

I think this perception about women condemning other women in the workplace via ideas like the Queen Bee needs to be understood in terms of the larger feminist concepts of gendered organisations and male dominant cultures. There seems to be no evidence for intrinsic competition and oppression between women, and my own study reveals amazing cases of women supporting one another and taking pride in the networks that develop from such support. Some of my participants experienced negative interactions with other women. Others did not, or perceived more nuanced forms of negative experiences. My “networking” section, both formal and informal, show a very different picture of the relationships that women strive for with each other in the Oil industry, despite its highly competitive nature.

We have mostly focused on the nature of women’s leadership with relation to gendered organisations and masculine business culture. The experiences of the women with whom I spoke suggest that these issues are complex and not easy to categorise strictly. They have suggested that women are more akin to “authentic leaders” defined in the literature who considered other people and the interaction between them. But some participants were also reluctant to embrace generalisations and expressed opinions and reflections based more within an intersectional approach which takes race, gender, age and cultural factors into consideration. Lastly, the participants described experiences along the spectrum of gender roles in the industry as traps and those roles as resources for advancement.

4.6. Work/life balance and Multiple Roles

The issue of work-life balance has been one of the major challenges for women in almost every sector of the labour force. The “feminization” of the workforce (Casale 2004) involved many more women contributing to the global workplace in numbers. Whereas before, there were mostly men in various jobs and industries, more and more women started to be included in workplaces across the board. For many of the women I interviewed, the issue of work/life balance was something that they were aware of and were trying to cope with on a daily basis.

I start this section with a long quote from one of my participants, Felicity, who expressed a view that not only I could relate to personally, but that was also shared by my other participants.

I found it so difficult to juggle everything, I would start work at 7am, then pick up my child at 3pm at his school, then drop him at my mother's house on the days that I had to go to university, and then pick him up from my mother's house if my partner was working...In some cases when we were working towards a deadline, I would go back to work to finish work. This left one or two nights in the week to look at my studies, but the majority of work on my studies had to be done over weekends...This was exhausting, and what would have been nice if I could have worked from home for two days a week at least.

Thandaza also shared some of her challenges with relation to these issues.

I had transferred from another oil company and moved to Cape Town, I needed to work longer hours in the first year, I was studying part time and I had some family responsibilities. This was quite a difficult time for me, as I did not have the kind of network that I had where I lived before. What made it worse was that there was a small oil spill and my working hours increased at the time, as I had to engage with various stakeholders.

Fatima supported this idea and said that "I was at one time working long hours and this went on for quite a lengthy period. At the time I wasn't even aware of how exhausted I was, and I felt that I was not giving my children the attention that they deserved."

Asanda affirmed the specific pressures of the Petroleum industry in saying that "being in a senior management position makes it impossible not to work long hours at time, we work in a very competitive environment".

While Tamara expressed the difficulties of this level of engagement and maintaining a good family life;

You have this added pressure that you are a woman in a senior position and you always have to set the example. For most of the men working long hours is not a problem, they have someone to take care of the children and see to the needs of the family. Somehow you have to still perform these multiple roles if you are a woman.

The feminisation of the workplace however introduced further complexities. For instance, since many women were forced or chose to maintain their roles in the home, the balance between the home life and work life became a more pressing issue. As Asanda put it:

I find studying while keeping down a high pressured job is very difficult. What makes it even worse is when I need to travel. Fortunately, I don't do long periods, but I still feel guilty when I have to leave my family.

Then Babalwa expanded on this notion of "guilt" associated with leaving one's family.

I know how that feels. This continuous guilt is something that is so difficult to deal with. We are doing our best. I mean, I study, work hard, take care of my family, and I still don't have enough hours in the day. Even though my husband helps, a lot of the childcare still falls on me.

There is still a lot of resistance to accommodating women, especially in terms of child care vis-à-vis working hours. "Guilt" is a common side-effect of the forced balance between a successful career and a positive family life. In addition to this, many women have been skilling themselves and there is a significant amount of women who are studying and working, which leaves little time for them to devote to themselves and their families (Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2006, Judge, Ilies, Scott, 2006). These multiple roles can be difficult for women in senior management positions and eventually many women suffer burnout and are either forced to resign from high pressured jobs or seek other entrepreneurial alternatives (see Winstanley and Whittington 2002, De Sousa 2013).

Multiple roles and work-life balance need not involve children or an extended family, these pressures can be felt among single career women as well. Carol, a young single woman, agreed with the challenges that managing all these tasks was difficult. She is not married and does not have children, but has other responsibilities,

I leave work at 5pm, then go to university, and my class ends at 8pm. When I arrive home, I still have work from the office. This happens if there are urgent deadlines or work that has to be done and can't wait for the next day. My study commitments then get shifted to the weekend, at which point I have to attend the Saturday class, and then go back to the office. When I travel I cannot attend classes, so I do a lot of catch up when I get back.

Nombulelo supported this aforementioned idea with a specific example: “I also attend Saturday class, and this effectively means that my weekend is shortened, and this is also the time that I have with my family”.

Notions such as “pressure” is not unrelated to the difficulties of balancing work and home life. Moefeeda, a senior manager, described her experiences of work pressures in depth.

When I transferred from one oil company to another, I was not familiar with the downstream operations, and I needed to learn a few things, even though I was qualified for the job. My role in the new company was at a much more senior level, so working late was not an option, but a given. It was not my qualifications or skills that was the issue, but working with a new team, and the company was undergoing a restructuring process, so I felt the pressure.

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The historical imbalance between labour division in the home, and the societal expectations and socialisation of women, have left women with the challenge of fulfilling multiple roles. Initially, women were already battling to juggle work and family life, and further pressures on women who wanted to advance in the industries has meant that further study was required. Furthermore, Casale and Posel (2002) suggest that South Africa is unique in that women enter the workforce out of

need. “Unlike other countries where women workers are being *drawn* into the labour market because of demand for female labour, in South Africa women are being forced to join the workforce, out of sheer economic need” (Patel, Govender and Ramgoon, 2006: 39). Many of these jobs are at the lower levels of income. Thus, mechanisms for the facilitation of work-life balance at the senior management level have not been sufficiently developed.

Work-life balance is a concept related to the equilibrium between employment and home life.

“In everyday life, individuals and households struggle in particular ways to combine the activities of production and reproduction, work and home, in an attempt to achieve what in contemporary parlance has become known as work/life balance (McDowell, 2004: 148).”

Naturally, there is a gender component to this concept as women are still considered to be the primary caregivers in the household. Thus, balancing work and home life becomes particularly difficult. This is a narrow definition. In many cases, as with many of my research participants, the balance between work and home is not one of family life versus job requirements but between study and work or various other activities outside of the workplace.

Thandaza, for instance expressed her view in the following way:

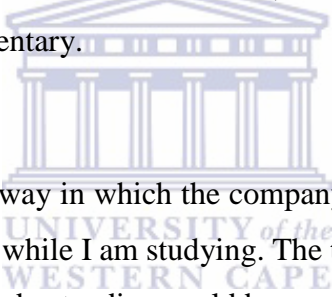
When I was on a long assignment, the break from my children was very difficult. I was still studying for my MBA during one such assignment. I always felt that my role as a mother was questioned, although my husband was very supportive. There were still those unspoken things of not being there for the everyday things that my children needed. That somehow I needed to be there.

Fatima even decided to postpone her further studies when she mentioned that “I am thinking of studying further, but I want to wait until my children are older”.

Although family life and work life are often at the centre of most debates around work-life balance, my study revealed that there are other competing factors that can affect this balance and in some cases this can be seen as a benefit as opposed to a conflict. The idea that the personal roles of women come into conflict with their work functions is due to a “role scarcity” argument. This

argument states that there is a limit to the amount of energy or effort which people can afford to their tasks. “A metaphorical pie is often used to illustrate; the time and energy represented by one “slice” of activity deplete the amount of “pie” left for the other roles” (Ruderman et al., 2002, 370).

Thus, when a woman expends efforts in her work life, then she is out of sync with her personal or family life. An alternative conception involves what is known as “role accumulation” in which it is argued that multiple roles can positively affect work. Under this argument, there is no conflict between work and home life but rather home life and the roles which it requires that can enhance work. This is consistent with many of the ideas of the leadership section of this research in which women are often expected to perform certain roles such as the “mother” role or others under more nuanced theories of leadership (such as authentic leadership). This idea emerged from one of my participants who did not see the conflict between studies, work and family as essential but rather suggested that it could be complementary.



Carol: I wish that there was a way in which the company could see that what I am studying will benefit the company, even while I am studying. The things that I am learning I can apply in my work. Surely a mutual understanding could be reached whereby I am given time off to attend to my studies and my family.

