationship for Underlying Reasons

Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Underlying reasons for empowered powerlessness	Reason for women leaders experiencing empowered powerlessness	The past experiences and current experiences of managers and society	Work, social settings, political and government forums	Continue to act in a way that is disempowering	Legacy of discrimination, racism and the roll-out of employment equity within SA. Given the previous perceptions that women were not career-driven and subservient home-makers, male managers find it difficult to accept women’s current career ambitions, the more vocal and challenging nature of women in the workplace, their own (male) insecurities when confronted with women who do not fit their prejudiced ideas and own partners’ roles at home, as well as SA’s religious history which perpetuated the ideological division and differential treatment of males and females	By understanding the underlying reasons for disempowered mannerisms and feelings one can change behavior to be more supportive and inclusive, continue to act in a way that is disempowering

Table 10: Conditional Relationship for Encouragement of Empowered Powerlessness

Family Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Encouragement of Empowered Powerlessness	Behaviors and mannerisms by female managers that encourage disempowering behaviors by male managers and feelings	When relating with male manager colleagues or in daily activities	Team meetings, project sessions, leadership forums, board meetings, after work activities	Insecurity, uncomfortable emotions, natural reactions	Moaning and moping about experiences instead of taking action, overanalyzing experiencing and interactions with male colleagues, creating own barriers by convincing themselves they are not good enough and also by not taking action, being extremely emotional at the wrong time	Women lose respect, are ignored, marginalized, ousted, told to leave the company

women leaders in relating to fellow male colleagues, certain themes emerged during the interview process. One of these themes was that women could also be contributing to EP themselves. This entailed moaning and moping about the experiences, over-analysis of experiences and “sweating the small stuff”, thereby creating their own personal barriers. They also suggested that women can be overemotional at inappropriate moments.

These interesting insights were shared by female managers; they certainly provided “food for thought” (Table 10). The literature review carried out on this topic did not provide a significant amount of insight into how women leaders encourage this disempowerment behavior in the workplace.

Emergence of Empowered Powerlessness Model

During the process of constructing an inter-relationship and causal loop diagram (see

Figures 7 and 8) of the family codes determined earlier, four significant causal loops emerged. It was determined that the following were the key drivers in feelings of powerlessness, emanating within the production environment:

- Various underlying reasons for EP.
 - Male manager levels of awareness—intentional or unintentional disempowering behavior.
 - (Actions to) alleviate EP.
 - Female managers encouraging EP behavior.
- Similarly, the consequences of these drivers were determined and listed as follows:
- Types of support turned to or needed for women leaders.
 - Various gender EP experiences.
 - General EP.
 - Women manager reactions.

The four causal loops suggested that there were certain underlying factors that instigate

