

**Effects of ethnicity on Indian women as a minority in South African
organisations.**

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ABSTRACT

The lived experiences of ethnic minority groups are as relevant for discussion today as ever before. This is as a result of organisations moving toward a global approach to business that requires leaders from all ethnic groups to be included in the conversation and have their voices heard. This study attempts to better understand the relationship between ethnicity and the effect that being in the minority has on Indian women leaders in South Africa today. Extant literature has not gone far enough to provide a holistic understanding of the factors that affect Indian women leaders in South African organisations, and their lived experiences as a minority. The aim of this research is to explore the barriers that Indian women face based on their ethnicity, in South African corporates.

A qualitative, exploratory research approach was adopted in this study to present novel insight. So as to ensure an improved understanding of this phenomenon, a total of 18 semi-structured, in-depth interviews was conducted with Indian women leaders in South African organisations.

With respect to challenges that Indian women face as a minority in the workplace, this research study documented several barriers faced by Indian women, namely, marginalisation, lack of advocacy, and being overlooked for promotion and workplace opportunities. Cultural upbringing was found to influence Indian women both in their professional and private lives. This research study found that Indian woman believe their husbands to hinder their progress, holding them back from achieving success in their careers. The findings of this study contribute to the extant literature on minority groups in the workplace in the South African context.

KEYWORDS

Minority groups, Indian women leaders, intersectionality, lived experiences, social identity.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the research topic exploring the effects of ethnicity on Indian women leaders in South Africa. This chapter outlines the relationship that exists between women leaders, and the effects on women being the member of a minority group. The introduction outlines the research problem, the purpose as well as the practical and theoretical value of the research.

1.2 Background to the research problem

Research on gender and race have historically portrayed women as part of homogeneous groups, prioritising the experiences of white women, where a gap exists in the research on the lived experiences of women of alternative racial background (McGee 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Tomlinson et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2018; Hussein, 2022). There are many different collective terms used to describe ethnicity and what this term entails. Ethnicity is a term commonly used to combine people that come from different backgrounds (Finney et al. 2019). Ethnicity focuses on skin colour, human and social capital and income as also results of how identities are racialised (Peters et al. 2019; Clark et al. 2019). The experiences and treatment of people are often based on these factors where we note that one group of people will be treated differently to another based on skin colour, culture, and social backgrounds (Clark et al. 2019). It is within the confinements of this treatment that we note the biasedness that exists in organisations that affect individuals (Finney et al. 2019).

The experiences of white women are different to the lived experiences of Indian women as an ethnic minority in the workplace, where the unique experiences women of colour, and in particular their views, are often overlooked (McGee, 2018). The lived experiences of ethnic minority women are a core component of these women's individualism, as it provides the lens through which they see themselves, giving them their sense of belonging, and defining the value that these minority women bring to a work environment (Jayachandran, 2021). When women from minority ethnic groups are made to feel inferior in the workplace, this impacts their ability to perform and to show up as their authentic selves. This is discussed by intersectionality theory, which notes that ethnic minority groups encompass social identities to which people belong, and the role that these

different identities impact the manner in which people enter into and exist in the workplace (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989).

As a theory that originated with ethnic minority feminists, intersectionality theory addresses how social identities and oppression intersect with one another, and this is relevant to understanding the effects on ethnic women in their workplace (Jayachandran, 2021). Intersectionality identifies the multiple factors that make up identity that include but are not limited to race, gender, class (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). The link of the intersectionality theory to ethnic women is noted, where in organisations, women with complex power and privileged networks may have an advantage over ethnic minority women who lack the same access, which places them at a disadvantage (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989).

The disadvantages experiences by ethnic women in minority groups discussed in the previous chapter are also termed as “ethnic penalties” (Tomlinson et al., 2019). Ethnic penalties are referred to as the disadvantages or negative consequences that groups from ethnic minority backgrounds experience, and these experiences can be both their personal and work environments. These penalties are noted in different forms, such as in the lack of social or economic opportunities that are given to ethnic women in the minority (Tomlinson et al., 2019). When women that are a minority experience these penalties, it places them at a disadvantage in their professional lives, and this means that these women are not as readily able to contribute or add value in organisations as representative of their true potential (Zwysen, 2020).

With the shift of organisations moving toward diversity and expanding into global markets, the need for diversity and inclusion at all levels is essential for success (Chated, 2020). This means that women from ethnic minority groups are deserving of a seat at boardroom tables, where there is equal representation of people from different ethnic groups, and not only the need for employees to look the same. This study argues that we require the voices of these ethnic women at all levels in an organisation (Howells, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to focus on Indian women leaders as a minority in organisation, and to unpack their lived experiences (Gradin, 2018).

1.3 Theoretical Relevance of the Study

The impact of race and gender have been grounded in early psychological studies, which explain that there is a history of masculine agency that overpowers that of feminine

communion in the workplace (Rosette et al., 2018). The agency of women in the workplace cannot be overstated, as agency provides a platform for women to make decisions that are supported in the workplace and enables women to have control over their decisions and actions in an environment that includes them, as opposed to being excluded based on gender, race, or ethnicity (Gabriel, 2018). When agency is provided to ethnic women that are part of the minority, it provides these women with the confidence to build and integrate in the workplace, which is important for building a corporate culture that is inclusive as opposed to exclusive (Gabriel, 2018).

The manner in which individuals identify themselves in the workplace has gained much currency in the studies of organisations and leadership, as it argues that identity work is the central point of intersectionality linked to racio-ethnicity and gender. For this reason the relevance of intersectionality and creating an inclusive work environment for ethnic women ought not be secondary, but primary (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). Ethnic women have a voice and need to be heard in the workplace. The fact that they are off a different ethnic background should not be the reason that they are excluded from the proverbial conversation (Howells, 2018).

By conducting empirical research on the link between race-ethnicity, and the impact of this on leadership, the study can lead to insight on how people understand the role and practices of women of ethnic minority in the domain of leadership. This is done by drawing on race-ethnicity as an important element of both leading people, and being led (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

1.4 Business Rationale of the study

1.4.1 Visibility of minority women

An ideal leader is still considered to be a white heterosexual man. For this reason, pressure is placed on Black women to perform in ways that conform to this rubric, rather than being present as leaders that are representative of their authentic selves (Love et al., 2018; Harris-Perry, 2011). If the innate drive of individuals is that of distinctiveness, the need to feel unique, important, and relevant (Georgiadou & Sayed, 2021), then the tension to balance the lack of visibility of Black women as a minority group and the need to belong will be heightened to feel included and represented in organisations (McCluney et al., 2019; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Recent studies have explored occupations where women from minority groups enter workspaces where they need to adapt and alter their individualism to be visible, for example, newly qualified nurses in ethnic minority groups choose to assimilate, by changing how they represent themselves in a recruitment process to fit certain norms in comparison to students that are not part of the minority (Hussein, 2022; Hammond et al. 2017). This study provides context for the desperate need of these women to fit in and to be acknowledged, even altering their looks and behaviour to become accepted into the workplace, which makes the process of recruitment exhausting in the extreme for ethnic women minority groups (Hussein, 2022; Hammond et al. 2017). Why should women of a minority ethnic group change who they fundamentally are, and that which they represent as individuals, in order to achieve acceptance? Ethnicity and minority groups must be embraced and provided with equal opportunities in the recruitment and workplaces. The voices of these women need to be heard, and adding these to the conversation provides a different perspective that organisations require in order to be transformative, not only in culture, but in representation (Howells, 2018).

Indian women who are in the minority in the workplace should not have to but are compelled to alter themselves for workplace recognition and acceptance which is concerning as this reflects the gap that exists for ethnic minority groups in the workplace (Carrim, 2018). Women of ethnic minority groups must feel visible and accepted without such imperatives.

1.4.2 The need for research on gender and ethnicity

Research on gender and ethnicity remain marginal in the field of leadership, therefore the research on Indian women as a minority in the South African workplace will provide insight into the perceptions of the lived experiences of these women as a minority group (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Race and gender in the workplace are not independent of one another, these constructs are interlinked, as research on women often does not speak to gender without considering race (Rosette et al., 2018).

When discussing race and gender, which specifically focus on minority groups, intersectionality theory bases this discussion on an individual's race, where gender can be described as dimensions with certain commonalities, an example of this is that of being Black and female, where one is not considered more important than the other when studying intersectionality. It is the combination of both race and gender that provides context into the experiences of Black minority women in the workplace (Rosette et al.,

2018). Therefore, this study considers the lived experiences of both leaders that are women and Indian, as an ethnic minority in a South African landscape deserving of study (Carrim, 2018).

Carrim (2018) provides, to this end, context into the lived experiences of Indian women in South Africa who choose to consciously mimic their male manager's traits, reasoning that these will assist them in their career progression. Given that these traits were in complete contradiction to what is accepted as the behaviour of an Indian women, these women felt as though as they had no alternative but to adopt the characteristics of their male colleagues to gain visibility and respect in the workplace (Carrim, 2018). The rationale to focus on Indian women in the workplace is based on this internal conflict that has caused Indian women to adopt their male manager's traits, traits which stand in direct conflict with their Indian culture, and thereby forcing Indian women to adopt the personas of others; this leads to extreme internal conflict of self-concept (Georgiadou & Syed, 2021).

1.5 Purpose Statement

The relevance of the study is to provide context and understanding of the lived experiences of Indian women leaders, as a minority group in corporate South Africa.

1.6 Contribution of the Study

The study of Indian women leaders in South Africa will provide insight into the experiences of this minority groups, and more broadly, provide lessons on minority group inclusion within corporate South Africa. The study will provide some context as to the experiences being part of this particular minority, and what this entails in the working life of leaders in South African organisations and will unpack these experiences by asking questions of Indian women leaders in South African organisations, so as to share their views on ethnicity and the role that this has played in their leadership. By making ethnicity a key variable in exploring its association to leadership, this will promote a new agenda for empirical research (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). The study of ethnicity on leaders poses the following questions:

- What is the understanding of leadership and race-ethnicity?
- How can leadership practices be created and drawn from based on the understanding of race-ethnicity?

- Is race-ethnicity used by leaders on their own leaders and or followers, and how does this translate in their own social identities? (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

There is a dearth of research on gender, race, and ethnicity (Peters et al. 2019). This chapter provides context into the perceived views of what an ideal worker looks like, and the impact of this trope on Indian women as a minority in the workplace. The contribution of this study will provide an understanding into the experiences of minority Indian women leaders.

This chapter provided a view of the research problem and highlights the significance of addressing this problem. The next chapter will look at the literature that informs and supports this research thesis.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the research that has been conducted regarding the effects of ethnicity on Indian women leaders in South African organisations. The chapter starts off with a discussion on social identity and intersectionality theory and explains these theories and their role on minority women. This discussion is followed by the construct of understanding women in the workplace as the purpose of this research to study the effects of ethnicity on Indian women as a minority in the workplace. Thereafter, the literature will focus on the relationship of factors that influence the lived experiences of women that are in the minority in the workplace, and the role that ethnicity has on these experiences. Recent studies have begun exploring the experiences of women that are a minority in the workplace, since the existing literature on Indian women in a South African context is limited.

The researcher incorporated literature related to other minority ethnic women groups, as well as women in organisations in other countries to overcome the dearth of literature relevant to Indian women and women as a minority in South African organisations specifically. The research focuses on Indian women as a minority in the workplace, and the literature reviewed focuses on the experiences of women as minorities. The relationship between the constructs of ethnicity and minority is discussed in detail, under the subsections entitled minority women need to show up differently and Indian women as a minority group in South Africa. The literature also expands on the body of research discussing the need for women to show up differently in the workplace and the reasons why there is a need for minority women to mimic the characteristics of others for a sense of belonging.

The chapter concludes with a discussion described from a research lens, and a summary is provided of the findings from the literature review which informs the questions that have been posed in Chapter 3.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory describes the relationship that exists between an individual's sense of belonging to a group and the negative or positive feelings that are associated with the group (Hogg, 2021). The group can be either cultural, collective, or social. According to

social identity theory, people simplify their environments by categorising their social world and placing people into different groups. We tend to look at these groups for a positive sense of belonging and membership (Opara et al., 2020). Individuals that place themselves in certain social groups often look to these ingroups more positively than other groups, also known as “outgroups”. This results in the outgroups being viewed with prejudice, where ultimately, a level of discrimination that forms toward those excluded results from the attachment to social groups (Hogg et al., 2012). The level of discrimination and prejudice marginalises minority groups, as individuals in these marginalised and minority groups struggle to find positive self-definition in society, and in some cases, feel ostracised for being part of the minority (Holvino, 2010).

A sense of not belonging and not being part of a given social group is often found largely in the workplace, where individuals find themselves surrounded by individuals who look the same, make up the majority of the work environment. These environments are not set up to accommodate individuals that are not part of the relevant majority identity (Bruskin, 2018). Social identity theory mobilises the concepts of fluid identities that serve to fit into these social norms in the working environment, noting that identification and one’s own identity are not static terms, but are becoming ever more fluid, where identity is shaped through the social interactions and context into which one is required to fit (Kele et al., 2022). Individuals that form part of minority groups tend to adopt different identity management strategies to ensure that they are able to cope with being socially accepted in relevant environments, where the social interactions and situational factors that individuals face have an influence over their identity formation and presentation. These environments often do not breed social acceptance (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). In the literature discussion on social identity theory and the impact that it has on marginalised and minority groups, there is often a link created between social identity theory and intersectionality when discussing the impacts of the social norms associated with minority groups, and the way in which these theories coincide with the framework of ethnic minority groups (Ospina & Su, 2009).

Research conducted by Love et al. (2015) discusses these links by noting that there exists a framework that combines intersectionality, social identity theory, and the cognitive intergroup theory, noting that this trifecta presents a clear link between the unequal power that exists within dominant groups, versus that of minority groups. This is evident in the workplace from a career progression and culture perspective (Love et al., 2015). This

study used social identity and intersectionality theory to demonstrate how Black women as a minority group navigate their lived experiences regarding race and gender identifications that are given to them by society, and how they are perceived, based on their ethnicity, where the research concludes that there is a concern regarding the social injustices that exists toward Black women as a minority group. This indicates that there is a need for research in the study of minority groups, as well as the lived experiences of other ethnic female groups (Jayachandran, 2021). The section below discusses intersectionality theory and how this theory comes to bear on women that are part of a minority in the workplace.

2.3 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality contributes to the studies of women (Love et al., 2018), as it provides a view of the theories that are linked to social identities that females adopt (Love et al., 2018). Intersectionality highlights the disadvantages that individuals experience in comparison to the experience of those individuals who are part of the majority groups (Etherington et al., 2020). From the lens of the workplace, employees often feel pressurised to feel seen and heard for their uniqueness, whilst having the added pressure to have a sense of belonging in the workplace, and amongst their peers, to a large extent this sense of belonging and need to be heard and seen is not in the control of individuals in the workplace, particularly not its minorities (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Intersectionality highlights that individuals are viewed from within different frames, which have a direct effect on how they are treated in the workplace (Carrim, 2016).

To succeed in the workplace, women as a minority are dependent on the role of managers and upper-level managers to mentor and sponsor them in the advancement of their careers (McGee, 2018). Without these sponsors women tend to struggle with career progression and are often overlooked when there are opportunities in the workplace. The structures in the workplace places further distance between career progression and growth for minority women, as these structures increase the invisibility of minority women and their lived experiences in the roles that they fulfill, therefore the increased focus on the required agency for women and the role of sponsors and mentors is important, as this allows women that are part of the minority and that have never been given opportunities the visibility that is required to progress their careers (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019).

Intersectionality has been used to describe the different ways in which discrimination and oppression impacts individuals. This describes intersectionality as encompassing both a

theoretical and empirical approach in emphasising several kinds of difference (Love et al., 2018). It is important to note that intersectionality refers to an individual's experience, and not that of the experiences of a social group that the individual may belong to (Warner, 2008). What one person may experience may be very different to that of another in the same social group. It is noted that intersectionality is based on the struggle that different women of colour face when on the receiving end of discrimination and bias (Rosette et al., 2018). Women are susceptible where it becomes the norm rather than the exception, leading to complexes associated with being marginalised (Atewologun, 2018).

Intersectionality outlines the struggle that women of colour face in the workplace, which often leads to women in minority groups having to adopt identities that defy who they in fact are. Ethnic women that are part of a minority tend to adopt and mimic the behaviours of majority colleagues seen as the "ideal employee", often white male or females (Tomlinson et al., 2019). Historically, African Black women in South Africa were enslaved workers who often were sexual property, and subsequently, African Black women filled subservient low-paying roles such as domestic workers (Harris-Perry, 2011). A lack of transformation in this regard remains prevalent (Sales et al., 2020). Wilkins-Yel et al. (2019) posits that women who are in the minority in the workplace need to take back their power and authority, and this can only be achieved by changing the narrative on how these women are viewed in the workplace at all levels of the organisation, where agency ought to be returned to these women (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). Dominant perceptions can only be changed when the people around ethnic minority women are ready to change these perceptions and allow these women to enter the conversation (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019). This is done through support structures that promote agency.