Nombulelo had similar hopes “Although we get days off for our studies, we are aware that taking time off when there are deadlines is not possible, yet these studies do add value to the work that we do.”

Tamara, expressed her feelings about the various roles that women play and also her anger at the double standards applied even when women do manage, against the odds, to establish a balance between work and home life.

Our studies are mostly at post graduate level, and most of us came into the industry with our degrees and some even with postgrad degrees. For example, if you are in finance, most of us were chartered accountants when we entered the industry like the chemical engineers. What we are doing now is post graduate studies, Honours for a few, more Masters and MBAs which

is heavy if you are doing it part time and have a very responsible job, and in a leadership role, and with that our family commitments, it can become too much at times... Then you do all this, and you still don't get easily promoted and passed up for a man who does not even have these qualifications and skills.

As the term "balance" suggests, the idea is that a balance or medium is required for both job satisfaction and home life fulfilment. If the scales are tipped in either direction, the other suffers. One problem is that this has led to the so-called "equal opportunities" discourse in the literature. In other words, policies aimed at including women in the workforce have centred around "levelling the playing field" instead of addressing the root causes of gender imbalance. As Smithson and Stokoe (2005) put it.

The language of equal opportunities typically reflects this ideal, and conveys as its main purpose the facilitation of a level playing field so that individual potentials can be realized within a system (Hughes, 2002). Equal opportunities discourse of women being the 'same as men' have, however, been criticized for silencing women: they cannot speak out about their difficulties, as this highlights their difference and their lack of suitability for the work, or need for special 'help' (148).

My participants also reflected on the fact that in their views, men should be more sensitive to the difficulties faced by women in the organisation. Babalwa was especially reflective on this matter.

For example, we almost appear weak, when we speak about women's health issues which may affect them in the workplace at certain times and some of the challenges related to it. So we keep quiet about it. It is only in the women's network that these issues are raised. It is a pity that men are not invited to these sessions or we cannot discuss these issues more openly.

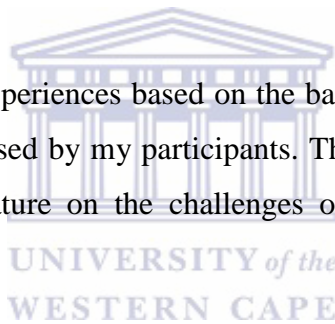
Nombulelo expressed a similar view: "You would think that it is known. Surely men they have partners, wives or girlfriends who experience these challenges."

According to the literature, in some extreme cases women have been forced to conceal their pregnancies and childbirth as reported in (Blair-Loy, 2001; Martin 1990). One of my participants mentioned exactly this phenomenon in her experience.

Carol: I know of some women, who know that they are pregnant but hide it because they don't want to be discriminated against, and then only reveal it later... The problem with this is that when women are afraid to speak about their needs even to the extent of their pregnancies, it makes it more difficult to plan. I am not sure why this is such an issue, it takes nine months to have a baby, during that time contingency planning can be made without embarking on any discriminatory practices.

This is the result of the organisational culture being predominantly male. Like many of the issues discussed in this research, the concept of gendered organisations becomes important and it is on to this topic that we move next.

In this section, many views and experiences based on the balance between studies, families and the pressures of work were expressed by my participants. The views were not uniform yet they reflect many aspects of the literature on the challenges of work/life balance which women specifically face.



4.7. Work-life balance and Travel

In the previous piece on the work/life balance and the challenges associated with it, a general perspective on the various challenges was discussed. However, another aspect of this balance emerged from my interviews, namely related to travel. Working at high levels in the Petroleum industry often involves both local and international travel. This presents a specific dimension of difficulty in the equation between balancing work and home life. Given that many of my participants chose to specifically focus on this aspect, it requires its own section as it produces its own challenges to women.

Specifically, Fatima discussed the difference between men and women in her workplace in the following way.

It is expected that it is the women's role to take care of the home and the children, so if we are working long hours, it is something that we need to organize...whereas with men, especially those who are married and with children, their wives take care of the family and children...We are then measured against the men who have a similar status, married with children, and expected to perform at the same level, whilst we perform multiple roles. There are no other working options which accommodate the multiple role that women have. For example, men can travel easier when it is required because their wives are at home with the children.

One of the other research participants, from a different oil company, Babalwa, had similar reflections to those of Fatima:

I can do more at home. When I work from home, there is more flexibility. This kind of working option will also accommodate my studies. I will be able to *travel* much easier to the university and for work, if I had a flexible working option.

Surprisingly, many studies on work-life balance neglect gender. For instance, as reported by Emslie and Hunt (2009: 152) “[o]ne example is Clark’s (2000) work-family border theory that aims to explain how people ‘manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance’ (p. 750).” However, as previously mentioned, the petroleum industry has a marked male organisational culture. This comes to the fore especially with relation to gender roles and work-life balance. One of my participants cited a “double standard for men” when it comes to working hours, flexibility and travel. Issues of childcare especially relevant with relation to this double standard (see next section). “Compared to married men with children, women advance more slowly in organizations (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy 1994)” (Ruderman et al., 2002: 369). Yet the ability to travel for work is a distinct advantage in this industry. As Carol affirmed, even though she was single with no children, that “travelling once a month locally, was a bit taxing, but she realized that to get ahead in this industry, that it came with the job”.

In the last few decades, women wanting to advance had few options of accessing internal training, which often meant after hours work such as assignments and additional travel etc. Naturally, such activities would take away some of the time with their families and generally involve travelling.

In many cases, development opportunities required more academic studies which can also be intensive and time consuming. As one of my participants, Fatima, noted again, “the travelling and heavy work pressure interrupts my time with my children and overall family life”. In a more extreme instance, one of the participants, Asanda from another oil company, said “I had to make a huge sacrifice and leave my husband and family for a period of over a year while on assignment in another country”.

Another participant, Thuli, from yet a different oil company was also given a very prestigious international assignment and she was also the first woman to hold such a position, said that “I missed being away from my family and friends for such a long period. Also the cultural differences made this kind of long term international assignments quite challenging”.

Such travel added more pressure, as for most women in these multiple roles (see next subsection), it has become extremely difficult to continue in this manner if the employer did not try to accommodate their needs. In addition, the whole issue about child care facilities has been a major challenge and much discussed in the literature (see White 2001, Diaz & Rodriguez-Chamussy 2013, Overseas Development Institute Report 2016). Although related, this will be discussed in the next section.

After the birth of her first child, Felicity started to question her role and career choices. Specifically, she said “[w]hen I had my son, at the time, I kept asking myself: Was it the industry or me? I was also that time trying to build my credibility”. Again, the balance between building credibility and devotion to family seem to be at odds.

The research participants of this study have worked in areas such as finance, strategic management, procurement, logistics and occupied top management positions in which critical decisions were

made and thus many of their challenges are relevant to a larger debate concerning work-life balance in industry. Thus, many of their experiences lie at the intersection of other fields or industries in which these skills are used. Some more specific issues related to the difficulties of establishing a balance between work and other aspects of life in the oil industry are beyond the scope of the present work. For instance, the potentially unique challenges faced by women on the off shore oil rigs are not included in my study. Nevertheless, most of the women interviewed had to regularly travel locally and for a few women, internationally for long periods at a time, and this impacted on them and their families.

Thus, for women in the oil industry, travel added another dimension to the already challenging work life balance issues discussed in the literature. My research has brought this dimension to the fore as the voices of the women in my study were expressed around this issue.

4.8 Lack of child care facilities

A number of research participants raised the problem of lack of child care facilities in relation to the work/life balance topic. For the research participants with children, child-care facilities at the workplace would have meant less travelling often at very early times in the mornings and in peak traffic, and having their children close by would definitely have relieved some of these pressures.

One of my participants, Tamara, mentioned a curious incident of policy change with relation to the issue of child care facilities at her company.

Our company used to be okay about children coming to the offices after school to wait for their mothers, but now it is not allowed anymore. I am not sure why this has happened. I asked if there were perhaps dangerous or hazardous substances that could be harmful to them, and [someone] responded that there were none. This was purely in the office environment.

Inexplicable changes like these can serve to make life difficult for women in this industry. Fatima had an appreciation for issues surrounding childcare despite her situation being somewhat different,

I was fortunate that I had family that looked after my children when they were very young, so I cannot imagine what it must be like to drop very young children off at a crèche early in the

morning and collect them late in the afternoon. I think that a lot of women and men with children would be more at ease if their children are close by and they can check on them. For the children it would be very comforting to be able to see their parents during the day.