Figure 7: Interrelationship Diagram

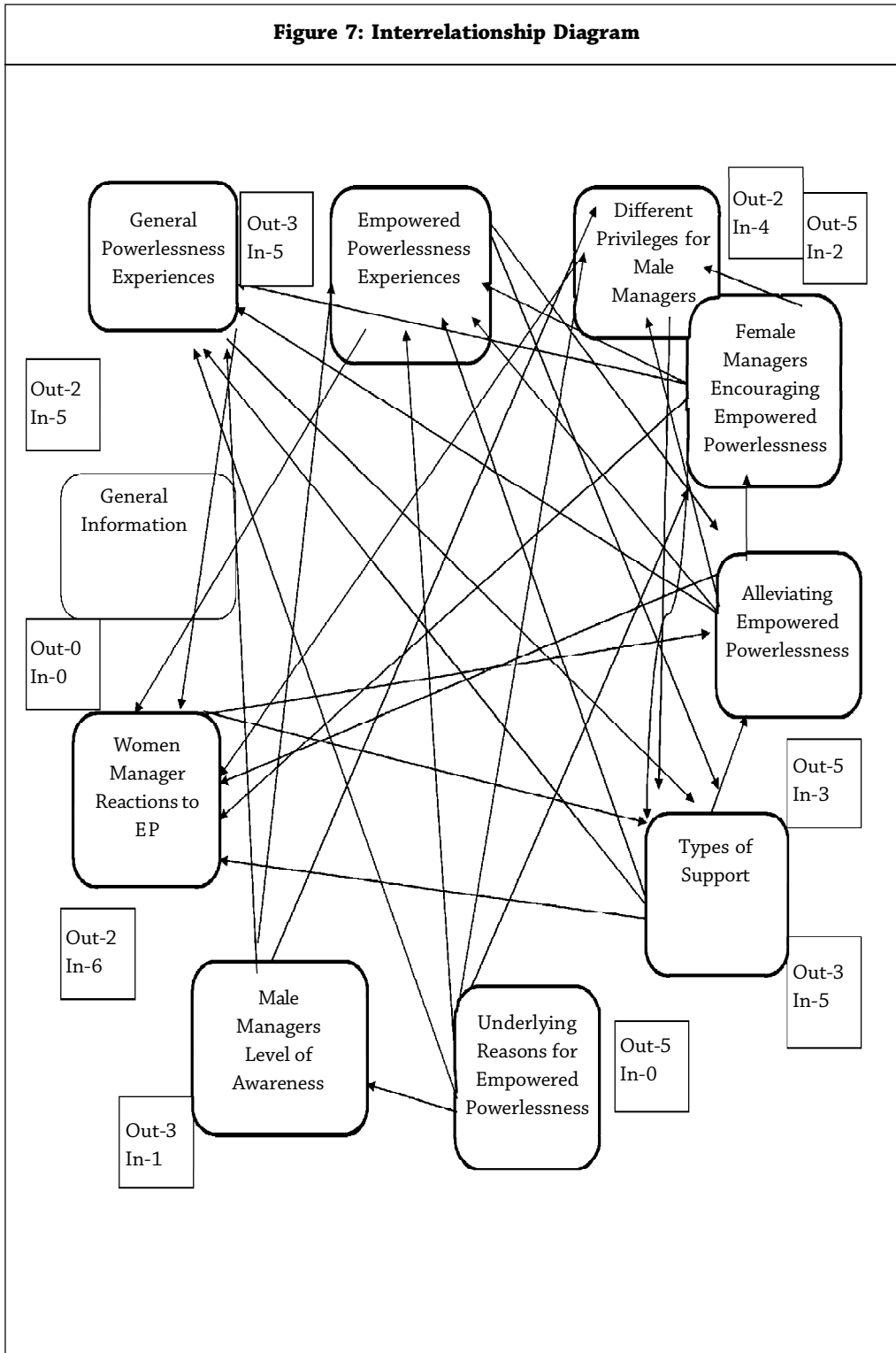