In a research study conducted by McCluney & Rabelo (2019) the discussion on intersectionality and the conditions of visibility are explained, as there are different types of visibility given to ethnic women in the workplace, where these levels of visibility affect the manner in which these women show up in the workplace. The levels of visibility are noted as precarious visibility, invisibility, hypervisibility, and partial visibility (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Precarious visibility describes a total lack of sense of belonging where uniqueness is not seen or valued, and where the lack of distinctiveness and sense of belonging for ethnic minority women in the workplace makes these women feel as if they do not belong to the organisation due to the status afforded them. Invisibility refers to the low levels of distinctiveness associated with high levels of belongingness, achieved by

these employees in order to fit into the organisation at the expense of their own personal values (Rosette et al., 2018). Invisibility is discussed in this instance referring to the inability of organisations to see these ethnic women of colour for their unique experiences, and rather erroneously assuming that all ethnic women of colour have the same lived experiences (Kele et al., 2021). Hypervisibility is discussed in the research where employees who are part of the minority group feel like “insiders” within the organisation (Shore et al., 2011). However, for minority ethnic women, a high sense of distinctiveness and belongingness results in hypervisibility or “othering”, as they are not seen as part of the norm (Hussein, 2022). In a study conducted on Black women leaders as a minority in the workplace, the study found that errors made by these women were perceived as the women being less capable leaders than White people or Black men, and that these women were criticised harshly compared to White people and Black men (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). The last form of visibility discussed as part of intersectionality theory is based on partial visibility, which states that an ethnic women’s race and gender could result in an increase in their distinctiveness, but race and gender may also erode the ability of organisations to see their individual contributions beyond these constructs (Tomlinson et al., 2019). In a recent research study conducted on female scientists in the workplace, it was found that Black women scientists reported that they had been mistaken for janitor workers, whilst White women scientists did not experience the same (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

The different roles of visibility or even the lack thereof when researching ethnic women of a minority reflects that organisations do not accept these women into their structures, or support them based on their experiences (Hussein, 2022). It is clear from the literature shared on intersectionality and the effects that this has on ethnic women as a minority in the workplace, where there are clear gaps in the equality between one group of women and another (Sales et al., 2020).

2.4 Women in the workplace

Research conducted on the perspectives of women in the workplace has increased during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Due to the increasing disparity in career progression and acceptance of women in the workplace, there is a link between the experiences of women in the workplace and the lack of equality that exists amongst women more generally (Kato & Kodama, 2017). When individuals do not have a sense of belonging and are missed in the culture of the organisation, this leads to individuals disassociating

themselves from the organisation and often feeling marginalised in the workplace (Yu, 2020). The lived experiences of women in the workplace have been investigated so as to understand what these experiences are, and various social identities associated with gender, ethnicity, race, and class are interlinked to provide necessary context (Warner, 2008). By expanding on the effects of these social factors that influence the workplace experience of women, insight can be provided into the complex ways that society is burdened by rigid power relations and gender norms (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Roberts (2018) posits that emerging leaders that have been underestimated and under-resourced are remarkable when noting their journeys that have led them to their leadership. However, their sense of heaviness cannot be overlooked as their fight has been ongoing for years and continues as the lack of support for diversity and equality is of less urgency (Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

A research study conducted by Sang (2018) on Black women academics shows that ethnic minority women academics experience feelings of being marginalised and that opportunities and career progression given to White females surpass those given to Black women in the organisation. The study further expanded on this to note that the Black women academics in some instances were better qualified than their White colleagues, but that this had no effect on the recruitment process. This study was concluded by the researcher, noting the considerable degree to which Black women are overlooked as an ethnic minority (Sang, 2018).

The lack of belonging and inclusion in the workplace is not the only barriers ethnic women face, where the gender equality gap that places pressure on these women is extensive (Atewologun, 2018). This is due to the fact that the lived experiences of women in the workplace are qualitatively different to those of men (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003). The discrimination against women can be seen in many forms in the workplace, including wage gaps, exclusion from social networks, and a lack of career progression (Opera et al., 2019). These factors have role to play in the closing the equality and gender gap.

2.5 The experience of women in comparison to men

The experiences of women are different to the experiences of men, where the conversation is ongoing as to the equality that needs to be created between women and men in the workplace (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). The concept of an embedded context provides an understanding of how sociocultural factors generate the subjectivities that support an individual's capacity to think and act in keeping with their social

environment (Howells et al., 2018). Gender is best understood and examined as a socially constructed and subjective construct that is created, produced, and constituted differently across time, place, and culture (Opera et al., 2019). The experiences of men are vastly different from those of women in the workplace, and this has been researched in-depth so as to understand the nuances of this in leadership and the workplace.

Women have been noted as being token appointments in the workplace as opposed to being acknowledged for their contribution, and because of this, women have been excluded from structures and decision-making positions, and placed into roles where career progression is not evident (Hussein, 2022). When being perceived as a “token” appointment, women tend not to be taken seriously, and have to rely on members within their networks for support and guidance in navigating their way in organisations. Men on the other hand are provided with support and entry into social networks in the workplace that provide the stepping stones for success, access and agency by those around them in an organisation (Georgiadou & Syed, 2021). Agency and access are not the only factors but wage gaps also remain in place (Opera et al., 2020). According to the International Labour Organisation (2020), one out of two women are in the workplace, compared to three out of four men, leading to a disadvantage as a minority in organisations (International Labour Organisation, 2020). These additional barriers of entry experienced by women in the workplace results in the misallocation of talent and time for women (Jayachandran, 2021). Women have the ability to change the course of organisations by being included, which it is noted may directly increase GDP in developing countries (Ostry et al. 2018; Hsieh et al. 2019).

2.6 Minority women in the workplace and the need to show up differently

There is research that provides evidence that managers are influenced by unconscious bias against minority women in the workplace (Georgiadou & Syed, 2021). An example of exclusion in the workplace has been observed for African American women as a minority group who remain excluded from historical discourse and leadership literature, in comparison to African American men that are provided with opportunities for career progression, and even included in social networking groups that provide the basis for forming relationships in the workplace that result in career progression (Roberts & Mayo, 2018). There is evidence that women of ethnic minority groups are capable of providing value to an organisation and have the relevant skills and knowledge to progress in leadership positions, as evident in the role that African American women have played in

the establishment of schools and political and social movements, providing social aid in community organisations leading to social progress (Sales et al., 2020). It is necessary to address the lack of representation of women to ensure such progress (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019). In 2014, attention was given to Pakistani women doctors whereby the Medical and Dental Council limited the number of women applicants to no more than fifty percent in medical colleges in Pakistan. The council acknowledged that women made up more than eighty percent of the medical graduates but argued that because a percentage of these women chose not to continue their careers after graduating, this resulted in a shortage of doctors in the country's health sector (Acker, 2012). Women doctors in Pakistan face discrimination before even starting their careers (Javaid, 2014). In a recent research study conducted by Masood (2018) on Pakistani women doctors who choose to wear a *purdah* in the workplace, the study found that these women are seen as promoting femininity within a masculine workplace culture. In practicing their right to wear the *purdah* these women are excluded from meetings and not allowed to voice their opinions, which results in these women being shut out of advancement opportunities from the start (Masood, 2018).

The term glass ceiling is synonymous when describing the career progression of women as a minority group in the workplace in comparison to the experiences and advantages of the White male and the opportunities that are afforded to White males because of the biased view that is associated with what a leader must look like in an organisation (Yu, 2020), the term glass ceiling describes the ceiling that exists for women in the workplace and their inability to break the glass ceiling that is representative of lack of opportunities and career progression into senior and executive leadership positions (Sales et al., 2020). In contrast to the glass ceiling that is used to describe the lack of opportunity for women in the workplace, a term that emerged from the research of Hyun (2005) introduces the concept of a bamboo ceiling, referring to those factors that impede Asian women as a minority group in organisations and their consequent inability to climb the corporate ladder. The factors that were considered in this study were that of culture and structures of non-inclusivity (Hyun, 2005). The research presented important factors exemplary of the experiences of minority groups in the workplace, one of which is the size of the Asian population in the United States in contrast to their representation in the labour market at executive levels of organisations, and the findings note even less of a chance for Asian women as a minority to become executive leaders (Yu, 2020).

The lived experience of discrimination, resistance, and lack of support drive minority women in leadership roles to work harder in the workplace to assert themselves in proving that they can grow their own business or climb the corporate ladder in contrast to the challenges that these women face (Tlaiss et al., 2019). Ethnic minority women do not have many choices in shaping their careers as they have to combat their own marginalisation (Kele et al., 2021). The views of ethnic women from African American, Latin and Asian ethnicities have been researched by William (2014), who reported on the views of these women in the workplace. The research concluded intersectionality together with the experiences related to oppressions lead to results of needs, and expectations that are different problems to that of minority groups (William, 2014), this reiterates gap that exists in research on understanding not only the lived experiences of African American, Latin and Asian minority groups but also a need to focus on different minority groups in the workplace (Sales et al., 2020).

When minority groups are treated differently and have no sense of belonging or inclusion in the workplace, it is often found that these groups tend to adopt or mimic the behaviours and characteristics of their co-workers in an attempt to fit into the moulds of the organisation (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). Social identity theory explains that individuals need to feel that they are included in the social groups in which they find themselves, whether in their personal or professional lives (Bruskin, 2018). Individuals who are part of minority groups will observe the behaviours and characteristics of their colleagues who are seen to be provided with career opportunities and agency and then adopt these characteristics, which are not true to their identities. They will then fit into the environments in which they find themselves (Hogg, 2021). This behaviour is often found in the workplace, as minority groups are left with little choice but to progress and then seek alternative methods to advance in their careers. The mimicking of characteristics and behaviours are not always successful as the challenges faced by minority groups are the biasedness of workplace that is engrained in the culture of societal norms which cannot be changed by altering the manner in which ethnic groups behave or present themselves (Yu, 2020).

On the opposite end of this spectrum are the minority groups who find themselves closing off to society and shielding themselves from the realities that surround them in the workplace; there is then an alter ego that forms that is dressed in defensiveness and arrogance as a method of dealing with exclusion and disappointment in organisations (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). This behaviour impacts their abilities and skill

development, as they are viewed as problems in the workplace and often leaders do not want to invest in their growth and careers, which leads to a lack of sense of agency (McGee, 2018).

Organisations need to understand the importance of acknowledging ethnic minority groups in the workplace, as these groups enter the workplace at a growing rate, there is a need for these groups to become part of the conversation and be provided with agency in their careers (McGee, 2018). The need to invest in the leadership skills of ethnic groups is growing, as these individuals can relate to the workforce that are entering the workplace, the young individuals entering will look up to individuals who look like them for guidance and support. This can only be achieved if the growth and career progression of ethnic groups are invested in by organisations to create new leaders (Yu, 2020).

There is a lack of research on minority ethnic professional women in their lived experiences. The extant literature has included studies on women minority groups, particularly African American women, Asian and Latino women, and their lack of career progression to senior or executive leadership roles within organisations (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). The gap in the research that exists is a failure to consider the intersectionality that in organisational identities and lived experiences of ethnic professional women in the workplace other than African American, Latino and Asian women (Opara et al., 2020).

2.7 South African Indian women as a minority group in the workplace

2.7.1 History and the landscape of apartheid

Racial segregation amongst the Black, coloured and Indian categories designed for apartheid in South Africa dates back prior to the arrival of the first Europeans in Cape Town in 1652 (Gradin, 2018). Apartheid was enforced by the National Party in South Africa once it had taken office in 1948. The aim of this party was to enforce the political and social regime on the country by segregating white and non-whites with the aim of keeping all economic and political power in the hands of white citizens alone (Chantreuil & Trannoy, 2013). This segregation between whites and non-whites affected almost every possible aspect of the lives of non-whites, including work, health, transportation, education, recreation, and politics, which also meant that job reservation was meant for white workers on skilled and semi-skilled labour, and that non-whites were able to only occupy low levels of labour as they were excluded from adequate education (Wittenberg, 2014). Non-whites were ethnic groups made up of Africans, coloured and Indian groups in South Africa, and

these ethnicities were banned from receiving adequate education or job opportunities and would often fill the labour market at low level skilled jobs, which meant that these ethnic groups were placed on the backfoot in comparison to white citizens of the country (Gradin, 2018). The after-effects of apartheid are still seen today in the workplace, where the South African labour market is largely stratified by race, and where transformation has proved to be slow (Chantreuil & Trannoy, 2013). There remains a large gap between the skilled workers in the country, being dominantly white, and the lower-level work being occupied by African Black, Indian and coloured workers (Dlamini et al., 2021). Women of colour were placed in the same position to that of their male counterparts and placed under the same restrictions under apartheid. This left these women at a disadvantage over white females, as women of colour were not considered any less than children and men of colour (Jaga et al., 2018).

Indian women as an ethnic minority group were seen as “Black” and provided with the same sanctions of having to live only in a segregated part of their communities and were able to receive education that was limited to a level and standard that resulted in the limitations on job opportunities and economic progression. Indian women were assigned a specific category of citizenship and placed in segregated geographical spaces as part of the apartheid vision of world (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). As a result of this, Indian women found themselves isolated and segregated from dominant groups, which impacted their ability to find a sense of belonging in the country, and a place in society that allowed them the freedom to choose an education system that was of standard and allowed for their professional progression (Jaga et al., 2018)

2.7.2 Indian women as a minority group in the South African workplace

The aftereffects on a country that withstood the injustices of apartheid resulted in considerable injustices for non-whites; the apartheid regime placed these individuals at a disadvantage for years that outlast the regime (Abel, 2019). White people make up 9% of the population in South Africa but 16% of the workforce, and the Black population being the majority at 80% occupy 69% of the workforce; coloureds account for 11% of the workforce and Indians/Asians only 4% (Gradin, 2018). Noting that only 4% of the South African population is made up of Indians and Asians, Indian women are represented as an even smaller minority the workforce (Gradin, 2017). The underrepresentation and lack of opportunity provided to Indian women as a minority is a concern in the South African

workplace landscape, as these women face challenges in voicing their opinions and being included (Scheepers et al., 2018).

2.7.3 Indian women leaders as a minority in the workplace

A research study conducted by Carrim (2018) conducted interviews with Indian senior and top managers, where the themes that emerged from this research note that Indian women struggle with a lack of belonging in the workplace, often sandwiched between cultural values and organisational norms that exist in South African organisations (Carrim, 2018). Indian women leaders are constantly reminded of their own scarcity (Scheepers, 2018). These leaders have the need to constantly appease and prove their worth as the social norms placed on them in their personal lives place undue pressure on these women to show up as wives, mothers and homemakers, which places them in a position to have to balance the two identities, both at home and in the workplace (Carrim, 2016). The upbringing of Indian women is often associated with having to be submissive to men, wedding at an early age and bearing and raising children at a young age (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). It is then found that when Indian women enter the work environment, these social norms are ingrained in their self-identity, where they may be reticent to stand up for themselves when it comes to salary negotiations or inhabit their agency at a leadership level (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). This places these women in a constant state of in-betweenness, which is a term that refers to people of mixed race being in between positions, having to adapt constantly to fit in in the working environment, and finding themselves having to switch between identities created at work to those in their personal lives, in order to cope with the disadvantages that they face (Easthope, 2009). Indian women as an ethnic minority in the workplace have to shift between multiple identities as a result of their gender, race, and ethnicity, and tend to encounter challenges different to that of other colleagues, which results in challenges that eventually filter into their leadership styles (Hussein, 2022).

The field of leadership in South African organisations does not account for the complexities that emerge when individuals from different minority groups with difference cultural backgrounds enter the workplace, acknowledging that these individuals experience a very different culture that is presented in the workplace in comparison to groups that are in the majority or that enjoy more automatic social acceptance. It is found that there are different lived experiences of inclusion and progression (Carrim, 2018).

Indian women find themselves at a loss between white women and Black women in terms of a sense of belonging in South African organisations (Scheepers, 2018).

The limited research conducted on Indian women as an ethnic minority provides a single view on the socio norms placed on these women in a working context, there remains a gap in research on the lived experiences on Indian women leaders in South African organisations and for this reason this research study was conducted to unpack the lived experiences of Indian women in South African organisations.

2.8 Conclusion

Chapter 2 outlined the literature of research on minority groups in the workplace. The future research recommends that there is opportunity to do further research in the field of ethnic minority women and their lived experiences in the workplace and to further explore this topic by studying different ethnic minority groups considering the lived experiences of women leaders in the workplace differ. For this reason, this research study will be based on Indian women as an ethnic minority in the workplace, the focus will be on women leaders in South African organisations.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research study seeks to understand how ethnicity effects Indian women as a minority group in South African organisations. This will be done by answering three specific research questions. The questions chosen for this study were founded based on literature that was reviewed.

Research Question 1: What are the barriers that Indian senior leaders' women as an ethnic minority group experienced in organisations?

The aim of Research Question 1 is to identify the barriers that Indian women experience in organisations to understand the lived experiences of Indian women and to explore how they have overcome these barriers to achieve career progression.

Research Question 2: Do Indian women leaders feel marginalised in their organisations as a result of being an ethnic minority?

Research Question 2 aims to identify the experiences of being marginalised in their organisations as a result of being in the minority. The question will explore the reasons for being marginalised, and how this has affected their careers. This question will support the improved understanding of Indian women, and the challenges they experience in the workplace.

Research Question 3: What impact has Indian women's upbringing had on their leadership style?