Babalwa had specific problems with transport: “Our roads are so full, we really have a huge traffic congestion problem, and it is becoming so dangerous. Imagine we are on the road with our small children taking them in my case in the opposite direction to my work. It would have been much better if we made one journey.”

As my participants mentioned, one of the more common and challenging obstacles for women in this industry is the lack of childcare facilities. While this was not discussed in much depth in the interviews, as my focus was primarily the challenge of race and gender in advancement in a male dominated environment, it certainly was an issue which women feel strongly enough about to mention independently. Only two of the participants had children under the age of five, but three of the other women interviewed, had children over that age, and even for them an after-school facility at the workplace would have been beneficial.

Thandaza: I sometimes have to leave early, just to be in time to collect my child from the after care, they close earlier than the other after care facilities. It would have been great if we had one at our work. In some instances, when I have extra work, I have to take my child home and then his father takes care of him, but then I go back to work.

Nombulelo suggested “these are the things that we have to fight for in the women’s networks.” Thus, the women in my study felt very strongly about this issue.

This shift or new policy is not particular to the petroleum industry, or in one of the petroleum companies mentioned in the interview, it is a standard policy in most organisations. The question is where do the children of women in senior management go after school if the school is not in the same area as their parents? This has implications for transport and home care which becomes another challenge. Aftercare facilities would have addressed this issue.

Carol supported the idea of childcare to such an extent that she sympathised with women particularly in the South African context “I don’t have children, but with the high crime rate, it is essential to know that your children are safe”. This suggests that childcare is a significant enough issue that even women who are not directly affected would like to see changes made to benefit those who are.

Felicity had a similar perspective in her interview “If our companies had after care, we would have that peace of mind to know that they are safe, and near us, and I know that I would have worked much better knowing that my children are safe and close to me”.

Osborn and Kleiner (2005: 24) report on the discriminatory practices and policies of the oil industry. They attribute much of this to the culture of the organisation.

“The oil industry has faced many problems with discriminatory behaviour to its ethnic and female employees in the past. In fact, it holds a “macho industry” perception among general public opinion. In order to overcome this perception from maintaining a reality, corporations operating in the oil industry should take the necessary precautions above and beyond the laws to avoid such discriminatory behaviour that has cost the industry millions of dollars and emotional stress to its employees.”

The case of childcare is one in which these companies can go “above and beyond the laws” to prevent discriminatory and undue stress of female employees.

The need for women to balance their work and personal lives, especially when they have children, becomes quite stressful (as discussed in previous sections). In a few instances if it is possible, they opt for part-time employment (which one of the research participants chose). The information that I gauged from the research participants did not clearly give an indication if this was possible for everyone who applied. I could not confirm the policy related to part-time employment as I received no response from the human resource departments whom I contacted at the time.

Childcare has been on the feminist agenda for as long as women joined the labour force, and is more significant for women in the corporate sector who work long hours in male-dominated

environments. A substantial amount of information and literature is available on this topic and it is still something gender networks and policy formulation should be created for.

Thuli believed that this issue should and is something which needs to be addressed by women's networks. However, she noted the difficulty with a particular interpretation of addressing these kinds of issues in women's networks which was very intriguing.

Our women's network was working on a policy which included childcare, the only problem with these policies is that they insert these 'issues' which everyone then sees as a special gender or women's issue and it is then not taken seriously or implemented, rather than write the policies with all these issues in mind so that it is not an afterthought or special consideration.

The Lack of childcare facilities is a significant challenge in the Petroleum industry according to most of my participants. The strength of this issue was brought out by the urgency with which my research participants attempted to bring this to my attention and put these issues on the agenda even if it was not specifically asked in the questions I presented to them. Most of the women felt that onsite childcare facilities would lift the burden of traffic, transport problems and safety concerns.

4.9 Facilities for women in the workplace

Much of the conversation thus far has been about very high positions in organisations, but in many cases, the issues women face is at a very basic level. For instance, one of the research participants said in her interview that during her 20-year tenure in the petroleum industry, she has witnessed many changes including the relatively recent development of facilities for women. One would assume that basic amenities such as toilets for women would be a given in any organisation, but the lack of such facilities is evidence of the uphill struggle women face.

Leanne, one of the research participants from one of the major oil companies described the industry when she started in the following way,

When I started 20 years ago, there were very few women in my organisation. I worked at night. One of the things that we had to do to go to the bathroom was to get the key from one of the men. This may have been quite difficult as women have different needs at different times and the point was that there were no facilities for women at that time.

It seems that men held the keys to the success and the bathroom. However, since then, according to most of the women interviewed, there has been a major improvement in the petroleum industries in terms of facilities for women. My research does not extend to women working on oil rigs or who are doing shift work however.

Carol added that in her company, through the establishment of women's networks, "there are even breast-feeding facilities for women now". This is marked progress from the lack of bathrooms to breast-feeding facilities.



Flexible working options vs Flexi-time

In most of the interviews, the research participants said that it was up to the discretion of the managers to grant flexible working hours. Research participants from three different oil companies, Renata, Fatima and Tamara, defined flexible working hours in this way respectively, "if you arrive an hour early, you can leave an hour early and vice versa", "It also depends on the trust of your superiors in terms of your work and if they trust you as a person, then you can ask for this" and "There is also flexi-time with lunch time, you can either have it earlier in the day, or later in the day". This was what most of the research participants understood as flexi-time. In a few of the oil companies, as Tamara explained, "there is an understanding for mothers whose children are sick, her phone will always be on, and that she would respond, should the call from the office come through, unless it is a medical emergency that we experience, then we do not have to respond". In another oil company, the use of technological communication systems such as *Lync* is used when staff need to work from home. Leanne said that "I sign on and off using *Lync* and when we have meetings we use SKYPE sometimes or teleconferencing." Although as Babalwa mentioned that

this system came with a caveat “you should be able to respond within minutes otherwise you would not be trusted to work from home again.”

The request for different working options appeared to be something that could only be obtained if the women were working for a long period for the company. Leanne, for example, in her interview said, “I am now working in a 2/3 capacity after giving birth to my second child...I would like to devote more time to my family, I could negotiate 2/3 although it is not across the board”. Thandaza mentioned that “in some specialised areas of work, you can arrange your time. For example, if you have a 24-hour shift work, this is less likely, but in projects it is possible.” Felicity said that she had Fridays off, “I worked 80% but I had to ask for two years before that to make this happen.” Felicity was also at the top level of management. Babalwa, on the other hand, said that “it was not possible for me to even make this request as my manager was against women working in an oil company”. Thus, the experiences with flexible working hours were varied.

It appears that having the option to have different working hours is quite difficult to attain. A contributing factor is that this is dependent on the area in which you work. For the research participants interviewed in finance, different working options were something that they would welcome, especially women with children. Tamara’s expressed reservations at the situation with relation to remote accessibility in asking the question “Why do we have the communication technology if we don’t use it?” Fortunately, in three of the oil companies, there is the option to work one day at home, but with certain conditions according to my participants. For instance, there is an expectation that there should be a response time no longer than 30 minutes for all work related issues.

As one of the participants, Thuli, put it,

I think that we need to look at a completely different way of understanding what flexi-time is, or better still, do some research and look at what other companies are doing. There must be other working options, like maybe a half day off midweek, or a day off every second week.

Thandaza added further “I don’t think that there is anyone of us who only works a forty hour week, we always go way over the forty hours, but it’s not right, our families suffer.”⁹

The idea of flexible working hours for women in the Petroleum industry was something that almost all of my participants reflected on. The experiences differed in some cases, across different companies and management levels, but on the whole there was overwhelming support for the possibility of more flexibility in working hours and remote accessibility.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the multiple roles that women are expected to fulfil in both work and home life. With relation to this, many of my participants felt a sense of overwhelming pressure and even guilt for not being “there” for their families. The data showed that the notion of work-life balance goes far beyond merely juggling family life and work life, and includes studies, travel and other factors.

The discussion moved toward other roles and stereotypes, besides the “mother” role, that women are often forced to display in the workplace. There were mixed reactions to this phenomenon among my participants. Some of them saw these roles as resources to achieving success and others saw them as traps which insulted their qualifications and actual job competencies.

Lastly, the question of flexi-time and alternative working structures were discussed and the women’s views on how these structures could ameliorate the difficulties related to work-life balance came out strongly in favour.

⁹ One of the possible recommendations that could be considered would be to start a consultative forum for women which look at different working options and taking into consideration the different areas of work and which links it directly with the human resource practices. In this way, policies developed for women with different needs could be implemented, rather than to accommodate women in existing policies, which may only benefit a few women. It would also eliminate the need for management, which in many instances are men, to apply their discretion which may be biased.