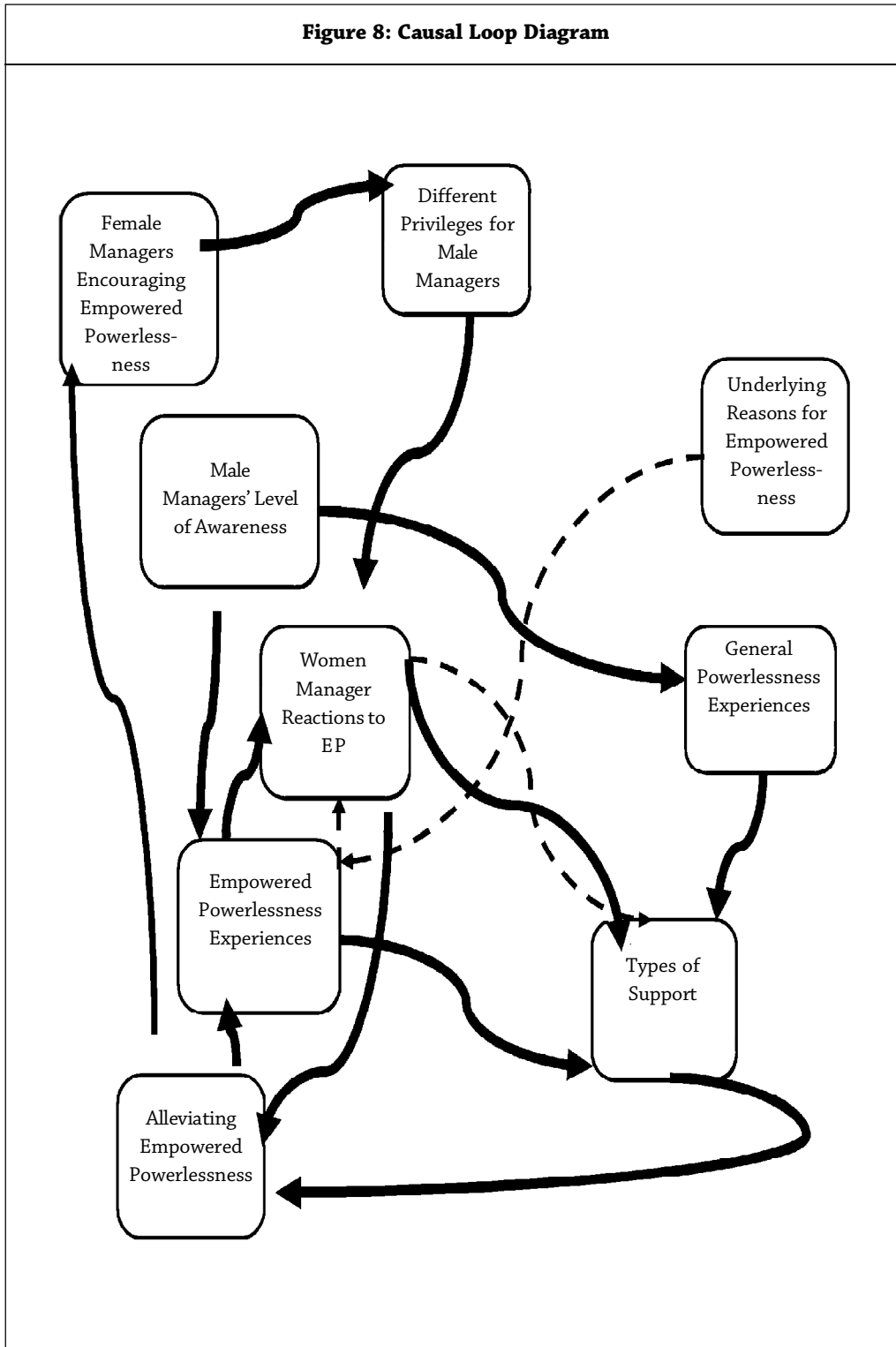