The aim of Research Question 3 is to identify the characteristics and identities adopted by Indian women as a result of growing up in an Indian family, which is often culturally orthodox and requires women to be submissive rather than freely outspoken. The question will provide a view on the factors of upbringing and its effect on Indian women, as well as how these women must break the bonds of thought behaviour on women that are to be submissive, and homemakers to becoming leaders that are respected in organisations.

These Research Questions are informed by Carrim, 2020 who called for more research investigating the lived experiences of racial-ethnic minority women (Carrim, 2020).

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Purpose of research design

According to research by Yin (2017), research design can be defined as the blueprint that researchers use in the collection, measurement, and analysis of collected data in order to answer research questions effectively (Yin, 2017). Research design has many forms, such as exploratory, causal-comparative, explanatory, and grounded. This research study was conducted using an exploratory research design. The application of exploratory research design includes insights being shared into the research phenomenon, where little to no research done on the research study was conducted (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), exploratory research is used in the preliminary stages of a research study, where exploratory research is the most effective approach in examining a particular subject (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

The research presents qualitative data, and a mono-qualitative method provides context in understanding the mechanisms that guided the research to the outcomes. This research involved the outcomes of interviews held with Indian women leaders in corporate South Africa (Branicki et al., 2019; Bluhm et al., 2011; Cornelissen, 2017). A qualitative methodology provided the researcher with the opportunity to use subjective skills for the research exploratory process (Alase, 2017). The research topic objective was exploratory. The philosophical lens provided the researcher with an understanding of the meaning and the intention of the participants in the research study (Myers, 2013). This approach was important in providing an analysis on the lived experiences of Indian women in the workplace.

Through the exploratory approach, qualitative research was conducted in-depth in understanding Indian women and their lived experiences as leaders in an organisation. Qualitative research was appropriate for this research study, as it explored the social phenomenon of the research study (Williams, 2007; Yin, 2016). According to McGee (2018), the influence of gender and ethnicity in the workplace is aided by the use of qualitative data, hence qualitative research provided in-depth knowledge in the understanding of Indian women leaders in the workplace (McGee, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data with Indian women leaders in South African organisations. Participants were interviewed based on a semi-structured

approach. This allowed for the adaptation of questions according to each interview setting and discussion in a conversational way (Yin, 2016). By using this approach, it allowed for participants to have freedom and share their lived experiences, which gave way for narratives to be shared in the data-gathering process. All interviews conducted during this research was done by recording the interviews, which were then transcribed. This was done by first obtaining the permission of the participants. Permission was obtained so as to ensure that there was transparency and trustworthiness in the data collection process.

Interviews were conducted in a single time period due to time constraints. Hence, the results from the research represent a particular time period in 2023. Consequently, the results are only representative of the particular period in 2023, and no inferences on these results were made for past or future periods. Saunders and Lewis (2012) term this a cross-sectional study, which constitutes a snapshot of the participants of this study at a specific point in time.

4.2 Philosophy Approach

4.2.1 Philosophy

The research philosophy will be underpinned by an interpretivist philosophy. Research philosophy is also referred to as research paradigm or worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The interpretivism philosophy is a critical thinking method of research, which investigates different phenomena that provide standards which regulate a specific technique of research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Research paradigm provides a worldview that researchers adopt in qualitative research studies (Mertens, 2014). Positive research paradigms are synonyms with quantitative research, and constructivism is associated with qualitative research. This research study was completed using qualitative research.

Saunders and Lewis (2018) posit that interpretivism provides insights into an organisation and the happenings within it. The experiences of each woman were different to that of the next, and their insights and experiences likewise differed (Gucciardi et al., 2018). Interpretivism analysis is based on the detailed collective of personal lives experiences, and these experiences were based on how the participants in the research make sense of their experiences (Alase, 2017).

Qualitative research is related to constructivist research theory, which is also known as social constructivism (Mertens, 2014), where the subjective viewpoints of individuals are

researched, so as to garner the richness of the ideas that individuals share in the study. This ensures that there are no restrictions to the ideas shared (Bernard, 2017). Constructivism research theory, which was done in this qualitative study, recognises that individuals have various diverse and subjective interpretations of the world and its phenomena (Saunders, et al., 2016).

The ideas and perspectives of individuals emerge through interactions and discussions with others, and for this reason, constructive research focuses on an individuals' behaviour and the processes of interactions that exist (Flick, 2015). This research study aim was to explore and understand the different variables, concepts and theories that exist with Indian women leaders in South African Organisations. With this as a focus point, constructivism research was chosen for this research study.

4.2.2 Approach

The research approach was focused on the process and planning that included assumptions for the use of in-depth methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation by the researcher (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). A research approach can be classified into three types of approach, namely qualitative research, quantitative research, and a combination of both (Walliman, 2017). Qualitative research was used to gain an understanding of the thoughts, practices that surrounded an event which allowed for the collection of in-depth rich data, which allowed for the researcher to understand the research study (Pope & Stanistreet, 2017).

The research approach was inductive, based on developing theory built on the explanations that were received from each woman that was interviewed, and noted from the patterns observed when conducting the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.3 Methodological choices

As a qualitative study, the research lent itself to a mono method of gathering data. The proposed method of gathering data was in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The qualitative approach assisted in understanding the outcomes that aided the interview process with each participant (Branicki et al., 2019; Bluhm et al., 2011; Cornelissen, 2017).

Participants were interviewed about their experiences on ethnicity and its effect on leadership in organisations. Interviews were purposeful discussions between the participant and the researcher (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Qualitative research methodology was guided by previous work conducted in the research field of study. This

study provides deeper insights and understanding the individuals lived experiences thereby building on the theory (Gucciardi et al., 2018).

The research objective was guided by previous work done in the research field of knowledge, allowing the qualitative method of collecting data to provide the required information to address the research question.

4.4 Strategy

Data gathering was done by means of semi-structured interview guide. This was used to guide the interviews with participants separately. This research strategy was based on phenomenology. The lived experiences of the participants was gained by using the interpretative phenomenological strategy (Smith, 2011).

A 'participant-oriented', interpretative approach allowed for the research participants to be expressive. Without fear of misrepresentation or repercussion, which enabled the participants to tell their lived experience stories in the manner they found most comfortable (Alase, 2017).

4.5 Population

Research has focused mainly on African American women and the lived experience of this ethnic group within the contexts of leadership and intersectionality (Sales et al., 2019). For this reason, the identified population for the research topic would be Indian women in leadership roles in South Africa. Participants were selected by purposive sampling only (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016)

The population identified for the research were participants that have professional roles in their organisations and identify as being Indian. Leadership roles were identified as those requiring a minimum university undergraduate bachelor's degree and were South African Indian by nationality (Opera et al., 2020). The participants are between 35-46 years of age, and on average have 8-10 years of experience in a senior leadership role in an organisation based in South Africa (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). By having between 16–20 interviews only, the research had advantage of gaining in-depth insights into the lived experiences of South African Indian women leaders in corporate South Africa (Kele et al., 2022) Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the sample size was suitable to the aim (Opera et al., 2020).

4.6 Unit of analysis

The research study's units of analysis focused on the participants' opinions that had been shaped by personal experience. The units of analysis for this research study consisted of Indian women's experiences in leadership positions for over 10 years, currently leading a team of five individuals or more (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016).

4.7 Sampling method and size

Simply because it is not practical to gather data from an entire population, researchers typically select a representative sample (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A sample refers to a group of individuals to participate in the data collecting process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

In this research study, the use of non-probability sampling was used. The researcher does not have a complete list of Indian women leaders in South Africa with 10 years of experience, currently leading a team of five individuals or more. The researcher made use of a small sample; the researcher made use of judgement in choosing the sample. Judgement was based on the researcher's view on participants that answers the research question and meets the objectives of the research topic (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Non-probability sampling is conducted where there is no guarantee of an equal chance of selection from the complete population group (Etikan et al., 2016; Naderifar et al., 2017).

The research study was qualitative in nature, where the researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with participants. The researcher aimed to interview between 16-20 respondents. The research was conducted until saturation was reached, saturation is the point in the research that provides the required precision; this is when the researcher establishes the sample size of the research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). In the event that saturation is not reached, the number of participants may increase.

4.8 Measurement Instrument

The research study used semi-structured questions as an instrument to collect data. The questionnaire that was used, comprised of approximately eight questions that was used in the interview guide.

The researcher was used as the instrument in collecting and analysing data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research was conducted by means of individual interviews, where an interview guide was used to guide the interview in ensuring that the research questions are answered (as per Appendix 4).

The questions were centred around the topic of the research study, the questions sought to explore the effects of ethnicity on Indian women leaders in South Africa. The interviews were used as a measurement to determine the main themes of the effects of ethnicity on leadership in an organisation.

The questions in the interview guide were placed in a format that provided sufficient flexibility to assist the researcher in outlining the research problem, and what needed to be answered. The research study used semi-structured interviews, which further assisted with flexibility when the researcher conducts the interviews.

4.9 Data gathering process.

The purpose of this research study was to explore the effects of ethnicity on women leaders in South Africa, focusing on Indian women. The data was collected by means of face-to-face interviews; these interviews were setup with potential participants. The interviews were completed using semi-structured interview guides. The interview guides were used as a basis of the discussion, when collecting the data. The timeframe of the interviews, depending on the level of engagement with the participant ranged between 45 to 60 minutes.

If all individuals are asked identical questions, then reliability would define the point of departure for the questions. There are two important factors for the analysis of the measurement, these are the validity and reliability of the questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The objectives of the questions answered lie at the core of the instrument's validity. The researcher ensured that the questions were valid and relevant to the research topic.

All participants where asked identical questions so as to ensure that reliability becomes the centre point for all information gathered. Questions were phrased as simply as possible to collect the relevant information.

The research study was exploratory, and based on qualitative research, where the data gathered was done by interviewing all the participants' lived experiences. It was crucial to establish a standard interview guide to prevent any potential bias from emerging during the process. The researcher used the Delphi technique to test the interview guide with a participant (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In standardising the interview guide and testing the guide on a participant first, the researcher reduced the uncertainties of the responses, and ensured that the necessary outcome of the interview was achieved.

4.10 Analysis approach

Data should be converted into meaningful outputs as part of the analysis approach with the use of critical and rational reasoning (Saunders et al., 2012). The researcher made use of an induction approach, based on theory building. This is done by analysing data that has been collected (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher analysed the data by classifying feedback into themes. Measurement metrics was used to analyse the data, which provided a view of the patterns and relationships that were formed to provide the outcomes of the data.

Microsoft Teams was used as a medium to conduct interviews with the transcription functionality used to record all transcriptions from interviews. Transcriptions were stored electronically and backed up on the cloud to ensure that the data was not lost. Transcriptions were password protected to ensure that it is kept confidential. The analysis relied on interview transcriptions and field notes. Data analysis began halfway through the interview process and was carried out in accordance with the study questions. The goal of the analysis was to find themes that answered each of the research objectives. Data analysis was done using a combination of Atlas coding per participant. This coding was used as a reference for manual thematic analysis to generate codes and themes. The process included reading each transcript, deriving codes from the data, and assigning codes which reflected the responses of the participants. The codes were classified based on their meaning and how they linked to one another.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio recordings used to ensure that the data was collected, once the Microsoft Teams recording were transcribed, the researcher used the collected data to draw on themes and patterns from the interviews to establish where saturation was reached (McGrath et al., 2019).

4.11 Quality controls

Authenticity, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all components that were important in ensuring the quality of the research (Saunders et al., 2016). Authenticity during this research study was important, as it ensured that the conduct and evaluation of the research was genuine and credible, which also contributes to the worthiness of the research of the field of study (Saunders et al., 2016), to ensure that authenticity was consistent during the research study, the transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participants to ensure that the transcripts were accurate.

To ensure that the credibility of this research study, the researcher ensured that the exactness and correctness of the used research tool was used during the interview process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). To ensure credibility during the interview process, the questions were made precise to avoid ambiguity, and participants were provided with the research context and purpose from the onset of the interview to make certain that that there was trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants.

Transferability refers to the detailed and clear description of research. This is achieved by ensuring that the findings of the study are clear and detailed so that the transferability of the quality research can be used (Leavy, 2017). Therefore, to ensure that this research study was transferable or generalised, the study was described in-depth to facilitate the process of transferability (Klenke, 2016). Careful consideration was taken to account for dependability, which accounts for changing settings in which research is conducted (Greenfield, 2016). To ensure that dependability was achieved, the researcher was careful in the analysis of the research, and this was monitored and documented with careful attention being paid to changes that occurred during the research study (Greenfield, 2016).

The study's research goals must be achieved, which was done by working to ensure that the research was comprehensive and credible. Validity in contrast, related to how well the measurement could be measured, and reliability referred to the consistency of the measure (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A pilot interview was conducted to ensure that questions were understood by participants. The pilot interview confirmed whether the research questions achieved the objective of the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; McGrath et al., 2019).

The sampling criteria was used in the selection of the research participants. A pilot interview was conducted by the researcher to test the time and suitability of the questions, as well as the flow of the inter guide. A pilot interview provided practice and skills to the researcher (McGrath et al., 2019). By using the semi-structured research approach, it provided room for the interviewee to ask clarifying questions to gain understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The aim of the research was to provide valid and transferable information, and this was done by ensuring that the research was ethical (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Controls were put in place to ensure that the research was reliable and valid. These controls served to ensure that the researcher used the interview guide to ensure consistency.

The interviews were face-to-face with the participants. Researchers need to be open to the possibility of an interview being steered away from the research topic by the interviewee, where self-awareness proves compulsory (Arsel, 2017).

4.12 Ethical considerations

Ethics refers to a set of norms of behaviour that could alter previous findings. For this reason, it was important that during this research, all ethical considerations were followed in applying principles and standards to protect participants (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) before commencing with the data collection (Appendix 2). Participants that took part of the data collection process was asked to complete a Consent Form (Appendix 3), and an explanation was given on the proceedings of the research study as well as confidentiality was assured to all participants.

To ensure the rights of participants was maintained, the researcher ensured that participants voluntarily participated in the research study, where consent forms were completed such that all participants were knowledgeable regarding the research study being conducted (Iphofen, 2017).

4.13 Ensuring consent

To ensure that participants who participated in the research study was fully informed of the requirements and risks of this research study, consent forms were completed, voluntary for every participant, ensuring that they provided voluntary permission to participate in the research study (Denzin & Giardina, 2016).

4.14 Ensuring no harm comes to participants.

This research study ensured that participants were not exposed to situations or circumstances that were dangerous to them. The study was conducted in a manner that ensured that all participants was provided with the necessary comfort required to complete the research study (Arsel, 2017).

4.15 Ensuring confidentiality

Ensuring confidentiality was important during this research study, as it relates to the privacy and anonymity of virtue, which preserves both the self-esteem and trust of the participants (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). Confidentiality was upheld by ensuring that the research results were shared only with individuals directly involved.

4.16 Limitations

According to Arsel (2017) qualitative research is subjective, and there is a reliance on the researcher to gather, analyse, and interpret its data. The research study aims to understand the lived experiences of ethnicity on Indian women in leadership, the researcher forms part of this sampling criteria; for this reason, the unconscious biases and opinions of the researcher have an impact on the interpretation of data (Arsel, 2017).

The limiting considerations for this study will be the sampling strategy and the geographical area in which the interviews will be conducted. Due to the researcher's lack of proficiency in designing questions, conducting interviews, or data processing, the input, process, and outcomes of the study may be impacted (Agee, 2009). The study's cross-sectional approach places restrictions, since it only records a moment in time without taking into consideration the participants' present situation. This may also vary depending on their unique circumstances.

4.17 Researcher Biases

Qualitative research has the risk of bias and assumptions that can be introduced by the researcher, which may affect the results of the study. The assumption of the researcher was twofold: firstly, that Indian women have had negative lived experiences during their leadership journeys in corporate South Africa; and that being minority Indian women they were subject unfair treatment in the workplace.

In addressing this limitation, the researcher conducted the study by exploring whether intersectionality theory and social identity theory could explain the lived experiences of Indian women leaders as a minority in South African organisations.

4.18 Time Horizon

Due to the time constraints, this research study was cross-sectional. Interviews were therefore completed at one point in time during 2023, where behaviours may change in the future, and for this reason, no inferences were made regarding the transference of behaviours into future periods (William, 2007).

4.19 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology that was used for the purposes of conducting this research study. Several aspects were discussed in this chapter, viz. research philosophy, research approach and design, sampling data for the research study, the data collection process, and data analysis methods used. This chapter further

expanded on trustworthiness and ethical considerations that were followed. The next chapter is the interpretation and discussion of the research findings obtained.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide the key findings of this study after completion of the analysis of the data. This research study collected data by conducting interviews using an interview guide. The chapter will begin by providing a description of the sample used in the research process to provide context on the results presented. This is followed by providing a view of the themes that emerge through the qualitative analysis process which related to each research question in Chapter 3.

5.2 Sample Description

The identities of the women who participated in this study have been protected by assigning a number to each participant in the order in which the interviews were conducted. Pseudonyms were used to replace the names of the participants and to replace the names of the organisations they referred to in the interviews. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of South African Indian women leaders as a minority in their organisations, the researcher undertook the process of interviews as a means to collate data on this phenomenon. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to identify the interview participants, and this was based on the sample criteria, namely, Indian women senior leaders in corporate South Africa. This research study sample consisted of a total of eighteen interviews that were conducted on Microsoft Teams.