Chapter 5. Support structures for women

5.1. Introduction: Women's networks and initiatives

In this chapter I explore the topics of women's networks and initiatives from the perspectives of my participants. For most of the research participants in my study, the women's networks and initiatives were places where they could obtain information and network with other women. As noted on many occasions in the previous sections, these networks went beyond the scope of merely exchanging information and touched on policy changes and the expression of frustrations with the male dominated environment that still exists in the industry.

The women's networks in the petroleum companies which were included in my study were for the most part informal although it was during working hours. The networks that were more formal in structure included programmes such as mentoring and coaching, as well as discussions on pertinent issues. The difference is described by Felicity in her experience as "the way in which our women's forum is made up is a bit of both, informal and formal, so in the formal there is more of a focus on work related issues, and with the informal which is mostly external, we get to engage with other companies and not necessarily oil companies".

Babalwa described her experience with these networks as follows: "In our company, our women's forum focusses on women's health and other issues related to women, and we have guest speakers and celebrate women's events". Another research participant, Asanda, said that "our women's initiative was very structured and formal, its more about HR matters and we looked at women's advancement in the company, but now with the restructuring I am not sure what's happening with it." Thuli also had the latter experience, "Our Human Resources department deals with most of the legislative issues and our focus is mainly external when it comes to compliance and transformation". Thus, each company has their own set of procedures and issues on the agenda for these forums.

The intended focus for this section is a discussion of the perception of these networks and initiatives, especially at senior management level.

Most of the research participants with the exception of one, said that the programmes/courses that they attended were really outstanding and served as tools for further development and advancement, and that made an impact on them, whether it was to give them more confidence, skills etc. Leanne, Thandaza, Fatima and Tamara, in separate interviews responded that the programmes were of a high standard, Tamara said specifically that “We don’t have any advancement strategies for women, but our programmes for women are excellent”. Fatima mentioned that “The programmes/courses are external and internal, either way, it is really beneficial for the workplace.”

On the whole, the impressions seemed very positive. For instance, Felicity had very positive comments regarding these initiatives “I found it so useful for my learning to have mentors and coaches as part of the women’s initiatives, there were so much exchange of ideas and support, it was really great.” Moefeeda echoed this sentiment “I think that we have a very progressive women’s network, we engage with other companies on issues that are relevant for women. In this way an exchange of ideas and networking happens”.

Given that my study is about the experiences of women in the oil industry, it was important to mention these programmes which I will discuss in more depth subsequently. Yet other participants discussed the various women’s networks and how useful this was for networking, mentoring and coaching.

I will first, very briefly, discuss the women’s networks, in response to the question of advancement strategies and later the programmes and courses which had a great impact on the research participants who attended these courses, but did still not serve as an advancement strategy.

5.2 Formal Women’s Networks

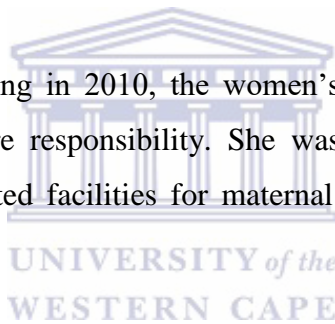
Networking emerged as a significant factor involved in the perceived success of women in the oil industry. Many of my participants were hopeful but critical of the formal women’s networks on offer in their industry. Formal networks are those that are over created across different companies with institutionalised structures, membership fees and agendas. Moefeeda, had this to say about

the women's network in her company, "it would be great if our network was linked to and could address some of the formal employment equity initiatives, and human resource policies." She went on to say "It should be more substantial, and monitor and track the progress of women". Her view addressed the perceived lack of support which women provide for one another as opposed to men. "The women's networks need another vehicle, as women do not always support each other, even in these networks".

Thandaza, from the same company, said that, "it's good to have OYA [a particular network] ...one of the oil companies, women's networks. We are made aware of health and social issues, but we should speed up the networking, it doesn't help you to advance your career though".

Another research participant, Carol, who is a leader of one of the women's networks said that,

Initially before the restructuring in 2010, the women's network changed from a cultural perspective and took on more responsibility. She was proud that the network included LGBTBI issues and had created facilities for maternal needs for women, for example to express their breast milk.



Babalwa said that "it is sponsored by one of the General Managers. The GM, reports to the CEO, So, they do things like awareness raising, events, taking visitors around and they organize events for them. The activities need to be supported, there is a committee...due to my work pressure, I cannot always attend the meetings."

Another research participant, Fatima, from a different oil company said that they have a women's forum. It promotes women, but suggested that I speak to the transformation manager to learn more about it. Despite several emails and telephonic attempts, there was no response.

Tamara, however, added another aspect of some of these networks, especially those of a more international nature. She said "Our women's networks are run by our overseas company, in the United Kingdom. I tried to read some of the information, but it gets busy here. If something is that remote rather than right here where you can participate, it becomes a challenge."

One of my research participants, who preferred her comments not to be attributed to her, was more negative concerning initiatives which were not locally based, “I don’t trust these women’s networks. I need to be physically engaged and see the people who organise it and know their agenda”.

The attitudes and impressions of the research participants were not homogenous as with many issues. However, many of the participants found merit in women’s networks and expressed caution about those networks which do not have local physical relatability.

5.3 Informal Networks

There are other informal networks which include women who attended the *Sunrise programme*, an internal coaching course for women. Informal networks are offered on a more local and immediate basis; they tend to be smaller and more intimate initiatives. In contrast to the formal networks, many participants felt as though the informal networks provided much needed support. Felicity, one of the research participants in top management, reflected on her experience with the women’s network in her company,

Ours is a mentoring circle, run by men and women who mentor, you learn a lot. Women start to support each other. All the structures are there and women can connect with one another. I think that men are missing out.

Babalwa emphasised the importance of informal networks.

Informal networks are sometimes where the real issues emerge, so we have a kind of support and networking called ‘snaking’ and this is just for women to keep up to date with the latest information, provide support. So let’s say we have a presentation to do in a meeting where we

might get some opposition or we know of a few males who would just criticize before we can even explain our concept, we use snaking to gain support and prepare our agenda.

Thus, informal networks present an opportunity to gauge support for ideas and garner advice on how to confront the male dominance of particular settings. As Moefeeda has said in her interviews with me, “It is always important to prepare well before a meeting, especially if you want buy in from some people who you know are difficult to convince”. Informal networks can provide an opportunity through “snaking” and other methods to prepare well for these meetings.

Asanda, supported this notion and added her voice to the experience of being “attacked” by men during meetings and other such gatherings.

At a senior management level this is almost a given, you cannot go into any forum whether it be a strategic meeting or anything else without preparing well. However, there is still a little bit of the ‘old boys club’ thinking when it comes to women and this is more apparent in meetings where they need to assert themselves. So we strategize beforehand. It makes it difficult for the men to attack us collectively as they sometimes do in meetings especially.



All of these experiences seemed positive and advantageous for women. However, Nombulelo brought out a limitation with informal networks. “Only problem with this [networking] is that there are so few women in top management, so with all the strategizing and caucusing we, in most cases, especially in our company, end up at times as the only woman in these meetings”.

I have linked the informal women’s initiatives and the internal programmes together because the internal programmes/customised courses are sometimes as a result of the internal forums and women’s networks where the gaps in learning or information is discovered.

The informal initiatives as Nombulelo said, “ is also a way of discussing issues which arise, which can be placed on the agenda much faster than in a formal network where forward planning takes place and consultation is needed to change or insert other topics earlier”.

And Fatima added of the relationship between informal and formal initiatives “that the one can feed into the other. This makes things sometimes more relevant, you hearing from the women themselves, if the General Manager coordinates it, it is usually his agenda that is followed.”

Moefeeda, cautioned that “These initiatives, such as informal initiatives, can also exist alongside a formal structure. A separation between what is entirely workplace issues and what are other issues, for example health awareness and topic such as this, although relevant and which can affect the workplace, can be placed in the one category”.

In an article in the *Harvard Business Review* 2013, it is posited that informal networks play an important role as a resource for women in leadership positions. It further notes that due to structural differences in women and men’s roles in the organization, along with the differences in career prospects, and in addition to the tendency to engage with the same gender, results in these networks could be of lesser value.

Asanda was insightful in her characterisation of the reverse situation involving men in saying that “men support men, after all when a promotion happens. It is in most instances a man signing the contract for another man, even if it is for a junior level man rather than a woman”.

Two of the research participants from different oil companies had different perspectives about the women’s informal networks and initiatives. Tamara, said that “sometimes in an open forum like that there may be repercussions for something that was raised”, and that she would not totally trust these initiatives. While Renata, said in her response to my question about advancement strategies that “people come in with their qualifications, and that the courses were too expensive”. She also mentioned that it was up to the managing director, but that “luckily he is very progressive”. Special emphasis on the concept of *luck* here and not design. So if you are lucky to have a progressive managing director then these initiatives are prioritised, if not they are not.