Figure 8: Causal Loop Diagram



disempowering behavior by male colleagues. This could be, as one candidate indicated, that she thinks that “employment equity in South Africa, the way it has been implemented ... on its own is disempowering to women, because there’s this whole token of apathy”, leading to women not being treated respectfully as it is interpreted as a “token appointment” in the workplace.

This triggers various reactions from women managers. For example, a women leader may have “the confidence to express [her] idea ... but when it continued to be pushed down or ignored, then another male brings up the same idea and then ... [she] would get very frustrated, and sometimes [she] would eventually withdraw”. Women would then resort to a support structure that best supports their feelings and character.

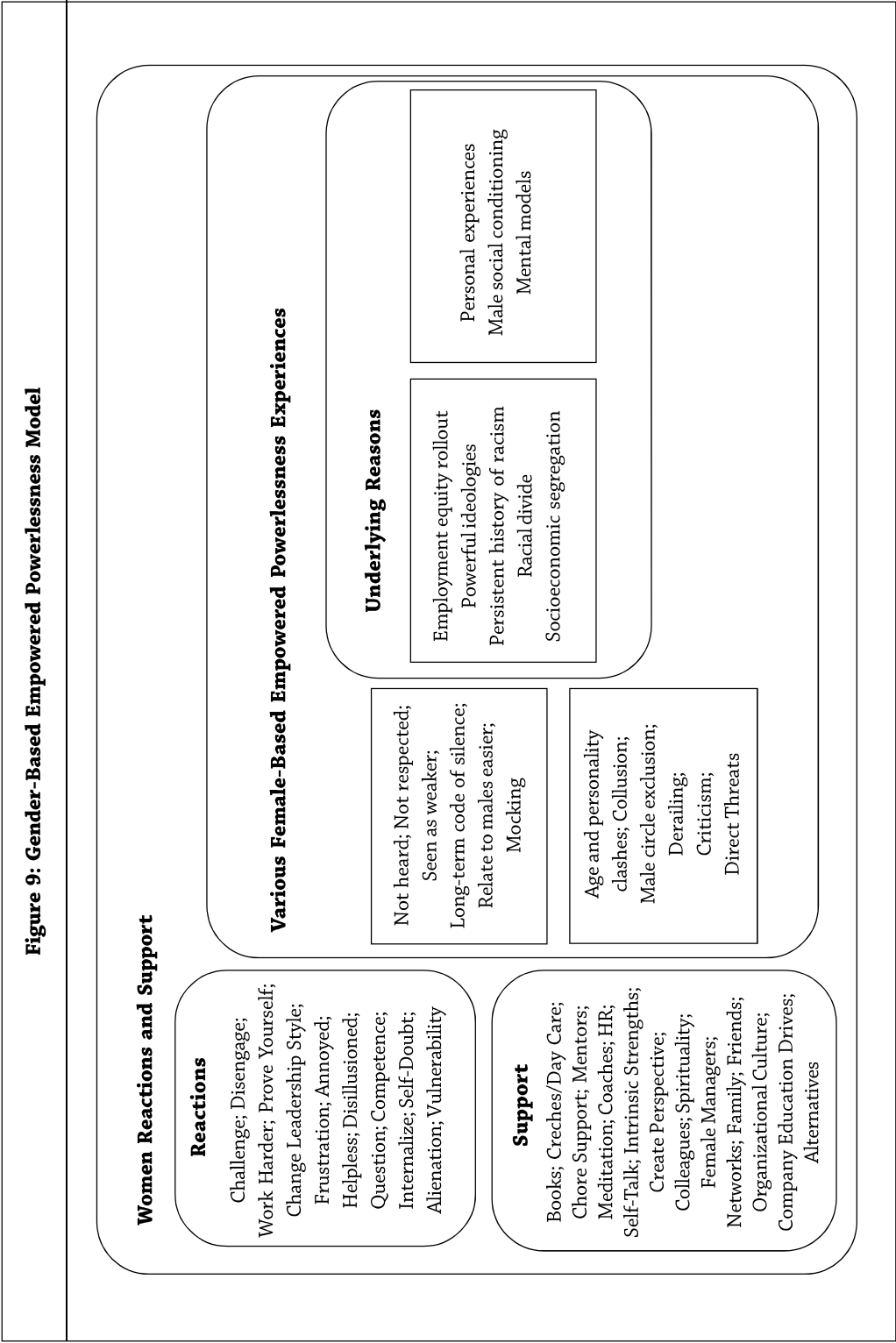
Another loop showed female managers themselves encouraging disempowering behavior, in that they created their own barriers by telling themselves that they were not good enough. Resorting to extreme emotional behavior at inappropriate times falls into the same category: “... she would, in the worst situations, just burst into tears ... and you forget everything else”. This results in different privileges for male managers, as men are seen as the stronger sex and are afforded better and more rewarding projects: “they are more inclined to trust them with bigger projects”. This perpetuates the cycle of women reacting in various ways: they might, for instance, challenge the experience and move towards alleviating behavior like having a courageous, honest conversation which might be beneficial, but, if performed in a “moaning and moping” manner, may have the opposite effect. Additionally, if not emotionally mature,

some men might struggle with the challenging nature of the conversation and continue with the disempowering behavior or, in a worst-case scenario, further entrench the disempowering behavior. Female managers who feel disempowered might turn to support structures, and this may, as a candidate shared, “give you perspective” and lead to actually alleviating the behavior within one’s spheres of influence and achieve what was intended in the first place.

The last causal loop involved the disempowering behavior of male managers—intentional or unintentional. “Not so long ago they all got tickets to go to the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand, and I never got an invite, and I said” ‘is it because I am a woman?’” In this case, the candidate did not think that this was deliberate. Another candidate asserted that, at times, this kind of behavior was deliberate and part of “power games” that continually play out in production environments. These examples could result in EP feelings and reactions, with women turning to support structures accordingly.

Through this process, and by assessing the survey results discussed earlier, the model shown in Figure 9 has been determined.

This model starts with the assumption that disempowering behavior starts with various underlying ‘reasons’ and ‘assumptions’. The ‘reasons’ and ‘assumptions’ then fuel ‘expectations’, and it is those ‘expectations’ which find expression in ‘disempowering behaviors’ from male colleagues in varied situations within production environments—whether deliberate or unconscious. This then results in a number of different reactions to the disempowering mannerisms, and the



implementation of various support structures. Depending on the quality and availability of the support, this can elicit various other reactions.

Conclusion

A process of triangulation was employed during this research process where senior women leaders from various production industries were interviewed, in order to seek their understanding of EP behavior, support structures and male managers' level of awareness. At the same time, a survey was extended to senior male managers in the same production industry to gain their understanding of marginalization and exclusion of their female colleagues within production environments.

Literature was also reviewed to summarize other experiences relating to EP, and critical aspects pertaining to the research topic. Various insights and experiences were shared by both the female and male leaders accordingly. The research approach employed was phenomenological in nature, with a clear focus on interpreting and making sense of the lived experiences of our research respondents. It was through this sense-making that insights were gleaned and summarized from the research results.