Rich insights were obtained from the women interviewed, and even though saturation was reached at interview twelve of the data collection process, the researcher continued with the interviews, as more women contacted the researcher for an opportunity to share their lived experiences. As a result, the researcher continued to interview the women and added an additional six interviews to the data collection to add richness to the study. To obtain data variation in the sample, the researcher made every effort to achieve a mixture of different ethnicities within the Indian ethnic group.

5.3 Data Saturation

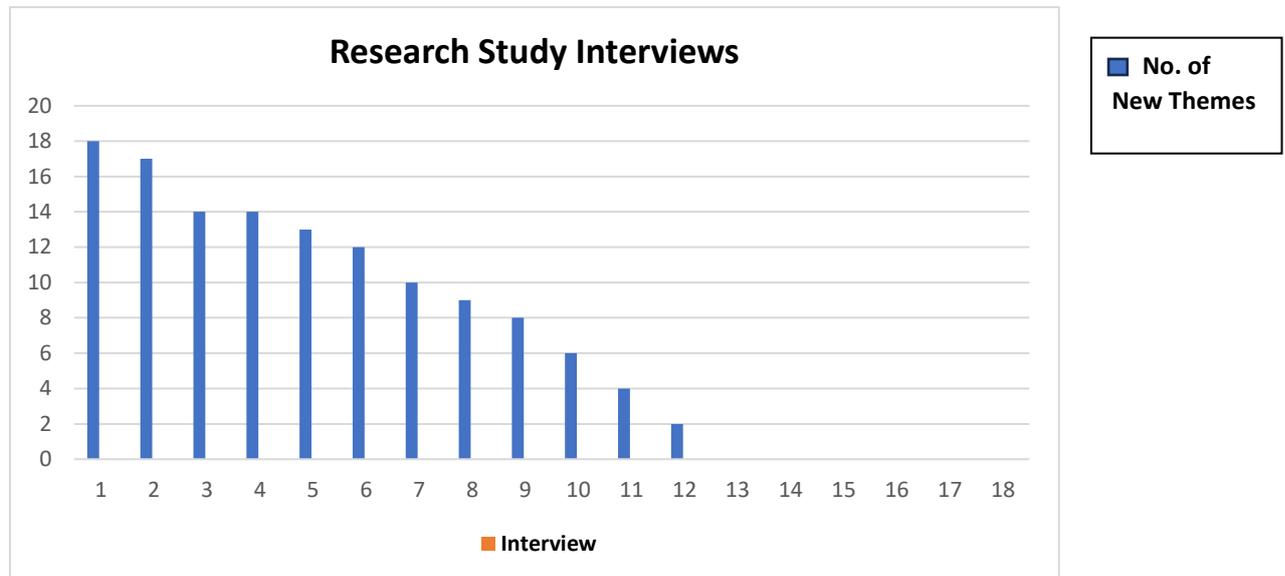


Figure 1: Data Saturation

A general guideline for collecting data is that data should be collected until the researcher reaches a point where no new themes are emerging from the data collection process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Once saturation is reached, this is a signal that further data collection will be of little value to the research study. As a result of this, the collection of data ceased after the eighteenth interview was conducted. Figure 1 above shows that data reached saturation at interview twelve, with only one new theme that was obtained from the last six interviews that were conducted. The one theme that was obtained in the last six interviews fell into the same category, which added little value to the research study. Participant responses are transcribed verbatim.

5.4 Responses from interview guide

5.4.1 Interview Question 1: Do you identify yourself as an Indian woman?

INT001

“Of course.”

INT003

“And I'm proud of my heritage. I have a heritage linked to indentured labour. So I'm very proud of the strides we have made in less than 160 years.”

INT005

“I do identify as an Indian woman. I've been brought up. My culture is Hinduism and so being brought up in a Gujarati community, yeah.”

INT010

“Yes I do, as an African Women more than an Indian Women. “

5.4.1.1 Interview Question 1 Themes

The results to Research Question 1 can be noted in Table 1 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Do you identify yourself as an Indian woman?	
Theme	Category
Pride in Heritage and Identity	Resilience of Race
	Individual Identity
Cultural Identity & Personal Values	Personal Background
Identity	Self Perception
	Acceptance of Ethnicity
Identity Formation and Perception	Ethnicity and National Identity
	Professional Identity
Personal Identity	Ethnic and gender identity
	Workplace identity

Table 1: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 1

So as not to assume, the question was asked to each respondent if they in fact did identify as Indian women. The feedback from 16 of the 18 women interviewed identified themselves as Indian women, and two of the respondents advised that they identify as African women rather than Indian women.

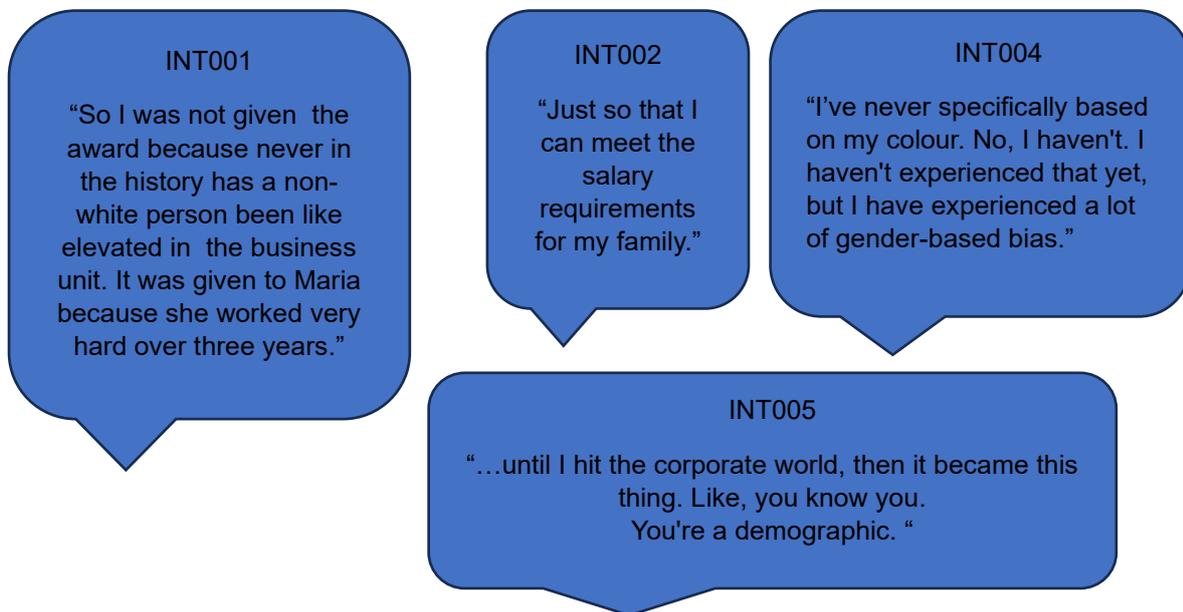
INT015: "I've identified myself more as being African merely because I'm 4th generation."

INT010: "Yes I do, as an African woman more than an Indian woman."

Pride was expressed in identifying themselves as Indian women, where the response was "I am a proud Indian woman", and this accompanied the explanation of the struggle that Indian citizens of South Africa had experiences when they journeyed from India to South Africa. Interview Participant 3 mentioned her Indian heritage and how Indians had come to South Africa to work as unskilled workers, as well as the progress that has been made by Indians in South Africa looking back at this heritage. Mention was made of the "strides we have made in less than 160 years."

Participants 10 and 15 advised that they see themselves as African women rather than Indian, explained that this was as a result of having been born and bred in Africa, as opposed to India, and growing up in homes that were liberal, which provided them with a sense of belonging to Africa, rather than only India.

5.4.2 Interview Question 2: Are there any barriers that you feel that you experience as an Indian being an Indian woman in the workplace?



5.4.2.1 Interview Question 2 Themes:

The results to Research Question 1 can be noted in Table 2 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Did you face any barriers being an Indian woman in the organisation?	
Theme	Category
Self-Doubt & Validation	Professional Journey and Growth
Career and Corporate Expectations	Visibility and Acceptance
	Breaking Barriers (Glass Ceiling in Corporate World)
	Create a Niche and Stand Out in Spite of Cultural Challenges
Professional Adversities and Adaptation	Challenges faced in different work environments
	Adaptation and changing leadership styles
Career Advancement and Corporate Ceiling	Corporate ceiling
	Resistance to corporate jobs
Cultural Background and Female Empowerment	Cultural pressures and achieving a work-life balance
	Embracing traditional roles while carving a career
Impact of Citizenship and Nationality on Job Prospects	Indian origin
	South African citizenship
	Employment Equity law
Language Barrier/Discrimination	Afrikaans
	Communication
Experiencing Intersectionality and Unequal Treatment	Gender Discrimination
	Ethnic and Religious Discrimination
	Institutional Discrimination
Perception of Gender and Career Impact	Barriers to Career Progress
	Maternity Leave and Career Perception
Challenges and Barriers	Gender over Ethnicity
	Resistance within her Ethnic Community

Table 2: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 2

Interview Question 2 sought to identify the barriers that Indian women face in the workplace, to understand if there are any barriers, and what these may be. Themes that emerged from this question were those of self-doubt that the participants expressed as a result of being excluded from roles and awards that were deserving to them. This was expressed in an interview where one participant advised that she was told “it is just the way it works around here”.

Interview participants 3, 7 and 16 responded to this question providing examples of barriers and proceeded to explain why they had stayed in the positions regardless of the barriers. The explanation included that they needed the income for their families and had very limited options available at that point, and in knowing this that kept them going in the positions given these barriers experienced.

INT003: “...she was my financial responsibility, and I wouldn't want it any other way. You just think your economic challenges have changed significantly and you also in a position to maybe take a risk that you weren't prepared to when you had all of these economic responsibilities?”

INT007: “And if it influences your involvement and your, you know a lot of commitment and all of that kind of stuff.”

INT016: “Yeah, I think you know, so the family environment and the community environment definitely sets you back, right. So you actually starting off on a disadvantaged platform, because your father's told you what your place is.”

A total of 14 of the 18 participants advised that they feel that they are not the ‘right shade’ to have been accepted in the workplace, that is, not Black enough or white enough to belong, and therefore feeling uncertain of their place. One participant mentioned that she was not placed on any private accounts where clients were mainly white, when she started her career to serve her articles at an accounting firm. She was placed on all government accounts due to being Indian, and when she questioned this, it made no difference.

A theme that had come through on this question was the participants advising that they had experienced a harder time when reporting to Indian men and women in their careers in comparison to reporting to leaders of a different ethnic group. The feedback was that there was a sense of resistance from male Indian leaders and team members, which made the participants’ work a little difficult. Participant 8 mentioned that she is a consultant in an

organisation and found that the Indian men did not want to take instructions from her as a senior in the business, and she had to take measures her authority to be taken seriously. The resistance from Indian men was noted by participants as being a barrier, in their expectations that Indian colleagues would understand these barriers and make it easier for them to work together as opposed to receiving such resistance.

INT008: “...and so from that perspective, I got that in the contact centre, initially when I started there, they were and their management team or their board level, they had four Indian males and I really, really struggled with them.”
 5.4.3 Interview Question 3: What were your coping mechanisms against these barriers?

INT001
 “The quality of my life depends on my output and how I do my job and what I get out of it. So I've had to add also as being a single mum, also needs to show my kids that despite any adversity, any challenges in life.”

INT003
 “The thing is that I just at a personal level believe that whatever I did, I needed to excel at it and I needed to give it my all.
 And I made sure that throughout my career that I excelled at whatever I did.”

INT009
 “I just keep giving my best to be very honest.
 I just keep giving my best.
 I think those are demons that I can't fight unfortunately, so I just have to speak through the work that I'm doing.”

5.4.3.1 Interview Question 3 Themes:

The results to Research Question 1 can be noted in Table 3 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

What were your coping mechanisms against these barriers?	
Theme	Category
Pushing against cultural conditioning	Confronting professional barriers
	Championing diversity
Shifting gender dynamics and expectations	Leaving a legacy
Professional Competence over Race/Gender	Competence
	Achievement
	Performance

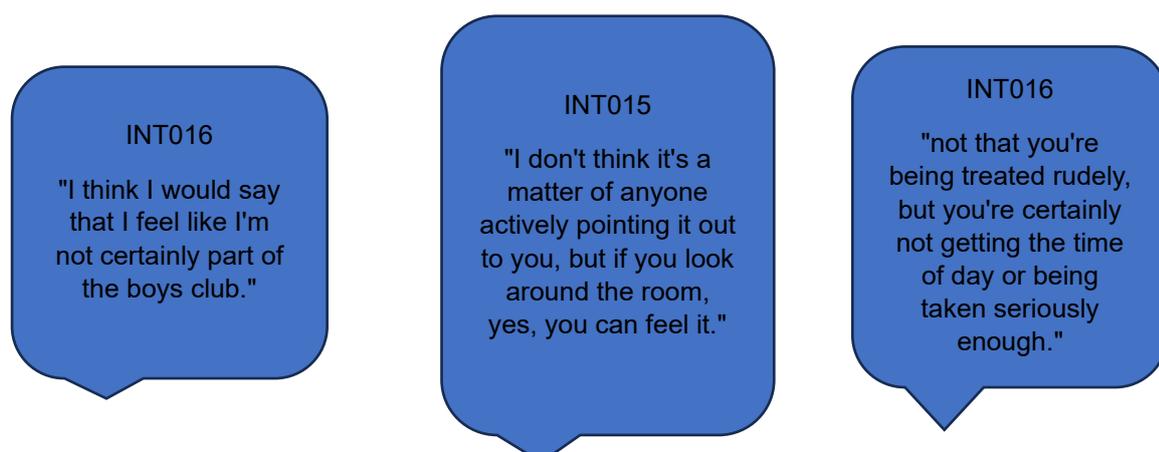
Table 3: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 3

The aim of research interview question 3 was to prompt participants to gain insights regarding their personal coping mechanisms used to overcome the barriers in the previous interview question. The question was designed to understand what sustains these Indian women who belong to an ethnic minority, regardless of the barriers that were shared in the previous question. Participants were prompted to share their personal coping mechanisms in their responses, to identify the key mechanisms used that provided them with the ability to success regardless of the challenges that were faced.

The themes that emerged from this interview question were related to the boundaries that exist for these participants. The need to excel and keep going at career progression by excelling in all aspects of their careers. The participants expressed the need to continue working hard at their goals and objectives to achieve career progression and personal aspirations. The need to leave a legacy for those Indian women who will come after them and for their own communities and families was shared by the participants. The women shared on the conditioning that is ingrained in Indian women from a young age, which is to be challenged as per participants' feedback; and the acceptance of Indian women being strong where they show the ability to shift this thinking.

Participants shared that their professional competence should be seen before their gender or race is taken into account, the barriers associated with race and gender must be challenged by skill and fit for position. This will allow for career progression and acceptance in the workplace, allowing individuals to be seen and heard for their valuable contribution to leadership and decision-making, as opposed to been accepted or not based on the shade of their skin or the fact that they are women. Education was shared as a tool to upskill and show competence in the workplace, as education has the power to overcome these barriers and be used as a mechanism to career progression that cannot be questioned.

5.4.4 Interview Question 4: Have you ever felt marginalised as an ethnic minority in the workplace?



INT005

"I literally blocked her out.

I would participate in conversation on appeal, colleague level, around business, but anything personally related I did not want to hear get involved in because her negative thoughts or her thoughts about racial but a bias will coming through and I was like, that's not the environment that I want to create."

5.4.4.1 Interview Question 4 Themes:

The results to Research Question 2 can be noted in Table 4 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Have you ever felt marginalised as an ethnic minority in the workplace?	
Theme	Category
Discrimination and unfair treatment	Racial discrimination
Racial Bias at Workplace	Prejudice and Stereotyping
Challenging Prejudices & Resisting Stereotypes	Leadership and Influence
Career Opportunities and Bias	Perceived racial bias
Perceived Discrimination at Workplaces	Perception of being undervalued
	Racial bias at senior levels
	Female bosses and race-related bias
Feminism and Racial Dynamics	Glass Ceiling
	Stereotypes and Racial Dynamics
Institutions and Your Role	Discrimination and Prejudice
	Overcoming Stereotypes
Perception and Confrontation of Stereotypes	Identification with Societal Labels
	Defiance of Conventional Gender Roles
	Gender-Related Experiences at Work
Fight for Equality and Change	Women's Compensation in the Workplace
	Narrative of Social Norms and Hopes for the Future
Workplace Discrimination and Stereotypes	Gender Discrimination and Exclusion
	Lack of Recognition and Credit
	Dominance of Male-oriented Culture
Discrimination and unfair treatment	Gender discrimination
hierarchical Limitations	Hierarchical challenges
	Need for diversity and inclusion
Identity and Self-Perception	Recognition of Minority Status
	Personal Perception of Self
Experience of Bias	Experience of Bias
	Cultural Bias
Workplace Experience	Expectations and Perceptions
	Professional Progression
	Discrimination and Challenges
Cultural Identity, Minority status and Gender Asymmetry	Self-Identity
	Cultural Differences
	Gender Asymmetry
Challenges	Exclusion and Under-Representation
	Discrimination
	Maternal Challenges
Female Empowerment in the Corporate Sector	Increased representation of women in leadership roles
	Advocacy for more female leadership training initiatives
Gender Imbalances and Power Dynamics in the Corporate Sector	Dominance of males in senior positions
	Evolution of gender relations in the corporate world
Intersectionality of gender and race in the corporate sphere	Minority status as an Indian woman in corporate culture
	Danger of "power-play" attitude among the minority female leaders
Women's Representation in Engineering/Technical Fields	Being a woman in a male-dominated industry
	Historical Context
	Representation
Challenges Due to Traditional Stereotypes and Biases	Working in a traditionally male-dominated field

Table 4: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 4

Participants were prompted to share their lived experiences with feelings of being marginalised in the workplace. Participants shared their experiences and expressed their views on this question during the interview. Themes that emerged from this question included experiences of being treated unfairly as a result of being Indian, where positions in the organisation were given to white or Black colleagues with less experience and no explanation provided on why this was the decision made when the women questioned this.