In conclusion, most of the research participants expressed various aspects of the role and effectiveness of informal networks. The salient aspect of these networks were that they provided an opportunity to counteract the male dominance of certain professional settings by allowing women to garner support for ideas and initiatives. However, as we noted by other participants, the low numbers of women at this level presented a problem for the full efficacy of these networks.

5.4 Women's programmes and courses

The courses or women's programmes mentioned in the interviews are offered through various institutions such as SAPIA (South African Petroleum Association), as well as internal customized programmes, such as the *Sunshine* programme, and courses attached to some of the Graduate Business schools and universities in South Africa. SAPIA conducted an evaluation of one of the leadership courses in 2015 and one of their recommendations was to add petroleum specific topics to the course. As a response to my enquiry about the courses mentioned in this section, SAPIA provided me with the outline and objective of these courses which I will list later in this section.

In an attempt to advance women, leadership courses are offered to middle and senior managers in almost all of the major oil companies in South Africa. These are external and internal courses which I will outline in this section which provide leadership, coaching, mentoring skills and technical knowledge related to the industry.

In terms of the SAPIA programmes, several initiatives emerged in terms of transformation in the petroleum industry, (see SAPIA presentation), however it was difficult to ascertain from the SAPIA presentation how many women graduated and more importantly, how many women, as a result of the leadership courses, occupy senior and top management positions. As one of the research participants, Nombulelo noted,

My current organisation is fairly small but from the industry perspective there are no mechanism in place that I believe are effective to advance women...The industry has initiatives like Women in leadership courses but many of the candidates don't end up in leadership positions.

Moefeeda also had experience with this course and expressed the same questions as Nombulelo, "I think that an evaluation was conducted on the Women in Leadership programme, I am not sure what the outcome of that was. It would be interesting to see how many women who attended the course actually ended up in senior management positions."

The SAPIA (South African Petroleum Industry Association) programme brochures which I received included two programmes: SAPIA's Programme (Advanced Certificate Programme in Management for Oil and Gas) 2017 which "focuses on real business challenges that Senior Managers face within the petroleum industry and uses a multi-modal approach to learning where we combine feedback, Integrated Group Projects, classroom experiences and methodologies, etc. To create a rich experience for candidates". The SAPIA WLP Programme (Women in Leadership) 2017, which "focuses on real business challenges that Senior Managers face within the petroleum industry and uses a multi-modal approach to learning, combining feedback, and classroom based learnings to create a diverse experience for candidates".

Tamara and Babalwa spoke with much enthusiasm about the leadership programme for women 'Conversations that matter'. Both of them attended the course and they are from two different oil companies.

Tamara: "I did Conversations that matter. I think that this was such an excellent course, very powerful. Taught me a lot and gave me the motivation to apply for higher positions in my company"

Babalwa: "It is a leadership coaching for women, with the intention to advance women or develop skills laterally...Run by a coaching person, and by women...Combination of senior and middle management...Was a clear pathing...use programme, mastery, coach, one on one and personal life...really inspirational!"

The Leadership in oil programme drew comments from the women such as this one by one of my participants.

Carol: It opened a lot of doors for me. Around 80% of the presenters were women which made a huge difference. In addition, they were excellent and highly skilled. The programme is meant to transform the industry. So how can we equip women to become leaders?

The 'women in oil' programme, according to Felicity, was "not as powerful as the leadership in oil programme, but it included valuable components such as finance, marketing, project management, networking and practical skills." She added that "There are exciting programmes in the oil industry. I travelled to Mozambique". Moefeda mentioned that "the leadership in oil

programme was very powerful, it covered all the critical areas of the petroleum industry”. Asanda added of the same programme that “this programme prepared me for my overseas assignments”.

These reflections touched on the differences in the experiences of what some of the women’s companies were willing to contribute fiscally toward their development. Babalwa said that her company sent her on an amazing executive leadership development programme at an American University in Cairo. “I discovered that a leader is not someone who can do everything. Where I can develop, or someone else in my team can do it, it was incredibly freeing, very illuminating”.

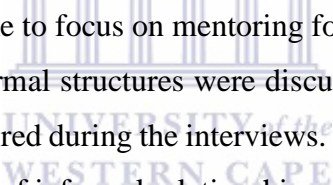
Fatima said, “my company paid for my Master’s degree in Economics. They walk the talk”. Moefeeda did not unfortunately share this experience, “Coming into the industry as a chemical engineer and completing the Leadership in oil programme, and later an MBA, I wanted to continue to coaching as this formed a major component of my job, and which I was passionate about. My company did not want to pay for my studies which was unfortunate, but I enrolled and I am studying business coaching and am learning so much. I am not disappointed that I did this”.

The women that she worked with had high regard for her and said that her mentoring and coaching was something that she excelled at, and that they all benefitted from. One participant said this about her: “As I have come to realise, the women in this industry, do not give up easily. She started with the business coaching and is paying for it herself.” This is a sentiment I shared of many of the women in my study. Their resilience was clear in the face of various obstacles.

5.5. An Interesting Discussion on Mentoring and Informal Networking

In response to questions about transformation in the oil industry, advancement of women as leaders and the women's experiences in the industry generally, aspects related to mentoring, coaching and networking were viewed as critical by the research participants. Many of the views expressed have far-reaching relevance for women working in other industries dominated by men.

The concepts of coaching and mentoring are related and generally refer to the formal and informal practice of support within organisations from an individual or group structure. Although there are no objective definitions of these concepts, the difference between the two concepts is that mentoring is usually conducted within organisations and on a more informal, individual basis while coaching is often done by outside service providers.¹⁰



In this small subsection, I would like to focus on mentoring for two main reasons. The first is that coaching mechanisms and more formal structures were discussed previously. The second reason is that something fascinating transpired during the interviews. In addition, some of the participants specifically emphasised the benefit of informal relationships of support. The relevant relationship here is the “mentor-mentee” dynamic which involves among other things individual support, advice and strategies for coping with work-life balance, advancement and other work related issues.

As Moefeeda explained:

There are aspects to mentoring and coaching which are personal to that person, the one you are coaching, and sometimes you realise that some of the personal issues that people are struggling with are proving to be barriers in their work. A generic mentoring and coaching programme does not always take this into account.

¹⁰ In some organisations coaching is provided internally as well. However, this still tends to be offered as formal structured events.

Felicity: For me with the mentoring and coaching aspect of programmes, it sometimes gave me the affirmation in terms of my work that I needed. Being in a high pressured environment and wanting always to do your best, you sometimes get ‘bogged down’ by small setbacks. Coaching does give you that perspective that you need, and if your mentor is good, they will focus on your achievements, the things that you do or did well.

The literature supports the role of mentoring in organisations.

“Mentoring is an important career development mechanism for both men and women, and a recent study shows that both male and female protégés valued the psychosocial functions such as acceptance, friendship, coaching and counselling rather more than the career development functions of sponsorship and exposure provider (Singh et al., 2002) (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003: 304).

Vinnicombe and Singh (2003) go on to argue that “women only” mentoring and coaching schemes are necessary to combat the “old boys club” and male networking structures are prevalent in many companies. Thandaza’s experiences suggest the importance of female support similarly.

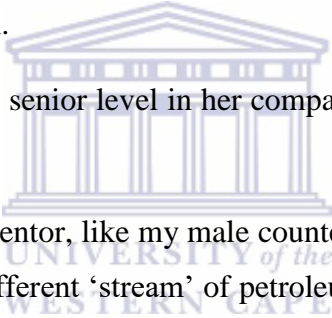
I had so much opposition from one of my male managers that it was important to network with other women, and gain their support...To find other ways, other than my own to deal with issues. It is good to be in a formal networking structure, but sometimes due to work pressures, one can’t always attend the meetings, activities or events, so it is good to network with other women in the organisation, so that they know what one is up against, and we can support each other.

Babalwa supported this perception,

At one stage, when I took over from a man, I was scrutinized and always reminded how he did things. I needed to convince the women in my team to give me an opportunity to prove myself and share my way of doing things. This was not always easy, as some of these women were older women and had worked with this man for years. The coaching really helped to cross this hurdle, and bring the team with me.