From the process of data analysis using Atlasti®, it can be deduced from the results shared and the analysis summarized that EP exists within production environments in South Africa. The manner in which it exists and occurs is manifold when senior women leaders relate to their fellow male colleagues. These types of experiences ranged from women not feeling respected, having no voice, believing they have to work harder, being

overlooked, believing they are seen as the inferior and weaker gender and, in some cases, even suffering direct threats and ambush! Male managers displayed a sense of awareness when they admitted to the existence of non-collaborative male circles, and the possible isolation of women as a result of women being the minority gender within production settings. The extent to which male managers are aware of this concept is unclear at this stage as the survey results indicated some conflicting information, as well as some disparities with what women leaders actually experienced.

It was clear from the results that there are limited support structures within the production work environment to support the women leaders that feel disempowered by male behavior or disempowered in general. Most women turn to their own personal support systems, behaviors or mechanisms. These were shared accordingly and included family, friends, female networks, spiritual methods and books, amongst others. There was a great deal of advice for organizations to build a culture of support that does not encourage disempowering behavior, embark on training and awareness campaigns, and also to employ mentors and coaches. These are shared as possible effective support solutions for women leaders.

This insight and advice will provide pertinent information to companies and other senior women leaders, as well as male leaders, about the extent to which EP exists within production environments. Their strategies to support women and develop male managers' sense of awareness can be aligned accordingly.

Lastly, this research will provide a voice for women who are experiencing this behavior

and expose them to others that have similar experiences and to the support structures that exist, thereby hopefully contributing to the eventual erosion of this phenomenon.☺

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Empowered Powerlessness: Senior Women Managers Within Production

Respondent's User-Information

Name: _____

Gender: _____

Age (Years): _____

E-mail: _____

Location: _____

Company: _____

Position: _____

IP Address: _____

Started: _____

Completed: _____

1. What type of production environment do/did you work in?
2. What position do/did you occupy?
3. Number of senior women colleagues within your team (direct/indirect) that you work/worked with?
4. Within your work environment, are/were there more male managers compared to females at senior management levels? And why do you think that is/was?
5. Do you believe that women in senior management roles feel/felt disempowered in production environments? Provide reasons for your response.

Appendix (Cont.)

6. If senior managers feel/felt disempowered within production environments, please rate the following from 1 to 5 as the underlying reasons for this feeling (1 – most frequent; 5 – least frequent):

	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of skill					
Ineffective leadership skills					
Insecurity					
Internal gender relations					
Lack of knowledge					
Ineffective multi-skilling					
Inequality in gender volumes					

7. Please list Words used (W), Behaviors (B), Actions (A) which are/were prevalent in production environments, and are/were relevant to the topic of this research?
8. What is your interpretation of 'the glass ceiling' for senior women? Is/was it apparent in the production environment/company within which you work/worked? Example(s)?
9. Please discuss whether you believe that senior women managers are/were treated in the same way as senior male managers, within the production environment?
10. Are you in agreement with the statement that, within production environments, women managers have/had to work harder to be recognized in their roles compared to male managers in similar roles? Please provide reasons for your response(s).
11. Do you think that female managers may feel/may have felt disempowered, as a result of them being a minority within technical/production disciplines? Explain your reason(s).
12. Please respond to the following statement: "Senior women managers often adopt typical male leadership styles in order to be taken more seriously, and to be more effective in their jobs".

Agree (with reasons)	
Disagree (with reasons)	
Unsure (with reasons)	

Appendix (Cont.)

13. As a male leader, I believe that my behavior and actions could contribute to disempowered feelings experienced by female leader colleagues? Explain your response(s).
14. Do you feel that the dominant perception in production environments is/was that women's roles are still predominantly seen as 'domestic' and associated with 'child-rearing'? Explain your answer(s).
15. In relation to question 14 above, do/did you feel a personal responsibility to change those perceptions if it exists/existed? Feel free to answer: n/a
16. Do you believe that there is/were effective platforms and support structures, within production environments, to alleviate disempowered feelings, and feelings of alienation, experienced by senior women leaders? Explain.
17. Production environments should invest more in building integrative and collaborative management teams, that focus on effective gender relations. Do you agree or disagree with this statement, and please explain why?
18. What role can male leaders play in alleviating the disempowered feelings that senior women leaders experience within production environments?
19. If women do feel disempowered within production environments, how should companies drive to change this?

Reference # 03M-2018-06-03-01