Experiences that were shared by more than three participants was that of leading teams in the workplace and having access to salaries of team members. These Indian women would later find out that team members earned more than them, as a result of being either white or male. This resulted in feelings of being marginalised. When the researcher asked if the salary discrepancy was questioned, one participant responded that she could never bring herself to discuss her own salary. The participant expressed her experience with salary, that she could never ask for what she felt she was worth and struggled with this. She felt that this was linked to the way she was raised from a young age to never question and to rather accept as a woman.

INT007: "I still struggle to have a conversation around my salary and I'm a senior person in in my organisation."

A theme that emerged from this interview question was that of stereotypes created in the workplace by virtue of being Indian. Participants shared that the stereotype associated with Indian women is that Indians are hardworking, and by virtue of Indian the expectation is that Indian women are expected to do more and give more, which comprises work-life balance.

Participants expressed that this was an unfair expectation placed on them and one that may be true, due to the work ethic of Indian people, however, this stereotype has a negative effect on Indian women in particular, as Indian women then place this expectation on themselves to work harder, give more of their time, prove themselves twice as much as their colleagues to be deserving of career progression or salaries equal to their colleagues.

Participants shared the challenge of breaking this stereotype, while there were some that were able to do that by virtue of being at executive levels in their organisations, others that still struggled with breaking this stereotype. The fear of being overlooked when positions

became available that meant promotions could be at stake, or even being taken seriously in the workplace was expressed as the main concern on not being able to draw boundaries that are required for work life balance by participants.

5.4.5 Interview Question 5 Themes: Do you think agency in the form of coaching and mentoring is important for Indian women to progress in their careers?

INT010
"She took me under her wing and she made sure that the work that she wanted to get out that that she would clear the pathway for me."

INT016
"I think there is value adding, and the reason for that is that you are definitely not going to be part of certain circles, especially from a seniority perspective."

INT005
"The reality is now we have this more diversifying and we're seeing a lot of female mentorship, but that's what also mentorship for me has played such a big role in my career."

INT012
"I cannot overstate the importance of coaching mentorship."

5.4.5.1 Interview Question 5 Themes:

The results to Research Question 2 can be noted in Table 5 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Do you think agency in the form of coaching and mentoring is important for Indian women to progress in their careers?	
Theme	Category
Persistence and overcoming adversity	Mentoring and teaching
	Support from mentors and family
	Persistence and determination
	Empowerment and Self-worth
Positive Influence & Mentorship	External Support

Table 5: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 5

Interview Question 5 was asked to participants to gain insight into the importance of mentoring, whether mentoring was received or provided to others during their careers. All 18 women shared that mentoring was an exceptional tool that either assisted them in the progression of their own careers or that they are passionate about in to now 'pay it forward' to women entering the workplace that seek mentoring and coaching.

Participant 16 shared her experience of mentoring and the importance of this by noting that as an Indian female you not included in the "all men's club", and there are some circles that as a female you will never be invited to. which makes networking difficult to do and often this hinders relationship building within organisations. Mentoring and coaching can bridge this gap, by obtaining mentoring and coaching from key individuals in the business, females can gain access to the knowledge and experience that these individuals are able to share and impart knowledge.

INT016: "Yeah, I think there is value add, that the reason for that is you are definitely not going to be part of certain circles, especially from a seniority perspective. You know, you kind of journey there, but in your earlier years, you're not part of that circle. And I think it's great to be understood by somebody you know, someone you trust, somebody who knows you well, someone who can put your case forward."

More than 15 participants stressed the importance of agency for Indian women in the workplace, expressing that agency is gained through mentoring and coaching and shared that it was through mentoring and coaching that their own careers progressed into senior leadership positions within organisations.

5.4.6 Interview Question 6: Have you ever felt like you needed to adopt /mimic the behaviour/characteristics of your colleagues in the workplace to feel accepted?

The image shows three blue speech bubble callouts arranged horizontally. Each bubble contains an interview ID and a quote. The first bubble on the left is for INT005, the middle one for INT012, and the right one for INT014.

Interview ID	Quote
INT005	"I watched how my peers were would answer things, and I realized, like something that's always helped me in good stead was that I was just very honest."
INT012	"So that's those have been some of my growth points as a leader and I have mimicked leaders that I have seen doing that even to the extent of making notes."
INT014	"It was more of a challenge if I was going to become someone else or become like them, it was better to be authentic, you know, and deliver on who I was and ask them to, to understand who I was and where I came from."

5.4.6.1 Interview Question 6 Themes:

The results to Research Question 2 can be noted in Table 6 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Did you ever feel through that you needed to adopt any or mimic many of the characteristics of your peers	
Theme	Category
Honesty & Authenticity at Workplace	Professional Ethics
Coping Mechanisms and Strategies	Adjusting Performance in Response to Perception
	Maintaining Authenticity and Work-Life Balance
Redefining Expectations and Identity	Roles and Expectations
	Asserting Authenticity

Table 6: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 6

Interview Question 6 was asked to participants if they felt the need to adopt or mimic the characteristics of colleagues. This question was posed to determine whether the women felt that they needed to change their social identity in a work environment to fit in and be accepted in the workplace.

A participant shared that she was often mocked for her Indian accent and her head movements, but she overcome this as she knew that had the skills to do her job and this gave her the motivation to keep going.

INT011: "So initially I was like I used to be worried. But then I think I'm sure I did have those challenges initially. I remember being like mocked, like, not mocked like, you know, you get with the head movements and stuff like that."

Seventeen of the women respondents that they had never felt the need to adopt the characteristics of their colleagues to fit in, they have been true to their own personalities and characteristics. One woman expressed that, in order to mimic colleagues would have been too much work, and that being authentic would be a reflection on her own worth and what she is able to do in the workplace. Another participant shared that she felt the need to show up as a man to be taken seriously at the onset of her career but realised that this was not necessary.

INT005: "And it was quite interesting, because I watched how my peers would answer things."

INT007: *“I thought I had to show up as a man, so we all have masculine and feminine energy, and I very much adopted a masculine energy in the workplace, and I still need it. I’m a COO. You know I’m very, uhm tactical, and process-driven in what I do.”*

One of the women did express that in the initial stage of her career, she did look at her white female colleagues and wanted to use words that they used and acted how did they in order to be accepted. She felt that by using the phrases and words that her white female colleagues used she would also get her view noted in meetings, etcetera. The participant proceeded to share that she learnt quickly that this in fact was not working and stopped trying to mimic her colleagues. She decided to be the most authentic version of herself and show up as these women.

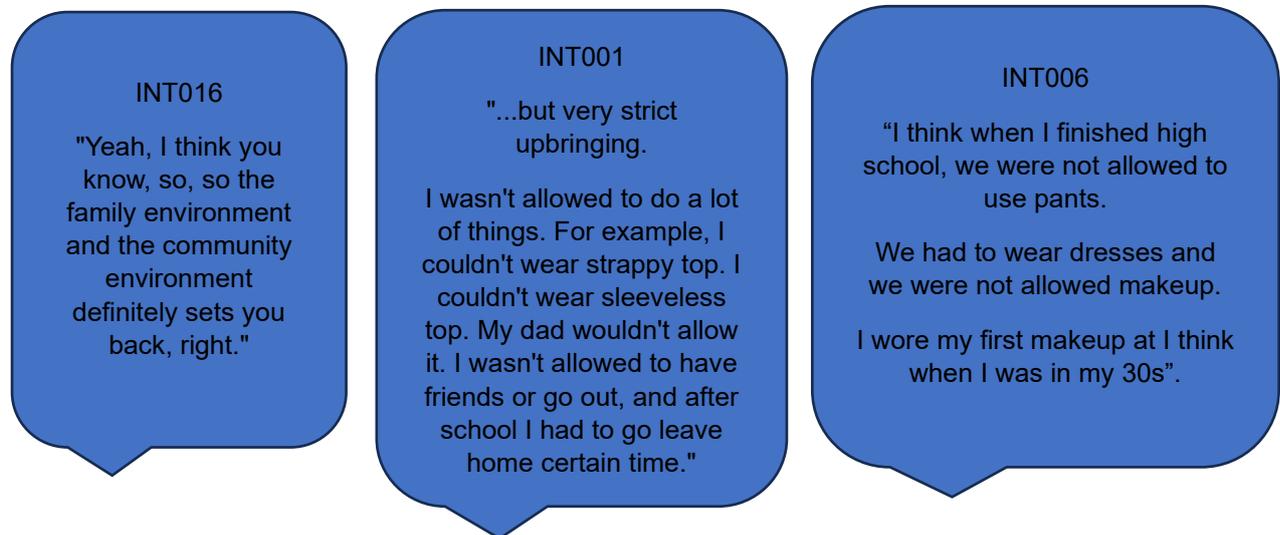
INT016: *“You know, I did feel like I needed to look and talk like my white colleagues and everybody else, because if I was different then I wouldn’t be recognised. So now I’m in my older years. I’m freer to wear my Punjabi.”*

Two of the participants shared that they looked at the traits and behaviours of leaders who led them and mentored them and took the positive leadership traits of these individuals and adopted into their own careers. The traits of these leaders and mentors provided them with guidance in navigating their own careers and leadership styles, and they looked up to these individuals for guidance and counsel throughout their careers.

INT012: *“So that’s those have been some of my growth points as a leader and I have mimicked leaders that I have seen doing that even to the extent of making notes. And you know, almost repeating.”*

INT010: *“But I would think I would study the way that they thought about problems, and I would write that down as a strategy, but also list the words that they would use. So, I would mimic the words that I found that they used most often. For two reasons; number one, to make sure that they felt heard; and number two, to demonstrate that we have a commonality.”*

5.4.7 Interview Question 7: Has been raised in a conservative home/or not has this impacted you to be submissive or more tolerant as an Indian woman?



5.4.7.1 Interview Question 7 Themes:

The results to Research Question 3 can be noted in Table 7 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Been raised in a conservative home/or not has this impacted you to be submissive or more tolerant as an Indian woman?	
Theme	Category
Personal growth and development	Values and beliefs
Breaking stereotypes and societal expectations	Challenging generational expectations
	Empowerment and self-sufficiency
Cultural and Socioeconomic Upbringing Impact on Career Choices	Indian cultural norms
	Perception of hard work
Personal and Family Values	Heritage and upbringing
	Religion
	Education
Influence of Religion	Islam
	Balance of religious beliefs
	Interactions with other religions
Emphasis on Education	Importance of formal learning
	Encouraging reading and self-education
	Power to liberate
Balance between Professional and Personal Life	Dual roles as a woman
	Traditional vs progressive roles
	Division of Domestic Labour and Responsibilities
	Parental Engagements and Time Constraints
Tradition vs Modernity in Indian Culture	Perception of Gender Roles and Marital Expectations
	Challenges Faced by Non-conformists
Cultural and Familial Support System	Support and backing
	Comparative upbringings
Societal and Familial Expectations	Societal Pressures and Stereotypes
	Support System
Personal Characteristics	Introvert
	Shy
	Learning
	Communicative Skills
Emphasis on Education	Family's strong focus on education
	Lack of gender discrimination in education within her family
Embracing Authenticity and Self-Expression	Upholding Cultural Identity
	Standing Against Stereotyping
	Self-Expression through Appearance
Cultural Norms and Individuality	Familial Influence on Individuality
	Societal Expectations Vs. Individual Resistance
	Balancing Personal and Professional Roles
Culture and Traditions	Amalgamation into personal life
	Cultural challenges
Education and Empowerment	Family influence
	Aspirations and achievements

Table 7: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 7

Interview question 7 asked participants to share their views on being raised or not being in a conservative home and if this had influenced them in their adulthood. The researcher was looking to understand whether cultural factors had a role to play in the views and challenges of these 18 Indian women.

Twelve out of 18 participants shared the challenges that they had to face growing up in cultural homes in which parents look at women as child bearers and home makers. These

participants had to deal with breaking these social norms and expectations placed on them from an early age and focusing on their own goals and aspirations. Where participants shared that they gave in to these norms, and married partners that were matched to them they still pursued careers and were able to find a balance between these two spheres of their lives. One participant shared that she had her husband's parents living with her, and even though she was progressing in her career into senior leadership, she was still expected to come home and cook a curry dish with rice for her husband's father, who insisted on only eating fresh curry every day.

INT011: "You still have to ensure that and if you come from a family that's pretty traditional in terms of eating curry and rice every day of the week, kind of thing. And you know, my father-in-law never ate the same meal twice. So you had to have like you had something for them to eat and they were like old school. So they ate curry for breakfast. They ate curry for lunch and they curry for dinner. So you had to make sure that there was something you know, cook for each meal."

By way of contrast, some participants felt that they were raised in a liberal environment, by parents who promoted individualism and education, and were able to find their own path in education and the workplace. This provided them with a voice to ask without apology for what they believed was due to them based on their value, and they were able to integrate with people from different cultural backgrounds easily. These participants attributed this ease in the workplace to their schooling experience, noting that being exposed to different people from different backgrounds in a multiracial school allowed them to integrate easily in all other aspects of their lives, especially when having to enter the working environment and having to lead teams that are from different ethnic groups.

Sixteen of the 18 participants expressed that education and the requirement to do well in school was important growing up. There was an expressed expectation that good grades would be achieved, and the choice of career was a reflection on the family. Two women expressed how they were given freedom to do those things that they wanted to do, only after leaving their family homes. One woman shared that she only began wearing makeup at the age of thirty years old, and another expressed that she was never allowed to dress the way she wanted to in her family home.

INT006: *"I think when I finished high school, we were not allowed to use pants. We had to wear dresses and we were not allowed makeup. I wore my first makeup at I think when I was in my 30s."*

5.4.8 Interview Question 8: Has this upbringing impacted your leadership style?

INT001

"because you realize that what you see because people see me and they make assumptions about me, right, they think I'm one of those ladies that has this fantastic lifestyle that was like just put into a position or just landed things land at my feet."

INT005

"It does, but don't you find that it goes towards more of a mutualism than so like when you are growing up, it's very much about like the status of someone within your and the family."

INT015

"I mean, I was brought up in very liberal home. It wasn't a very pure Indian home.

I am somebody who I relate to different cultures.

I relate to different I mean male, female doesn't matter.

I relate to everybody and I'm somebody who takes initiative to understand different cultures and stuff like that."

5.4.8.1 Interview Question 8 Themes:

The results to Research Question 3 can be noted in Table 8 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Has this upbringing impacted your leadership style?	
Theme	Category
Empowerment and Self-worth	Values and beliefs instilled by family
	Standing up for oneself
Value of Hard work and Persistence	Personal Values and Motivations
	Role of upbringing in Hard Work
Leadership and Empowerment	Progressive Leadership style
	Importance of trust
	Empowering employees
Professional Relationships and Team Dynamics	Sensitivity to Team Dynamics
	Adapting to Work Environment
Leaving a Legacy and Building Future Generations	Creating an Impact
	Teaching the Next Generation
Success and Leadership	Defining Success
	Leadership Impact
Impact of Personal Life on Professional Roles	Influence of personal experiences on leadership style
	Navigating through perceived bias
Identity and Personal History	Cultural Background and Family
	Personality and Aspirations
Personal growth and development as a female leader	Struggle with cultural norms and self-confidence
	Role of mentoring in developing leadership skills
Work-Life Balance/Decision-making	Self-directed career decisions
Management Style	Work delegation based on individual strengths
	Leading for Diversity
Empowerment through Leadership and Advocacy	Advocating for Women
Leadership Style and Work Environment	Cultural Background Influence on Leadership Style
	Adapting to Different Work Environments
Respect and Individuation	Individuation
	Risks and resilience
Feminism and Liberal Views	Parental influence
	Spouse's support
Persistence and overcoming adversity	Hard work and work ethic
Personal growth and development	Overcoming challenges
Attitudes and Defense Against Discrimination	Resilience
	Response to Discrimination
Workplace Experience	Discrimination and Barriers
	Persistence and Resilience
Empowerment and Growth	Self Empowerment
	Empowering Others
Strategies and Lessons Learned	Career Navigation and Self Advocacy
	Building Support Networks
	Perceptions and Stereotypes
Opportunities	Learning to Adapt and Overcome
	Advantages of being empathetic
Empowerment and Self Confidence	Confidence Building
	Overcoming Challenges and Building Strength
	Empowerment
Views on Gender Roles/Expectations	Not wanting to compete with men, but acknowledging differences between genders
Navigating Corporate Ladder and Culture	Building Personal Competence
	Struggle to Demonstrate Capabilities
	Overcoming Stereotypes and Cultural Expectations

Table 8: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 8

Participants were asked whether their upbringing influenced their leadership style, the participants were prompted to think of their own childhood and the cultural expectations placed on them as women. They were asked to identify whether there are links between these norms that have influenced their ability to lead others in the workplace.