There was also a perceived need to receive gender sensitive mentoring. As the lived experiences of women in various male dominated industries are in some respects similar, it is natural to assume that women would have a unique role to play in the mentoring of other women. In a radical paper by Baileys, Scott and Sealey-Ruiz (2015), it is argued that black women, due to their life experiences, have a distinctive mentoring style. Drawing from Womanism and the black liberation movement, the experiences of black women is seen as providing a unique insight and understanding. Their qualitative study, involving Black female academics in the US, claimed the following: “In this study on Black women in the academy, we are suggesting that the mentoring that Black women give and receive is a form of literacy that is particularly understood and executed by them” (Baileys et al. 2015). By “forms of literacy” they mean particular understandings of the world through particular experiences. Whether or not we agree with this conclusion, the idea that women are uniquely placed to mentor other women seems to be valid and supports the importance of taking an intersectional approach.

Again, another participant at a very senior level in her company described her views on the need for mentoring in this way,



I would have liked to have a mentor, like my male counterpart did, just to bounce things off. For example, I come from a different ‘stream’ of petroleum, and it would have been great to have a mentor who was knowledgeable about the particular ‘stream’ to check with.... Having a demanding, high pressured job, and still having to do a lot of research took a lot of my time.

The interesting occurrence happened between three different participants whom I shall refer to as participant 1, 2 and 3 to further ensure that no one can be identified.

Participant 1 discussed the other side of the mentoring relationship as the mentor in a beautiful way.

I worked with a woman once who was a really brilliant engineer, she didn’t seem to have much confidence in herself. As the manager at the time, it was my role to encourage support, and make her believe in herself in her abilities...This is one of the things that drive me, being part of the growth of someone else, especially women who don’t realize their own

potential... When I left the place of work, I am proud to say that she was flourishing, reaching great heights.

There is a lot of literature on the benefits of the mentee in organisations etc., but very little is discussed with relation to the positive effects on the mentors themselves. To my surprise, participant 1's excellent role as a mentor was attested to by two other participants in my study.

In the interviews of participant 2 and 3, they spoke about participant 1. They praised her for her commitment, dedication and as one of them put it, "taking the team along with her and moving them forward".

The other mentioned that "She [participant 1] is an example of the kind of role models which we need. We should see more of them at top management levels."

The positive impression of participant 1 was repeated by two further research participants from different oil companies, one of whom said,

We got so used to seeing men at the top. We are not happy with it, but we get used to it, until a woman like [participant 1] comes along and shows that a more facilitative, holistic and participatory leadership is possible with the same results and even better at times.

Participant 1 is continuing with her studies in coaching and mentoring.¹¹

¹¹ During our discussions, my participants came up with most of the solutions. One of the things that they suggested was that women network with other women and men internally to support them and to share knowledge and information. One of the research participants who was at the receiving end of ongoing aggressive behaviour stated she deliberately looked for men or women in senior management who could 'vouch for her' for the work ethic and quality.

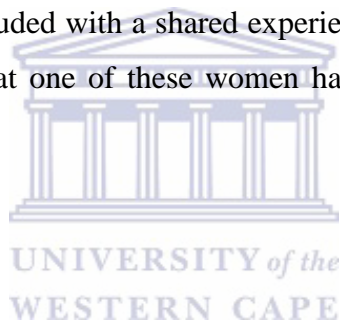
In other words, surround yourself (where possible) with people in the organisation who know your worth. This is also beneficial when you need a promotion. The other thing is to belong to the women's networks so that other women are aware of what is going on.

In addition to this, networking externally is also a good thing, perhaps not with colleagues in the different companies because of the competitive nature of the industry, but with other women in other industries, some which are similar to yours and other industries as well. This may produce different solutions and innovative ideas for your own situation.

Summary

This chapter delved into the networking tools of the petroleum industry. My research participants drew distinctions between the formal programmes offered by overarching bodies such as SAPIA and the informal company specific tools at their disposal for informal networking needs. They were largely supportive of the latter and believed that the former needs to be improved upon. However, many difficulties were expressed and challenged and the views of my participants were mixed on the usefulness of certain kinds of networking forums, especially of the international variety.

One formal structure which received high praise was the coaching and mentoring aspects of networking. My section was concluded with a shared experience between three participants who highlighted the significant role that one of these women had played in their careers and lives through her mentoring abilities.



Chapter 6: Labyrinths and Leaders

6.1 Discrimination, Recruitment and Selection

In my study, my participants spoke about what they perceived as discrepancies in some of the processes in at least six petroleum companies in terms of recruitment and selection. Two of the participants mentioned that their respective companies preferred external expatriates and white males for the top positions, rather than South Africans even for the local branches.

Tamara, at mid-to-senior level management levels said that

“Top management is in most instances recruited from outside. At our company they took a white male, 54 from Gauteng, with 26 year’s work experience, but not a Chartered Accountant. I asked if this qualification was needed in the job that he had to perform, and she responded by saying that it was in finance and the people that reported to him including her were all Chartered Accountants.”

Fatima expressed a similar sentiment in her interview, and said that there was a similar pattern of recruitment and selection processes at her company.

“They still seem to favour white Afrikaner men, with lesser qualifications and skills, including fewer years of relevant work experience above more experienced qualified women...It is a kind of racial favouritism, I believe.”

The experiences were numerous, as another research participant mentioned,

A white male who was given the job with only a diploma, with only a few years’ industry experience and is paid R350 000, above myself, a Chartered accountant with a Master’s degree in finance and years of experience in a which requires high level decision making and projection.

She went on to say

I am not sure if there is any compliance to the current legislation or how they do this, or get away with it. Who monitors these situations?’ said another research participant from another petro company. If they couldn’t find a white male, they would take expatriates and people from other countries above South Africans who have moved through the ranks of the organisation.

This phenomenon is discussed at length in Nkomo (2015). She describes two aspects of the Apartheid culture of corporations in South Africa aimed at reinstating the gender and race hierarchy that allows white men to occupy the top positions.

The everyday practices and cultures of too many companies are not conducive to attracting, developing and retaining existing black and women talent. Organisational cultures are not neutral spaces and are typically formed and shaped by the values of the dominant group. Research has documented two particular phenomena that can slow the advancement of black people and women: opportunity hoarding and social closure (Nkomo, 2015: 3).

“Opportunity hoarding” is precisely the phenomenon which my research participants have been experienced. It happens when the dominant group in an organisation keeps top positions and opportunities for other members of that group. Given that women, of all races, are generally not part of this group, they suffer when it comes to recruitment and also promotion opportunities.

“Social closure” on the other hand, is when tricks of the trade, not always visible in job specifications, are kept to members of the dominant group. The lack of information sharing results in a disadvantage for minority groups as they are left out of the loop when it comes to performing certain job functions. Or they make easily avoidable mistakes. In previous sections, the practice of coaching and mentoring can help alleviate this culture of social closure.

Again, Tamara, referenced an experience related to both opportunity hoarding and social closure.

I had to do an assessment. Did very well. Had the relevant experience and qualifications and yet I was passed up on two occasions for men, both not having the requisite skills and knowledge. The feedback I received from the Human Resources department and my manager

at the time was very confusing which made it difficult for me to know what or which area to improve on. Also there is little recourse if one is not satisfied with the outcome”.

In terms of promotion, one of my research participants was passed over for a position below her current level.

I was in level 5. To get to level 4...Level 4 manager left who was a male. I applied for his job, which incidentally I trained him in one of the critical aspects of the job that he did not have the knowledge and skills for. Yet, I was not successful, another male was selected.

These accounts suggest a pervasive picture of discrimination on the basis of gender and race. They also indicate the culture of gendered organisations and the subtle (certainly not invisible) mechanisms used to recruit, promote and support the dominant group in the oil industry. Nevertheless, the women interviewed in my study, have achieved many successes and promotions. This suggests that like in a labyrinth, the pathway to success is difficult, complex and frustrating, but many women value the chance to achieve success and manage to find innovative and creative ways of getting there.

One of the issues, pointed out by Eagly and Carli, concerning the inadequacy of the glass ceiling idea is that “it erroneously implies that women have equal access to entry level positions” (2007: 7). Before women can even travel through the challenges to fight for senior management, they have to get in. Both at the entry level and the higher levels, recruitment and selection processes bar many women from inclusion. In many cases, these procedures contravene employment equity and remind us of the “old boys club” aspects of industries such as Petroleum. This naturally leads us into a question of whether my participants believed that they could become the CEO of their various companies.

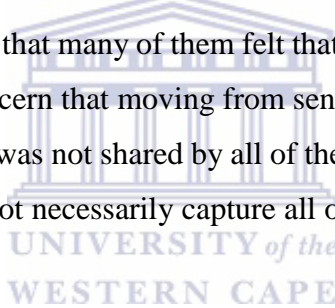
6.2. Can you be the CEO?

After all the interview questions and discussions, I asked the research participants, the question, “Can you be the CEO if you wanted to be?” It was a question that took some of the research participants by surprise. For others, it made them pause and think and for three women it was a definite yes. In other cases, there was uncertainty.

Moefeeda's response to the question was, "You could say after my international assignment and the position I held there, which one could say was at the level of the CEO here, I could easily do the job of CEO here, but there are lots of politics. So one is never certain that it will happen".

In this section, the factors preventing women from reaching top positions in the organisation will be explored. An important datum emerged from the interviews I conducted with many of the women in this study. One thing was that many of these women had achieved top management positions, and the other matter was that although they believed that there were implicit and explicit challenges, they did think such progress was possible for other women in the industry.

During the interview process, five out of the 12 women interviewed, were in top management positions, and my sense of this was that many of them felt that other women could also reach their level. Although they expressed concern that moving from senior management to top management was extremely difficult. This view was not shared by all of the participants however, and suggests that even an extended theory will not necessarily capture all of the diverse experiences of women in senior management.



Felicity responded to the question of can you be the CEO by saying:

Yes, it was a possibility. My position at the time, was one position below the CEO. There was also a woman in a top level position in the oil company that I worked for and she was practically running the company. She was considered by both male and female, including the board members, to be highly effective. She resigned when the company relocated to Johannesburg.

Asanda also had a positive response although she was guarded about the "politics" involved. This sentiment about politics was expressed before and is often seen as an obstacle given that women are either not interested in male politics or not well-versed in it.

The company that I am with complies with the Employment Equity legislation. We also had a very effective women's initiative which was formalized to an extent. They monitored the advancement of women...We have quite a number of women in top positions, and in

boardroom, and that this was definitely a possibility. I could be the CEO, as my international assignments and national exposure along with years of experience in the petroleum industry along with my skills and qualifications would make me a candidate for CEO. Unlike other oil companies, the number of women in top level positions would support the motion if I wished to aspire to be the CEO. There was only one problem, the politics at that level was extreme, and this was the arena in which the politicians played a role. So nothing is a surety.

Tamara and Fatima, however, when asked the question in their respective interviews, had categorically negative responses. The former said “It would first go to Afrikaner males, then expatriates or foreign nationals. We are last on the list, if at all. Also, we have to reach general manager level first, which is in itself a major advancement, how many women are there in the industry even at that level?”

One participant, Fatima, said that:

There is definitely a glass ceiling. Few women can reach senior and top management positions, but it is a slow process...The processes are complex, just trying to advance from one position to another can be difficult and fraught with many obstacles which are sometimes quite subtle and complex...the selection and recruitment process is still problematic and favour white males, even in the face of Employment equity.”

While another participant Tamara shared similar views, she also added that other dimensions in the recruitment process also play a role is the appointment of expats and the “moving of the goalposts”. “Moving the goalposts”, “complex processes” and “subtle obstacles” point to the need to analyse the experiences of these women in a more nuanced manner than the traditional glass ceiling approach which assumes invisible barriers that prevent all women from reaching the top.

The experiences of my participants are mixed and thus in contrast to the popular and familiar “glass ceiling” metaphor often used in research conducted on women’s leadership and progress in the workplace. I will argue that based the experiences of the women interviewed in this study, the more appropriate analogy is the “labyrinth” of Early and Carli (2007). Again, this metaphor is not

perfect and did not cover all the experiences of my participants, some of whom believed that there was an invisible barrier preventing women from rising to the very top.

In fact, many of the research participants said that even reaching the level before CEO, that of general manager, was precarious. A number of reasons were given, although there was no definitive reason why women found it difficult to reach even the general manager level. Again, I believe that this is in line with the notion of a labyrinth developed by Feminist thinkers recently. A myriad of obstacles was discussed during the interviews, which included gender parity, human resource recruitment, selection processes, the favouring of males and male dominance in the boardroom to more subtle hindrances such as the women selecting men instead of other women for promotion or selection and hostile working environment. But the central question is whether or not there is a perception that women in the oil industry in South Africa can reach the very top of their respective organisations.

Felicity in her interview referred to a “psychological glass ceiling” when she was asked the question, “Can you be the CEO?” When probed about this, she said that one of the women rose to top management in her company and managed a large section of the operations of the company very well. So women can reach top management level. Again, talk of a psychological glass ceiling seems more in line with the labyrinth symbol of Early and Carli (2007).

Her exact response was that “Because there are so few women in senior management, out of that only one or two women reach the very top management levels”. The word “psychological” here seems to indicate that with mental strength, women can rise to the top, again not the idea of a “glass ceiling” which suggested an actual (invisible) institutional barrier to promotion.

The labyrinth of leadership points to a range of issues both overt and subtle in gendered organisations. In Eagly and Carli (2007: 3) the metaphor of a glass ceiling is replaced with that of a labyrinth.

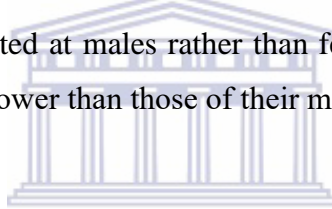
“A better metaphor for what confronts women in their professional endeavours is the labyrinth. It’s an image with a long and varied history in ancient Greece, India, Nepal, native North and South America, medieval Europe, and elsewhere. As a contemporary symbol, it conveys the idea of a complex journey toward a goal worth striving for. Passage through a labyrinth is not simple

or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead".

In their book, they go on to describe seven ways in which the "glass ceiling" metaphor is misleading, three of which are especially significant for my study. The idea of an invisible barrier at some high level of organisation through which women cannot rise, i.e. glass ceiling, suggests that there is some specific level of obstruction that this barrier is always hard to see or confront and that women cannot find creative solutions to breaking it.

However, Nombulelo had a slightly opposing view on whether women can progress even with creative solutions.

The industry is still very much male-dominated and women are not taken seriously as men. And promotions are still directed at males rather than females, regardless of how hard you work... Women's salaries are lower than those of their male counterparts.



This experience does not fit entirely with the labyrinth idea as there will be barriers to the success of women no matter what they do according to Nombulelo. The labyrinth metaphor represents the complex nature of the hindrances women face in reaching top management. But it also has a positive message, i.e. that there are pathways to achieving the goal of promotion and women have the tools to succeed. It is clear that some of my participants did not share this optimism.

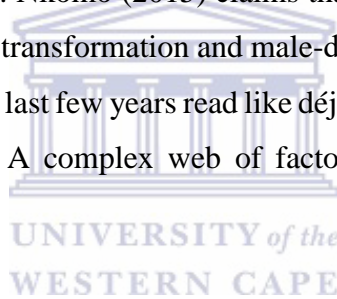
The idea is that unlike the glass ceiling which implies an invisible barrier to senior management, the pathways to success do exist for women but they are extremely complex and require perseverance, diligence and awareness. This metaphor supposedly aims to capture why there are some women who do make it to these positions but their number is few. But as I have shown, this metaphor is even limited in scope and does not capture all of the experiences women in top management encounter.

A sentiment expressed by Tamara and Asanda, was "You can count the women." which suggests that there are women who have overcome the challenges. Thus, the goal is to better understand the

barriers that women face in reaching senior management such as prejudice, resistance to women's leadership, issues with leadership style (what people prefer in women's leadership vs. what is needed) and family demands.

This view is supported by Oakley (2000: 321) who, states "Auster (1993), points out, that the glass ceiling is not one ceiling or wall in one spot, but rather many varied and pervasive forms of gender bias that occur frequently in both overt and covert ways." Oakley examines a number of reasons for why there are so few women at the CEO level in corporations. She suggests that promotion policies, training, and compensation all contribute to this problem.¹²

To South African readers familiar with the Apartheid system, the idea of a labyrinth might ring especially true. There were certain cases in which people of colour could rise beyond circumscribed positions. These cases were, however, rare and usually involved complex negotiation and strategy to achieve. Nkomo (2015) claims that new subtle barriers have replaced these Apartheid laws in preventing transformation and male-dominance. "The pace is so slow that employment equity reports over the last few years read like *déjà vu*. Why is this? Research suggests there is not a single explanation. A complex web of factors contributes to the slow pace of transformation."



Summary

In this chapter, the focus was on perceptions of upward mobility within organisations, particularly within male-dominated environments. While some participants felt that taking the top job was within reach for women. Others believed more obstacles to be in their ways, some hidden some more apparent. Much of what the women said corresponded to the literature of hidden barriers within a metaphorical maze or labyrinth of leadership (as opposed to the "glass ceiling" notion). This idea expands on the glass ceiling concept while leaving the possibility of success at the very top management level open, a claim which I think better captures the views of my participants.