There were multiple themes that emerged from this question as noted in Table 7, such as leadership empowerment, women empowerment, and empowering others through leadership and advocacy. A majority of the women shared that the current leadership positions in which they find themselves provides a platform for them to empower themselves and others, which is of value to them. The ability to give back to others and raise others with them in their journeys as leaders are important. Advocacy was shared as a theme, which was discussed by these women as the ability to allow women not only of Indian ethnicity, but of different ethnic minorities, the leadership that would allow their careers to flourish as well.

A participant expressed her lived experience as a leader, where assumptions were often made of her based on the fact that she was Indian. She shared that her colleagues would assume that she comes from wealth because she was Indian, and that she received her material possessions easily, when in fact this is the total opposite of her lived experience.

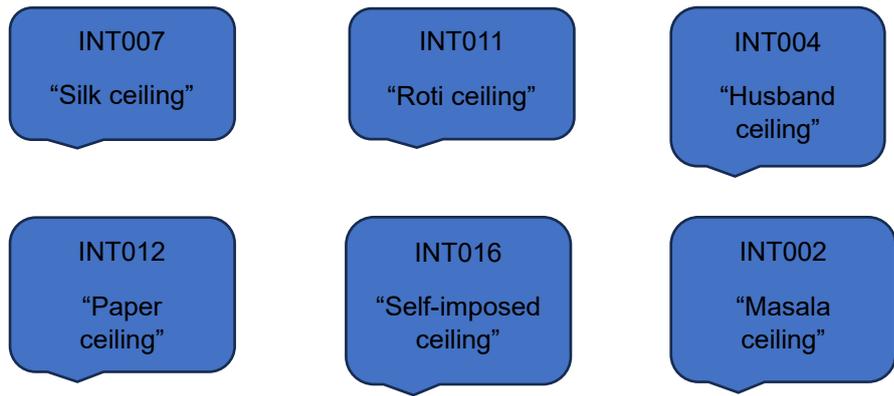
INT001: "because you realise that what you see because people see me and they make assumptions about me, right, they think I'm one of those ladies that has this fantastic lifestyle that was like just put into a position or just landed things land at my feet."

Respect was a theme raised by this question, where a majority of the participants expressed that their upbringing emphasised respect for others, and this filtered into their leadership style. Respect and empathy were important to lead, as shared by four of the 18 participants. One participant gave the example of leading team members that are older than she is, and expressed that she cannot leave behind what she was thought as a young girl when she works with older people, even in the manner in which she addresses the older people, as uncle or aunt etc., which is synonymous with Indian culture. This participant did proceed to add that whilst she addresses older people in this manner, she does not have a problem holding the same individuals accountable for work-related tasks etc. as in the workplace she is required to lead and be accountable.

INT005: "So, I think that all came from my upbringing for me, and I think we kind of conditioning was very much this thing of how you know when you grow up when you walk

into a house it's you greet everybody you get to know them and you when you leave the house you greet everybody. It's just that those small little touches that I think has helped shape my relationships with my team as well."

5.4.9 Interview Question 9: If you could name one word for Indian women as a minority in the workplace - like that of the glass ceiling for females or bamboo ceiling for Chinese women, what word comes to mind?



5.4.9.1 Interview Question 9 Themes:

The results to Research Question 3 can be noted in Table 9 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

If you could associate a term to these barriers that Indian women face in 1 word similar to that of the glass ceiling for females, what would you term it?	
Theme	Category
Challenges and Growth Opportunities	Constraints due to Cultural Expectations
	Self-Development and Empowerment
Challenging Gender Norms	"Husband Ceiling"
Personal Perception and Self-Imposition	"Self-Imposed Ceiling"
	Challenge of Breaking Personal Limitations
	Forming Realistic Personal Expectations & Boundaries
Ego Management	Men traditionally thought to earn more
	"Roti Ceiling"
Perception and Norms	Dealing with Stereotypes
	Struggling with Societal Expectations
	"Kitchen Ceiling"

Table 9: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 9

Interview Question 9 led two of the eighteen women to provide the term the “husband ceiling”, sharing that husbands are often the reason why Indian women do not progress in their careers. These participants shared that balancing work and home life is a struggle, and often when they do find this balance and excel in their careers, their husbands are threatened by this, and this leads to marital problems.

INT004: *“It’s the husband’s ceiling, because at some point, your success or your drive or your motivation or your..., it makes them feel less and they shouldn’t feel less, but they do. And that for me, is my ceiling like I think that’s always what I had that in my previous marriage.”*

INT014: *“I’ll; I would definitely think the husband ceiling; because I think it comes, it comes with a lot. It stems from, because you know as a female you are a mother, a wife and a sister. You are so many things in different forms, but with the husband being there, your belief system is always that the husband takes the lead. The husband goes first, you know? So, that is why I would term it rather as the husband ceiling, because we have that in our heads, but it’s for us to change it and to proactively say.”*

The “kitchen ceiling” was a word shared by one participant, who felt that Indian women are expected to always be in the kitchen cooking for their families and preparing food for family etc.

INT017: *“So that kitchen ceiling will probably be like an encompass of outside of being in amazing leadership roles and see our roles and whatever it is that we do as Indian woman, we still come home to reality of having a family, right or whatever it might be or you know, or if you within or being a daughter or being whatever it is.”*

The “masala ceiling” was a word shared by one participant, who gave context to this, advising that the different variations of spice in each masala is like the different ceiling that Indian women face at work and in their personal life. As they break through the mild ceiling, they have yet another ceiling to break, which could be medium, and then hot, and even a masala ceiling, named the “mother-in-law masala”, which is an additional ceiling that Indian women must manage in their lives that is not always easy.

INT002: *“I would probably put it in like degrees of masala or degrees, of curry powder. Like when you just enter into the workplace, you like the mild masala, kind of thing. And then when you at the ceiling being the hottest masala, which is, I don’t know, maybe the mother-in-law masala or whatever. So yeah, I would put it in like degrees of how you enter, where you get to and then the highest being the mother-in-law masala.”*

The “roti ceiling” was shared by one participant who shared that she saw the ceiling made of roti, which is an Indian bread made by Indian people that is eaten with a curry. This participant shared that she felt Indian women are always having to make rotis. The roti

symbolises the challenges that Indian women face that a multifaceted and not one dimensional. Rotis have multiple layers and steps in preparation.

INT017: "I thought making roti, but I was like, I don't make roti, I buy roti so it's... but just. So that kitchen ceiling will probably be like an encompass of outside of being in amazing leadership roles and see our roles and whatever it is that we do as Indian women, we still come home to reality of having a family, right, or whatever it might be or you know, or if you within or being a daughter or being whatever it is."

One participant shared the word "silk ceiling" that she associated with Indian women, she shared that the saree, which is a dress worn by Hindu women that is made with silk was a word that came to mind for her when she thought of a ceiling for Indian women. .

INT007: "So immediately, when you said that I thought a silk ceiling, like a silk study that was, that was the first thing that came to mind when you when you asked."

The "paper ceiling" was a term shared by one participant, who explained that women often feel like the ceilings that they need to breakthrough is hard and cannot be penetrated. However, if women view these ceilings as paper, they will rather see these as penetrable. The paper ceiling can be penetrated by a simple punch by any women, and they would get to the next level that they wish to move to.

INT012: "I mean the first word that came to me is like paper ceiling, simply because it's not glass. It's not transparent, so you can't see past it, but it's paper thin, so if you just punch, which is use your weight, you can, it's cause it's not hard solid you know, but it appears that way because it's opaque. So when you look at it, you think it is actually a difficult and hard to punch through. But if you just, it's like how hard is it to punch through a paper?"

5.4.10 Interview Question 10: Would you like to share anything else or add to the interview anything that I may not have asked, that you feel is relevant to my study on Indian women?

INT014
"I'd like to end of by saying, you know, as an Indian woman and you know a continuously emerging leader, I want to seek

INT003
"but maybe a one of the things while you exploring and this is a great topic is explore how educated the women you're dealing with and if you would compare that in in your topic to other people who've like made it to the top. You know where was the shortcomings for Indian women versus that particular group?"

INT001
"I think it's just to break that stereotype at home, you know, in the in the Indian community and in the in the in the workplace"

INT016
"There are certain barriers that are harder for us. But I just think that if you're strong, if you believe in yourself, I think you know we shouldn't be looking at our skin kind of. I mean, I just think that in our country, we are too fixated on our skin colour and we need to really get out of that mould. We must embrace it."

5.4.10.1 Interview Question 10 Themes:

The results to Research Question 3 can be noted in Table 10 below. The table indicates the emergent categories related to each theme.

Would you like to share anything else or add to the interview anything that I may not have asked, that you feel is relevant to my study on Indian women?	
Theme	Category
Diversity in the Workplace	Emphasis on race over competence
	Companies embracing diversity differently
Ethnicity and gender biases	Challenges of minority work groups
	Workplace discrimination
Experiences of Prejudice & Discrimination	Workplace discrimination
	Difficulty in professional advancements
Ethnic Representation in the Industry	Recognition of Minority Group in the Corporate Industry
	Increasing Ethnic Representation
Minority Identity and Representation	Self-Identification as a Minority
	Awareness of Limited Representation
Workplace experiences	Leadership experience and challenges
	Gender and race consideration at workplace

Table 10: Themes and Categories from Interview Guide Question 10

Question 10 asked participants if they wanted to add anything additional to the research study that was not asked that they felt would add value to the research.

A majority of the participants added the importance of companies embracing different cultures into the workplace, noting that individuals need to be seen for the value added to the business and not the colour of their skin, as this has no bearing on the outcomes that an individual can produce. Fourteen of the 18 women shared that the discussion on gender inequality was important for all women, and not only Indian women, while Indian women struggle with their own challenges, there are other ethnic groups in the minority in South Africa that also experience bias and career limitations due to their ethnicity, and this must be taken into account in research.

Interview participant 16 shared that she felt South Africa places too much emphasis on the colour of skin of individuals, instead of embracing difference. The important aspect is believing in yourself as a woman. She acknowledged that there are barriers, but self-belief can assist in overcoming these barriers.

INT016: "There are certain barriers that are harder for us. But I just think that if you're strong, if you believe in yourself, I think you know we shouldn't be looking at our skin kind of. I mean, I just think that in our country, we are too fixated on our skin colour and we need to really get out of that mould. We must embrace it."

Another participant shared that she felt that education plays a fundamental role in the experiences of different women, and the manner in which they show up and that future research could focus on the lived experiences of Indian women versus their level of education.

INT003: "but maybe one of the things, while you explore, and this is a great topic, is explore how educated the women you're dealing with; and if you would compare that in, in your topic to other people who've, like, made it to the top. You know where the shortcomings for Indian women versus that particular group was?"

One woman shared that the social norms associated with Indian women need to be broken first in Indian households and communities, and thereafter these will be broken in places such as the workplace. The views and cultural norms associated with Indian women are ingrained in Indian women at the community level, and then women are expected to live

up to these social norms in their personal and professional environment. By breaking these social norms, it provides a path for freedom to express yourself as an Indian woman.

INT001: "I think it's just to break that stereotype at home, you know, in the in the Indian community and in the in the in the workplace."

5.5 Presentation of results

The lived experiences of ethnic minority groups in the workplace are considered to be unfair and a form of discrimination in organisations (Etherington et al., 2020; McGee 2018; Roberson et al., 2020; Yu, 2020; Hussein 2022; Carrim & Nkomo 2016; Sang 2016; Love et al., 2015; Rosette et al., 2018). This research study sought to understand what these factors are for Indian women as an ethnic minority in South African organisations. The research questions were designed to provide context to understand what these lived experiences are for Indian women. The results of the 18 interviews conducted are grouped around the research questions, and themes that emerged with the themes and categories noted under each research question ranked from highest to lowest.

5.6 Triangulation of data

Through this research, the researcher undertook to understand the views of 18 Indian women who work in South African organisations. This was done to provide comprehensive insights regarding the effects of ethnicity on Indian women leaders in South African organisations, and to assure the validity of the findings from the interviews conducted. Each theme that emerged was verified by the 18 participants, which added credibility to the research findings.

5.7 Results for Research Question 1: What are the barriers that Indian women as senior leaders and as an ethnic minority group experienced in organisations?

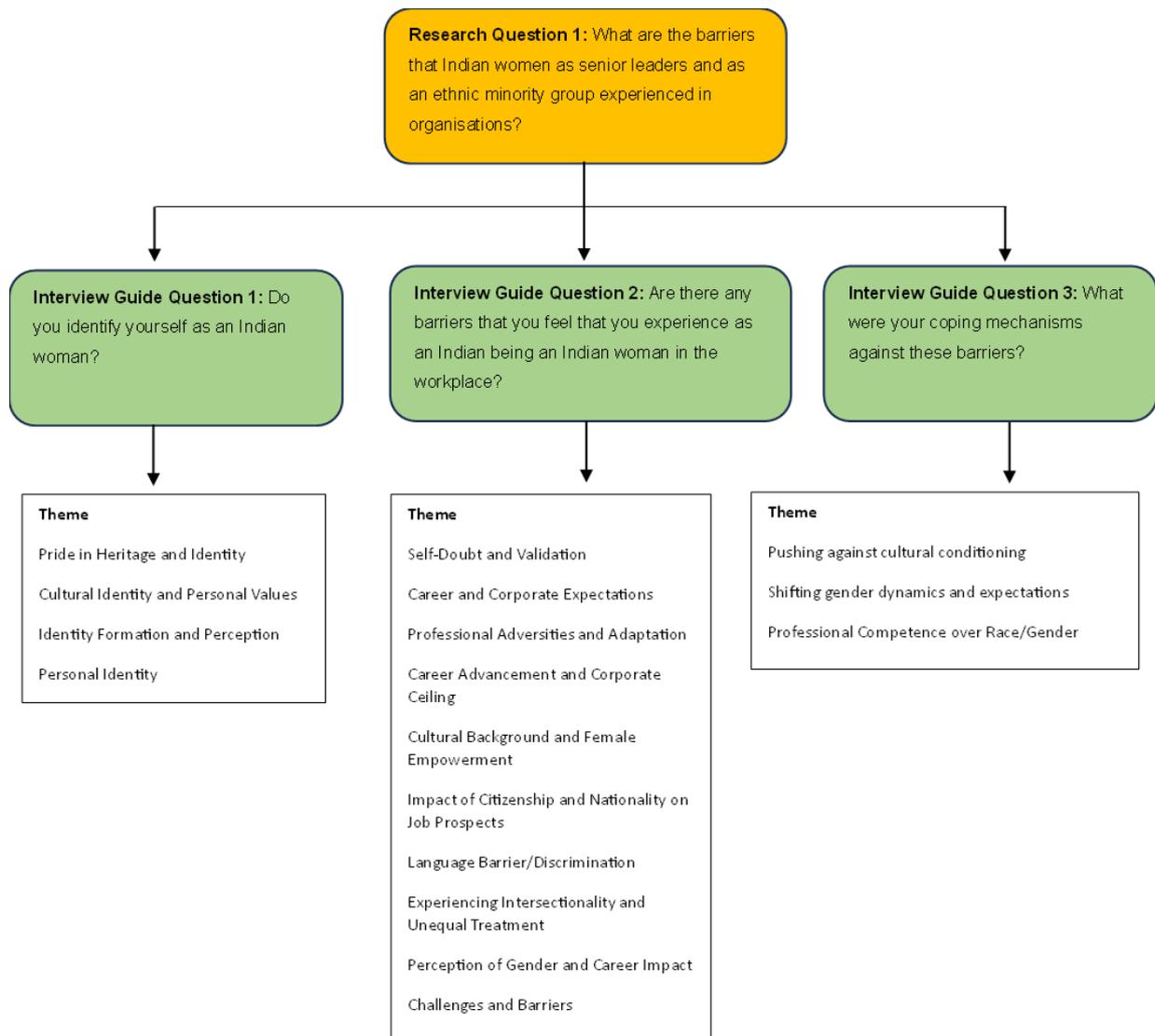


Figure 2: Research Question 1, Interview Questions and Themes

Research Question 1 aimed to identify the factors that related to barriers Indian women face as senior leaders and as part of an ethnic minority group experience in organisations. Interview Question 1 was designed to determine whether the participant did in fact identify as being Indian. Sixteen of the 18 participants identified as Indian women, and two of the 18 participants identified as African first, rather than Indian.

Interview Question 2 was designed to provide context into the barriers that Indian women face in their organisations. A key finding related to the barriers faced by the 18 participants was that the barriers did not stop these women in the pursuit of their career, even though

their choices were very limiting due to family responsibility and the need to earn an income. A majority of the women expressed their willingness to keep going regardless of the barriers faced, as they were determined to make an impact and set an example for their children.

Racial discrimination was a theme highlighted by most participants as relevant from the data, where one woman expressed that she did not receive an opportunity to fulfil multiple roles due to the colour of her skin, and not being part of the required ethnic group in the organisation. She was, rather, asked to make the tea for her male colleagues, and she described this as the role that they saw her playing in the organisation. When she raised this concern with her father, who she looked up to, he provided her with the advice not to leave the organisation and to accept what she cannot change.

Interview Question 3 asked participants how they coped with these barriers and what mechanisms they used to overcome them. This question was asked so as understand the types of coping mechanisms that Indian women have to build in their careers in order to succeed. The results revealed that failure was not an option for the participants. The women expressed that demonstrating exceptional work ethic and perseverance allowed them to grow and progress their careers by means of education, mentorship, and agency they were able to navigate the barriers faced and found that upskilling themselves in the workplace and proving their worth, even at their own expense worked for them and continues to be the case.

5.8 Results for Research Question 2: Do Indian women leaders feel marginalised in their organisations as a result of being an ethnic minority?

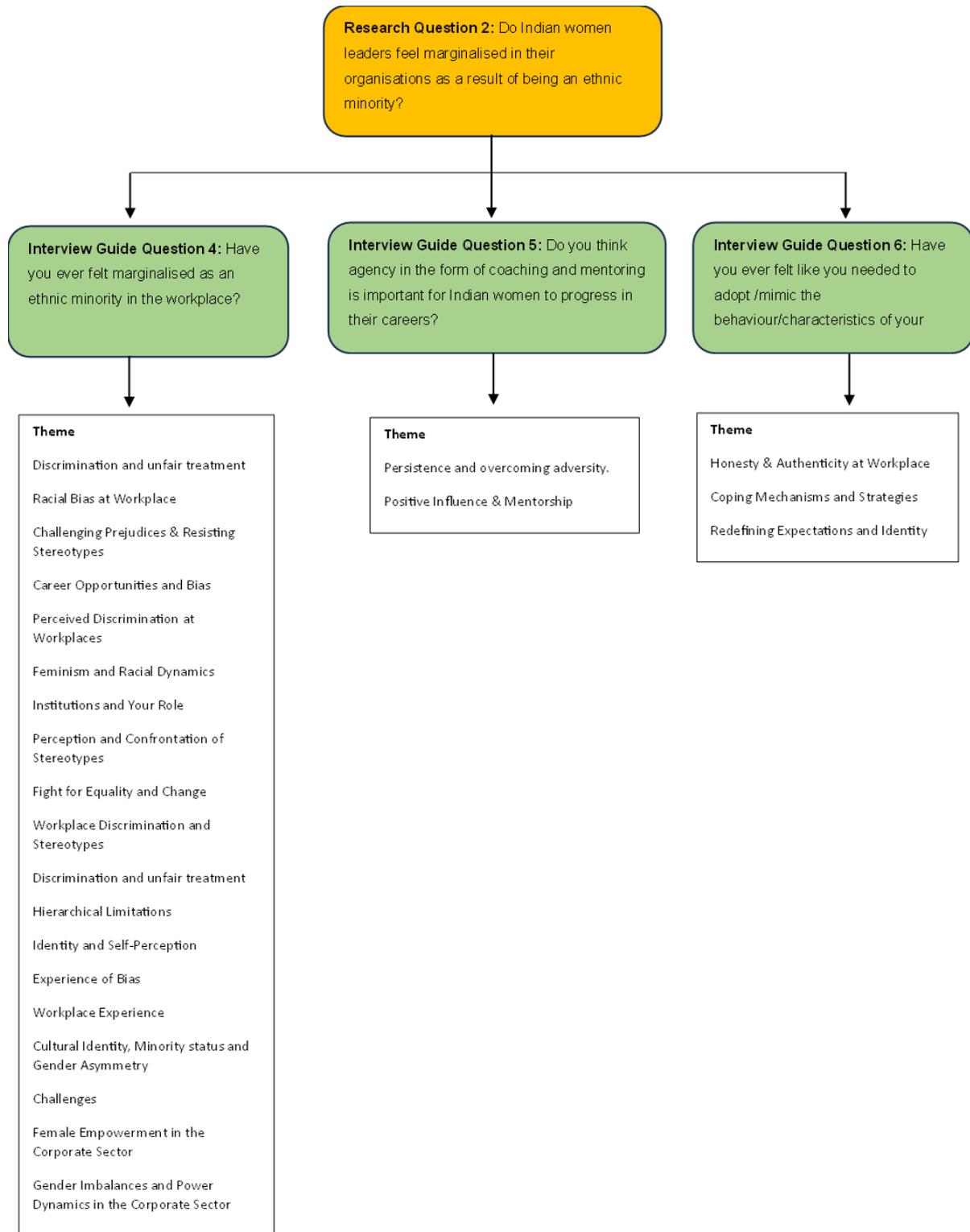


Figure 3: Research Question 2, Interview Questions and Themes

Research Question 2 was designed to determine whether Indian women felt marginalised in their organisations as part of an ethnic minority. The aim of the question was to understand whether these 18 participants felt marginalised in their careers, and to share their lived experiences with the researcher.

Interview Question 4 of the interview guide asked participants whether they felt marginalised. The theme that appeared in a majority of the answers received was that participants felt seen and not heard by colleagues, where there was a sense of displacement and lack of belonging in the “in circles” that existed in organisations. A participant shared that her colleagues were not rude to her, but were also not subtle in showing that she was overlooked. The participants expressed that they had come to terms with not being part of social circles, where one participant mentioned that she does not consume alcohol, and often feels left out at corporate golf days, but that she has found a way to overcome this by creating meaningful networks and relationships in her industry.

Interview Question 4 of the interview guide asked participants if they felt marginalised.

A theme that came through with regards to this research question was that of being told why as an Indian woman you were successful in obtaining a position and the opposite of this, where participants advised that they were told that they are not ‘the right shade’ to have been successful for the job application. Participants characterised this as marginalisation.

The stereotyping of an Indian women based on ethnicity was another theme that emerged under this research question, where a majority of the participants expressed their experiences with being treated differently or being asked questions on their culture that stereotyped them into certain roles.

When asked if mentoring and agency assisted them in navigating their careers, the result of this was an overwhelming amount of support and belief in coaching and mentoring and how this translates into agency for Indian women in organisations. The participants shared that coaching and mentoring provided the support they required to progress in their own careers, and a majority of the women paid this forward by mentoring and coaching other women in their workplaces.

Interview Question 6 asked participants to provide a view as to whether the participants felt the need to adopt or mimic the behaviours and characteristics of their colleagues to fit

in and not to feel marginalised and to understand from the participants lived experiences if this worked for them. The majority of the respondents shared that they did not feel the need to adopt the behaviours of their colleagues and chose to show up in the workplace as their authentic selves, by allowing their work to make the difference and be the reason that they were seen.

One participant did share that she adopted this behaviour in an attempt to be seen and not marginalised, but soon realised that this was not worth it for her, and therefore made the decision to be herself in the workplace.

5.9 Results for Research Question 3: What effect has Indian women’s upbringing had on their leadership style?

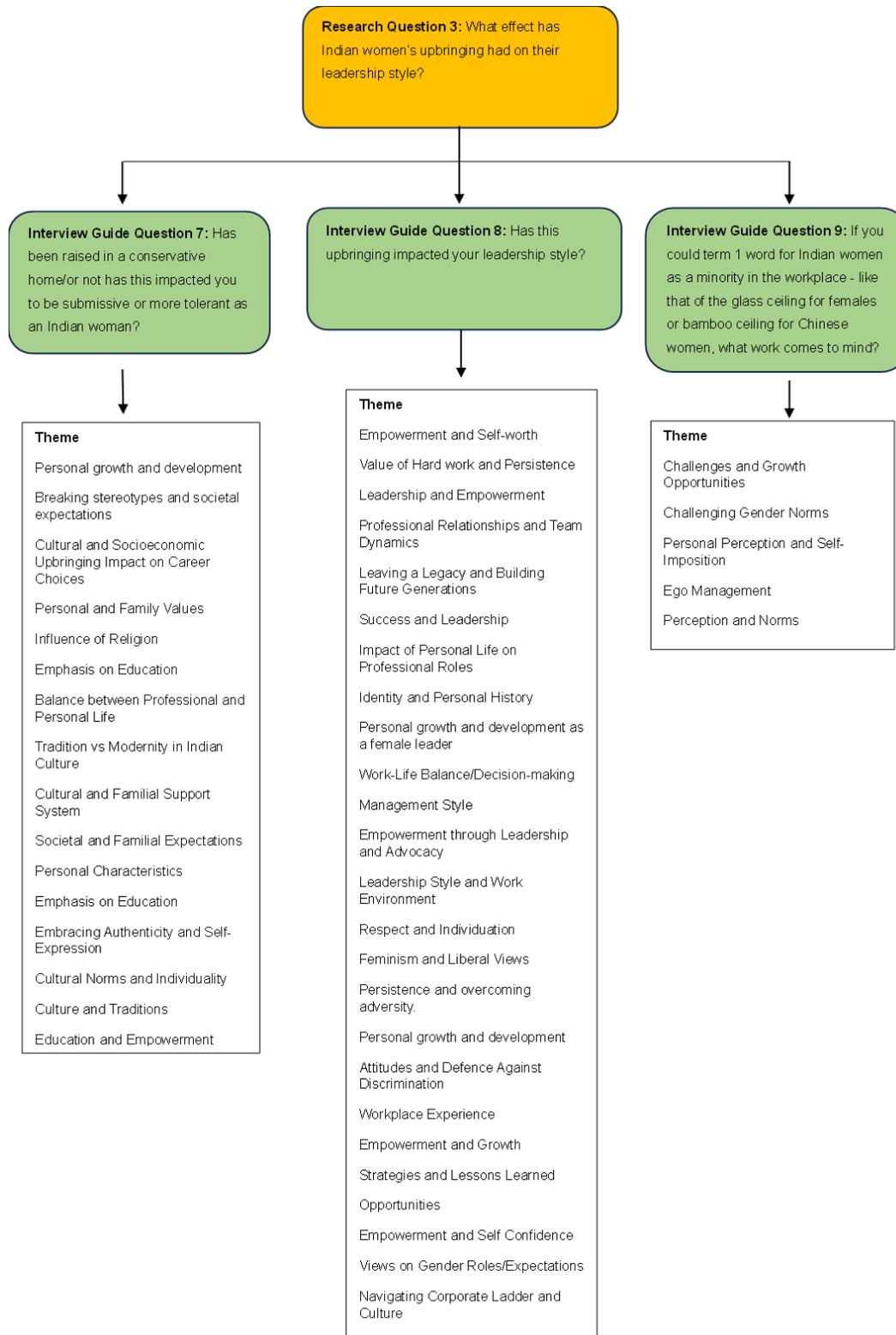


Figure 4: Research Question 3, Interview Questions and Themes

This research question was designed to understand whether participants' upbringing had an impact on their leadership style. Interview Question 7 of the interview guide prompted participants to answer this by asking whether being brought up in a conservative family impacted their careers. The question further expanded to ask whether this made them submissive, or more tolerant. The major theme that emerged from this question was that the views and opinions of parents and the community did play a role in the upbringing of these Indian women. There is a sense that parents still held the opinions of the community, which does influence the guidance and advice given to these women.

Two of the participants shared that they were given very little freedom growing up, where one expressed that she was not allowed to wear make-up. She wore make-up only at the age of 30. Another expressed that she was not allowed to have friends and did not wear strappy tops growing up as her father forbid this.

There was an overwhelming expression in majority of the women where they stood their ground as they left their parents homes and made decisions that worked best for them; not to please their parents or the community. A sense of achievement was expressed in their responses regarding how this was done, and the strides taken to break the social norms attached to Indian women by parents and the community.

Interview Question 8 asked participants if their upbringing affected the type of leaders that they had become. This was asked in order to gain an understanding as to whether childhood upbringing learnt traits infiltrated the leadership style that cannot be unlearned. Sixteen of the participants shared that they feel that their upbringing had an impact on their leadership style, as their work ethic and sense of responsibility was driven from a young age, and it instilled the ability to work hard, and often overcompensate in their tasks. Three of the 18 participants shared that they lead with empathy and could themselves in "other people's shoes" easily, which made up their leadership styles.

When asked for one word that would best describe Indian women and a ceiling as a barrier to penetrate as part of Question 9, the most common word was that of a "husband ceiling". This was related to Indian husbands that place expectations on their wives, which inhabits their careers and limits their career progression. The limitations shared were themes such as limiting, threatening, and expectations.

5.10 Conclusion

The findings for each of the three research questions posed in Chapter 3 were presented in this chapter.

The results of this study revealed that the lived experiences of Indian women does indeed include barriers in the workplace. Barriers noted by the participants of this study included themes such as being overlooked in the workplace, not being included in the “boys club”, and limitations to career growth resulting from limited networking. The questions posed under Research Question 1 also confirmed that Indian women are not given opportunities in the workplace as a result of racial discrimination and are often overlooked for positions that lead to career progression. The results confirmed that the stereotype associated with Indian women is hard to avoid in the workplace as the working culture views Indian women to the social norms that have led to social expectations.

The results suggests that a positive organisational outcomes are achieved when mentoring and agency is received for Indian women entering the workplace. Mentoring and coaching was a theme that emerged from the research study, revealing that a majority of the participants were a product of excellent mentoring and agency, who believe in the difference that it had made for their careers. The study further illustrates that these women now mentor and coach other women to ‘pay it forward’ in their careers. The findings to the three research questions posed in Chapter 3 were presented in this chapter.

Research Question 3 was designed to answer whether Indian women’s upbringing influences their leadership style, and the results from this research study confirms that there is a link between the participants’ upbringing, and the manner in which they lead their own teams in the workplace. The themes that emerged were that of having sympathy and leading with the situations of others in mind and being able to show empathy toward others, as well as respect.

The next chapter will discuss these findings in detail as related to the broader literature.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presented results gathered through a documented process outlined in Chapter 4. The results discussed in this chapter will be done in detail, where insights will be

presented to compare and contrast the results with that of extant literature. These insights will provide an understanding of the constructs associated with effects of ethnicity on

Indian women as a minority group in the workplace. The results discussed in this chapter will provide a view of the conclusive findings to the three research questions that were posed in Chapter 3.

The study identified the effects of being part of an ethnic minority and how the results of the lived experiences of Indian women, offering new insights that have not previously been explored in the reviewed literature presented in Chapter 2 of this research study. The discussion presented in this chapter are in line with the research questions posed in Chapter 3 and will collectively provide insight into the research problem identified in Chapter 1.

The sample criteria was Indian women in leadership roles in South African organisations, where these women were asked to share their lived experiences as being part of a minority in the workplace. These experiences could be positive or negative experiences. Interview Question 2 elicited examples of barriers that they have faced as being Indian and in the minority in their workplace and Interview Question 3 prompted participants to share the coping mechanisms that these women use to overcome these barriers they face. Participant responses confirmed that they experienced barriers in the workplace that have led to limitations in career progression, and that these barriers are being faced in organisational culture as well. The participant responses to the research questions validate that interview participants have met the sample criteria, which provide credibility to the findings of this study.

6.2 Discussion of results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What are the barriers that Indian women as senior leaders and as an ethnic minority group experienced in organisations?

Research Question 1 sought to identify the barriers that Indian women face in the organisations that they are part of or have been part of. Interview Question 1 prompted participants to share the barriers that they have experienced and to shed light on what these are. This study sought to identify the specific barriers that are experienced by Indian women. This section proceeds to discuss each theme that has emerged from Question 1 and 2 of the interview guide that provides a view of the barriers experienced by Indian

women in the workplace, and how these women overcome these barriers by providing context into the coping mechanisms used by participants to overcome the barriers.

6.2.1 Barriers in the workplace

The study found that Indian women in fact do face barriers in the workplace because of being part of a minority group. The barriers experiences by Indian women as shared by participants have impacted them negatively in the workplace in different aspects. The themes that have dominantly been raised in the data collection process will be discussed below.

6.2.1.1 Self-doubt and need for validation

The study revealed that self-doubt and the need for validation for Indian women is a requirement for them to feel validated in the work environment. The participants shared that they experienced self-doubt, particularly at the onset of their careers, on their value add and contribution to organisations. The need to validate their worth and place in the workplace was always relevant, so as to ensure that job security was achieved. This finding was anticipated based on the literature reviewed, which discussed the aspects of self-doubt often experienced in ethnic minority groups. This finding supports Kele et al. (2022), who found that individuals tend to adopt fluid identities between their personal and professional lives in an attempt to be socially accepted in the workplace, where women that are in a minority in the workplace tend to belittle themselves, for fear of being judged, which stems from an innate feeling of self-doubt.

The researchers argued that women in a minority group in the workplace are not provided with the support that inspires confidence and assurance, which is required for career success. This is supported by Hogg (2021), who suggests that social identity theory explains minority groups seek constant validation from “outgroups”, where, when that validation is not received, there is a negative response.