¹² Of course, on the other side are definite clear barriers to women's inclusion. For instance, Bolton (2015) discusses "glass walls" or actual barriers in certain countries in which women require permission from their husbands to work and "occupational segregation" prevents them from employment in high-paying roles.

7. Conclusion

The motivation for my study emerged out of my own history in the non-governmental and governmental sectors, my role as a single mother and a woman of colour. I reflected on my interest in women's leadership which started in a women's organisation, an NGO based in Cape Town which served the rural and urban areas of two provinces, the Western Cape and Eastern Province. This experience of leadership leads into the government sector as well, where the structures were very rigid, and male-hierarchy firmly in place and respected. As my knowledge and understanding of women's leadership grew through the academy and work experience with women, I wanted to explore women's leadership in another sector, a section often lauded for its successes in gender equality. Through my work experience in progressive NGOs mainly focused on women's empowerment at the grassroots level, I started to see the immense barriers and challenges that women face in the workplace.

In many instances, particularly in South Africa, where the Apartheid system segregated and discriminated against people on the basis of mainly race, gender oppression was not explicitly discussed or researched. Nevertheless, the experiences of women of colour presented additional challenges at the time and the experiences of many of my participants suggested an intersectional approach was necessary.

In this study, I employed a qualitative feminist methodology to explore some of the experiences of a small group of women in a male dominated industry. I took a closer look at the obstacles that women encounter, such as lack of child care facilities, work-life balance issues and obstacles from senior to top management. My data showed that many of the women were optimistic of their chances of rising to the very top but they were also guarded as they understood the various obstacles related to hiring, recruitment and selection processes which still represented male favouritism.

A feminist intersectional analysis allows for a more nuanced approach to the experiences of women in industries such as this one. The issue of diversity is of great importance and difficulties in acknowledging and understanding all the aspects and nuances that come into play in diversity is

discussed. I draw on the women's diverse experiences to show how important it is to understand divisions structured around class and race. I show that that women's experiences are not homogenous nor are they predictable along purely racial or gender lines. Some women in my study had very positive support from superiors who were male and not of the same race, others experienced difficulties when their immediate superiors were of a similar cultural background. I showed how overt and invisible barriers, such as the glass ceiling are experienced by my participants. However, some of my participants were already in senior management positions and believed that promotion to CEO for instance was possible. The complexity of success suggested a labyrinth metaphor was more appropriate for these women than the glass ceiling.

In addition to this, the notion that the roles that women fulfill in the home are also be transposed into the workplace. For instance, in my data analysis, my interviews with the research participants revealed that some of the women felt as though despite fulfilling critical roles in the organisation, they needed to do tasks which were typical of the nurturing and organising in the domestic setting.

The issue of women of colour, with particular reference to Black women lagging far behind their White, Coloured and Indian counterparts was also addressed, this despite the progressive legislation implemented in the workplace. One of the questions in the interviews refers to the Employment Equity Act of 1987 as a means of advancing women of colour. As women are part of the designated group as per the Constitution of 1996, it is almost a given that women would be in a better position twenty years later. However, this is not the case, and I discuss the barriers which prevent women from reaching senior and top level management. A few women are progressing, but given the large numbers of women in the workforce the numbers of women moving up are few.

In order to gain a better understanding of industries such as the petroleum industry, different leadership models are discussed. As this industry is still very male dominated, it is interesting to see the kinds of leadership styles women have to employ in order to survive, and work in this industry.

The difference between male and female leadership is important as the notion of a purely women's leadership model needed to be delineated. The notion of women needing to emulate the male traits of leadership came up in the interviews, where women felt that this was the only type of leadership that they were familiar with as most of the women entered the petroleum industry as their first work experience. In my data analysis, I investigated whether the experiences of my participants suggested an "authentic leadership" model was appropriate for women in the oil industries. For others, it was more a question of survival and a need to be respected, and for a few women who were able to explore other ways of leading it proved to be a worthwhile experience as it included the mentoring and coaching of other women.

My research methodology also detailed the theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality and the importance of acknowledging all the aspects of oppression in terms of not only race and gender, but also socio-economic, ethnic, language, age, educational backgrounds, etc.

My data analysis covered various feminist motifs and theories which emerged from my discussions with the women. I discussed leadership, the Queen-bee syndrome, survival and success strategies employed by women. My overarching narrative was framed by the idea of the Petroleum industry not representing a glass ceiling but a labyrinth to success (Early and Carli 2007). The idea is that the path to success is precarious, hindering and confusing but there are ways of emerging from the many obstacles placed in front of women and the women represented in my study are evidence of the fact that progress and achievement are possible. However, the labyrinth metaphor also helps to explain why so few women are at the top level of organisations as these strategies of success are not commonly known and in some cases individually determined.

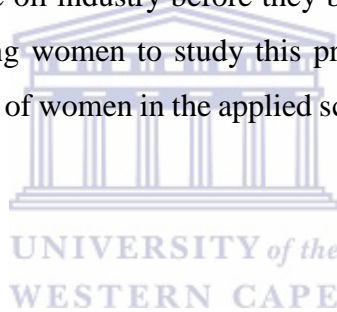
Of course, one limitation of qualitative research of this sort is that determinate conclusions cannot be drawn and recommendations are based on perceptions and experiences (see Appendix 1). However, on the other hand, quantitative research often hides or neglects the qualitative dimension of women's experiences within the structures and can therefore not present the full picture for the sake of understanding or progress.

It is my hope that women in other industries can learn from the experiences and successes of the remarkable women I interviewed within one of the much pervasively masculine organisational structures in society.

Future Work

This study leaves open a number of avenues for future research. One uncharted aspect involves a more detailed comparison between women's perceptions within the oil industry and other related engineering industries. What lessons can be applied to other kinds of gendered organisations and what special challenges do they face?

Another possible route for further study involves women in science. Many of the participants of this study reflected on the path before entering the field. More work can be done on grooming female engineers for success in the oil industry before they become members of the work-force. Then of course, encouraging young women to study this profession in the first place can also benefit from a better understanding of women in the applied sciences and industries such as the oil industry.



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Annexure A: Consent form



University of the Western Cape

Faculty of Arts

Women's and Gender Studies Programme

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535

South Africa



CONSENT FORM

Project: An exploration of women's experiences in top management in the Petroleum industry in the Cape Town

Researcher: Anthea Nefdt

Supervisor: Professor Lindsay Clowes

This small scale qualitative project aims to explore challenges and experiences women face when entering senior management positions in the Petroleum Industry in Cape Town. The main objective of the study is to explore how gender (and other relevant subject positions) impacts on women's career development and opportunities. I use a qualitative feminist methodological framework and plan to conduct a total of 8 semi-structured interviews with women employed in upper management positions in the 8 oil companies in the greater Western Cape area. A thematic data analysis will then be utilised to interpret the data.

The research study is for academic purposes and any data will be used toward the completion of the degree (unless otherwise stated).

The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. In order to guarantee confidentiality of the interview sessions, only the researcher and her supervisor

Copies: Each participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated version of the consent form and information sheet. A copy of these forms will be filed and kept in a secure location for research purposes only.



Researcher:

Anthea Nefdt
Department of Women's
and Gender Studies,
University of the Western
Cape.

Supervisor:

Professor Lindsay
Clowes
Department of
Women's and Gender
Studies,
University of the
Western Cape.

HOD:

Prof. Lindsay Clowes
Department of
Women and Gender
Studies,
University of the
Western Cape.

or Interview

Topic of research: An exploration of women's experiences in senior management in the Petroleum industry in the Western Cape

Questions for participants

Past Experience and History

1. What did you want to be when you were little /growing up?
2. Could you tell me about your career history?
3. How did you end up here?
4. What were your biggest accomplishments/achievements in terms of getting here?
5. How important has gender / race been in getting to where you are?

Present

6. How long have you been in this position?
7. What are your main duties?
8. Does the current legislation assist in advancing women?
9. Are there internal mechanisms in your organization to advance women? If so, what kind of mechanisms are they?
10. Do you see yourself contributing to the strategic direction of the company?
11. What do you believe are the main challenges or obstacles White / Black/ Coloured / Indian women face in this industry?
12. Do you perceive any advantages of being Black / Coloured / White/ Indian in this field?

Future

13. Where do you see yourself in 5 /10 years' time?
14. What do you think will be the challenges in getting there?
15. How do you anticipate addressing those challenges (if any)?

16. Do you think women employ different leadership styles to men? If so, could you describe the difference? If not, why not?
17. How important do you think it is to have more women in senior leadership positions?
18. Do you have anything which you want to add which we did not cover?
19. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for taking the time to be part of this research.

Annexure C-Department of Energy



Transformation in
the Petroleum Indus

Annexure D-SAPIA



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