6.2.1.2 Intersectionality

A theme that emerged from the research study was that the women interviewed felt that they were seen differently to their peers, where there is a sense of pressure to do more and be more to be seen by colleagues and senior management for career progression. This view is confirmed by McCluney and Rabelo (2019), who suggest that without sponsors or mentors, minority women tend to struggle with career progressions, and are often overlooked when there are opportunities in the workplace.

While intersectionality was a theme that emerged from the study, it was found that the lived experiences of all the participants were not the same. They are not just women, but Indian women, and at that, Indian women with vastly different experiences. There were participants who felt that they were not seen differently as a result of being Indian, while other participants felt strongly that being part of an ethnic minority was the reason that they were treated differently and given less opportunities than white women, as an example. Similar experiences could be felt in a shared racial identity in a country where race is important. The women shared experiences of being told by hiring managers themselves that they are were not the correct race for career progression and opportunities provided. These differences in lived experiences in relation to intersectionality and the difference of experiences that exist are confirmed by Rosette et al. (2018), who argued that what one person may experience may be very different to that of another in the same social group, as it is noted that intersectionality is based on the struggle that different women of colour face in terms of bias and discrimination.

The lack of visibility experienced by the Indian women that were interviewed provided the context that these women often felt like they were neither seen nor heard. A participant shared that she often felt like she needed to scream at her loudest to be heard in her organisation, as she was not part of the “boys club” and not included in the networking events that included males only. The effect of precarious visibility is explained by Rosette et al. (2018) as the exclusion that is faced by employees, noting that there is no sense of belonging and their uniqueness is neither seen nor valued. The lack of distinctiveness and sense of belonging for ethnic women of a minority in the workplace makes ethnic women that are in the minority feel as if they do not belong to the organisation. The feeling of not belonging can be attributed to the women’s status in the organisation or the hierarchy of the organisation.

6.2.1.3 Career advancements and corporate ceiling

The study found a positive career progression when Indian women enter the workplace with a sense of authority and power, as opposed to self-doubt and less confidence. Themes that emerged in the research study included that as the women interviewed began building experience and skill and moved to different organisations, they became confident in their ability and value. This provided the platform for them to grow and progress in their careers. This view is supported by Wilkins-Yel et al. (2019), who posit

that women who are in the minority in the workplace need to take back their power and authority.

The structural make-up of an organisation plays a role in this success, as these women felt confident coming into organisations, only once having gained the confidence and skill that made them feel worthy to be part of the conversation and to add value and speak up. The challenge in this regard are the barriers and lack of career progression at the onset of their careers in organisations that do not support Indian women that are in the minority when they start their careers. Support is fundamental to having Indian women progress and providing them with the agency required to feel like they belong and are valuable in organisations. Tlaiss and Kauser (2019) describe this support as changing the perceptions that exist in organisations around ethnicity and gender, which can only be done through agency and structures that support women that are part of the minority. The research study confirmed this view, as participants shared that when they felt supported and were given opportunity, this assisted them with building confidence and progressing in their careers. The guidance and support further supported their integration into the work environment.

6.2.2 Coping mechanisms

The results of this study found that Indian women used coping mechanisms to face barriers in the workplace. These mechanisms range from educating themselves to ensuring that they work harder than those around to overcome the barriers that they face as an ethnic minority in the workplace.

6.2.3 Cultural Conditioning

The theme that emerged from participants was that of cultural conditioning, explaining that hard work and work ethic was taught at a very young age, and this was taken into the workplace. Participants shared that proving their worth through adding value and working twice as hard as everyone else often led to their success. The ability to keep going regardless of the barriers faced has been ingrained in them from a young age, which led to progress, slow as it may have been. The cultural conditioning to stay in a position while being unhappy was championed by family members, who preached acceptance. Tlaiss et al. (2019) support the view of women in the minority having to work harder in the workplace to assert themselves in proving that they can grow their own business, or climb the corporate ladder.

Associated to this theme, was the cultural conditioning that exists within organisations. Participants shared that white females and males dominate the workplace from the view that they are what corporates deem to be ideal workers, and by virtue of this receive opportunities and access to networks that are not made available to Indian women. This view is supported by Kele et al. (2021), who describes the experience of minority groups in the workplace as the cultural conditioning that exists within organisations, with a view that the concept of workers, which include white men and women, does not include diverse ethnicities. This drives the need for ethnic minorities to fight harder and stand taller to gain any recognition in the workplace. There is a need to change the perceptions of ethnic minority groups at a cultural level in organisations, which begin at senior levels of leadership, before the culture can be changed at any structural level.

6.2.4 Gender dynamics

The inequality that exists between men and women was a theme that emerged from the research study, where three of the four participants felt that they struggled more with gender discrimination than they do with being Indian female. The equality gap that exists between men and women has been studied at length and is experienced differently as a socially constructed and subjective construct that is created, produced, and constituted differently across time, place, and culture (Opera et al., 2019). Hussein (2022) supports this view by noting that women are often token appointments in the workplace and are therefore not acknowledged for their contribution. Based on this, women are then excluded from decision-making positions and structures and placed in positions where their personal career progression is slow. A participant shared her own lived experience that she was told by her reporting manager that she was successful in gaining a position only based on her skin colour, and not because she earned or deserved the position. This impacted the participant for a long time, until she had to make the decision to stop listening to this internalised voice. Georgiadou and Syed (2021) argues that the lack of support and access to social networks does influence the success, access, and agency that ethnic women are afforded in comparison to men.

Lack of agency and access are not the only two factors that affect women in the minority, there are other factors such as wage gap and career progression that hinder them. The lack of agency that women struggle with further contributes to this, as, in this research study, a theme that emerged was that the women felt that they could not advocate for themselves when it came to salary discussions. The participants felt that this was not a

discussion that could easily be had, however, the women expressed that they were confident in their skill and value but could not discuss the salaries that they deserved. This is in complete contrast to the characteristics of men, who, according to Masood (2018) suggests that men easily ask for what they believe belongs to them.

6.2.5 Professional competence

The results from this research study suggest that Indian women in the minority that have faced multiple barriers and are relentless in their quest for career progression and success. The women who participated in this research study were all leaders in their own companies and held positions in senior to executive management. The theme that emerged from the research study was that a strong work ethic played a role in their success, together with a mentor at a stage in their career that assisted with propelling their careers. The research findings further note that the journey to leadership for South African women who self-identify ethnically is not easy. In this study the women shared their lived experiences of having to push boundaries both in their personal and professional life to reach the positions in which they found themselves. The women stress the importance of education that assisted in the achievement of their career growth. Robert and Mayo (2018) supports this view by suggesting that emerging leaders are often overlooked and under resourced, which makes their leadership journeys different to that of those who are given the required support and agency to be in decision-making roles within organisations. What cannot be overlooked is that there is a sense of heaviness that comes with these leaders who are in the minority, as their fight has been ongoing for years, and continues due to the lack of support for diversity and equality (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). Participants shared that the resources within the organisations were not supportive in providing the agency and investment in them to promote their career progression. This led the women identified in this study to educate and upskill themselves through perseverance and dedication, which resulted in advancement in their positions within the structures of their organisations.

6.3 Summary of discussion for Research Question 1

The research study concluded that Indian women face barriers as an ethnic minority in the workplace. The barriers faced are multifaceted and the struggle with these barriers stem from cultural upbringing that does not advocate for Indian women to have a voice, as well as a workplace that does not provide Indian women with the platform to grow in confidence in their own voices. Self-doubt and the lack of belief in themselves have placed

Indian women on a back foot, as they do not believe in themselves from the onset of their careers. It is only with time and experience, that a sense of self belief is grown. The results of this research study found that intersectionality is also a factor that must be considered, as it provides context into the lived experiences of Indian women that are an ethnic minority. Some of the women shared their experiences of having to watch and adopt the characteristics of their leaders to find their leadership style. This relates to the lack of mentoring and coaching given to these women from the onset of their careers and is only given in some instances by a leader who believed in them, although this is not the case for all the women.

The coping mechanisms used to overcome these boundaries are themes that emerged such as cultural conditioning, which speaks to the learnt trait from an upbringing that gives little room for failure. The thought and often unspoken expectation from family that failure is never an option for these women, firstly means that women are left with no choice but to succeed due to their financial responsibilities, or two, that acceptance of situations as given to these women in the workplace was not to be questioned, but rather, accepted. This innate need to succeed without a voice places Indian women at a disadvantage. To cope with these barriers of cultural conditioning, the research found that the women resorted to find agency within their organisations, such as via mentors, to advocate and provide opportunities for them. This assisted to an extent with the gender gap that exists for Indian women and allowed them access to networks and groups that they would otherwise not been given access to.

6.4 Discussion of results for Research Question 2

Research question 2: Do Indian women leaders feel marginalised in their organisations as a result of being an ethnic minority?

Research Question 2 sought to understand the lived experiences of Indian women being marginalised in their organisations. This study sought to identify those factors that make Indian women feel like they are being marginalised in the workplace. This section proceeds with a discussion of each theme that emerged related to Indian women's lived experiences of marginalisation in their organisations.

6.4.1 Discrimination and unfair treatment

This study found that Indian women have experiences of being marginalised in the workplace. From lived experiences, race emerged as a factor at work. The women shared

experiences of not being given feedback on why they were not successful in roles that they applied for but were simply told the roles were reserved for their white or Black colleagues. In other instances, women were told that they were successful for positions applied for, simply because they were the correct skin tone, and not appointed for their value or skill. While there is very little research to support the views mentioned above for Indian women in South Africa, Sang (2018) supports this view with regards to Black women that are part of an ethnic minority group in a study conducted in the US. Sang (2018) found that there is considerable oversight in career progression and marginalisation of Black women as an ethnic minority. A study conducted by Roberts and Mayo (2018) confirms this, suggesting that women in minority ethnic groups are overlooked and excluded in career progression and decision-making in the workplace in comparison to their colleagues, who are either white or part of the majority in the workplace (Roberts & Mayo, 2018).

The women who were interviewed shared that discrimination in the workplace was not always received from white or Black colleagues, but also experienced from Indian colleagues. A finding of the research was that Indian people were the hardest for them to lead and that they received push back from both Indian men and women. There is very little research on this dynamic within the Indian community in South Africa, and the reasons for why this is the case remain unclear. However, it is important to note that bias in this instance was noted as being received from the same ethnic group, where the participants felt that receiving support from your own ethnic group in the workplace would be the easiest and provide comfort against the barriers that they already have to face.

6.4.2 Lack of career opportunities

The research study also found that Indian women are not provided with the same career opportunities as those offered to their white colleagues. Participants shared that their colleagues were given unprompted awards and increases, excused as “the way things work”. The bias applied was not addressed, even when questioned and the women were made to feel less competent when they did ask questions. Words such as ‘victimised’ and ‘singled out for asking why’ were used, as women described being placed in compromising positions, where they felt that they were placed in positions that had very opportunity for growth. Atewologun (2018) suggests that ethnic women who are in the minority are often on the receiving end of discrimination for progression in their careers and position that will allow for them to succeed, and that this treatment has become the norm, rather than the

exception. Tomlinson et al. (2019) further expands on who found that this lack of career opportunities gives women complexes that are associated with being marginalised.

6.4.3 Importance of agency

The research study found a positive outcome to the progression of Indian women in cases where a mentor was involved. The women shared very strongly that agency and mentoring cannot be overlooked, as this is important in gaining access to conversations that Indian women are otherwise excluded. The importance of mentoring was also linked to networks and professional relationships that it provides. These networks and relationships are important for career progression and success in organisations, as this allows for Indian women to become part of conversation, where perspectives can be shared that would otherwise be excluded. Tlaiss and Kauser (2019) supports this view, by suggesting that the individuals that surround ethnic women constitute important role players that have the ability to change the structures that inhibit ethnic women. Only with the support of key role players in the form of mentoring and agency will the conversation change, where rooms will be filled with diversity and inclusion of all ethnic minorities.

McGee (2018) discusses the role that managers and sponsors have in the advancement of ethnic minority women, by suggesting that ethnic women can succeed if their managers and mentors sponsor them in the advancement of their careers. McGee (2018), who found that without these sponsors, ethnic women tend to struggle with career progression, makes them often invisible as a minority.

6.4.4 To adopt or mimic

The research study found that Indian women do not see the need to adopt or mimic the characteristics or behaviour of their colleagues. Hogg et al., 2012 supports this view that ethnic women find themselves having to adopt or mimic the characteristics of their colleagues, with the view that this could lead to career opportunities and agency. However, this behaviour is not true to the women's identities, and this leads to the women having to adopt two different identities.

There were only two out of the 18 participants that shared early in their career, they would talk and use words that their white colleagues used in order to assimilate in the workplace and thereby be taken seriously. The majority of women felt that staying true to their ethnicity and who they were was important, and that there was no need to adopt or mimic the characteristics or behaviour of their colleagues.

A theme that did emerge was that of adopting leadership styles and traits of leaders that the women were currently or previously led by, that inspired the women on their own leadership journey. This was achieved when the women were mentored by their leaders, who saw potential in them and provided guidance and support in navigating their careers.

6.4.5 Traditional stereotypes and power dynamics

The research study found that Indian women take the matter of personal work ethic very seriously and prioritise it even in the face of racial discrimination. Traditional stereotypes of women not being able to fulfil their roles due to being female emerged in this research. The competence of the women comes into question, expressed as a gender issue, rather than as an ethnic challenge.

The power dynamic that exists when men question in organisations question the ability of women to perform in their roles has been studied by Masood (2018), who conducted a study on Pakistani women doctors, noting that women are seen as promoting femininity in a masculine workplace culture by choosing to wear the *purdah* in the workplace, resulting in early career stage gender discrimination. Even though this study was done in Pakistan, the women in this research study described their lived experiences to be similar in South African organisations. Participants shared that they have had to adopt masculine personalities and traits to be taken seriously in the workplace. Yu (2020) suggests that this behaviour is found in women ethnic groups who are left with little choice in progressing their careers but are required to use alternative methods in their careers, and this includes the adoption of characteristics that are not in line with who they are.

6.5 Summary of discussion for Question 2

The research findings conclude that Indian women in a minority ethnic group feel marginalised in their organisations. Indian women are made to feel like they are not white or Black enough to fill positions within South African organisations. And in the cases where they are successful in job applications, they are told by colleagues that position was given to them based on the colour of their skin and not for their level of education or skills that have been acquired over the years of hard work and dedication. This places Indian women in a difficult position, as they are left to seek out whatever mentoring they might be able to find to try and advance their careers in environments that do not support them.

To advance their careers, Indian women rely on their high regard for work ethic and dedication to progress. The women prefer for their work to reflect what they can achieve,

rather than adopting or mimicking the behaviour and characteristics of their colleagues. The adoption of traits and characteristics have been identified only when there was leadership, mentoring, and guidance given to Indian women by individuals who believed in their capabilities and provided the agency required to advance their careers. This inspired the women and in doing so, who noted the traits of these leaders and mentors and incorporated these traits into their own leadership style. The power dynamics at play in large organisations have in some instances left Indian women with little choice but to adopt a masculine personality so as to ensure that they are taken seriously allowing them into rooms that otherwise they would not have access.

6.6 Discussion of results for research question 3

Research Question 3: What effect has Indian women's upbringing had on their leadership style?

Research Question 3 attempted to identify the ambient influences that affect Indian women with reference to their upbringing in cultural homes into their leadership styles. The themes that emerged related to the context on the effects of upbringing on Indian women were cultural norms place on Indian women by both the community that they were raised in, as well as organisations based on social norms associated with Indian women. This section proceeds with a discussion of each of these themes that emerged from Research Question 3.

6.6.1 Raised in a conservative home/or not effects on Indian women to be submissive or more tolerant

The theme that emerged from this research study on Research Question 3 was that the women felt that their upbringing sat at the centre of who they were as individuals. The first question in the interview guide asked the participants whether they identified as Indian women, where the overwhelming response was that they identified proudly as such. Some attributed this to the history of Indian people migrating to South Africa in search of a better life, as well as the strides that Indian people have made in the country in a short space of time. The challenges of being brought up in Indian homes was noted as having to be submissive, tolerant, and knowing where their place was in the family. These Indian women note that they are not given the opportunity to be part of decision-making or contribute to the conversation. This is done mainly with men in the family and in some instances, mothers are part of this decision-making discussion. Sivakumar and Manimekalai (2021) supports this view by suggesting that Indian women are thought from

an early age to be submissive to the men in their family, and from this stem the expectation that decisions are made on a woman's behalf. The majority of the women in this research study shared that they were given agency to excel at school, studies, and their careers, however, they did agree that the expectations placed on them was that failure was not an option. And this was often masked with not being troublesome in the workplace, and accepting the way things are done, not directly being told to be submissive. They also failed to speak up for themselves when it came to job applications and salary negotiations.

Dunlop and Scheepers (2023) argue that this is in fact the reality of Indian women, as they enter the workplace with social norms placed on them as home makers and child bearers, and these women struggle to overcome these social norms and be seen differently by their colleagues.

6.6.2 Effects of upbringing on leadership style

The research study theme that emerged from the effects of cultural upbringing on leadership style for Indian women related to work ethic, empathy, and adopting leadership traits from mentors and leaders that inspired Indian women.

The study found that Indian women tend to lean toward being empathetic when leading teams. The participants shared that they were able to lead people, whilst being able to place themselves in the shoes of others when teams struggled. The women were able to take the positive characteristics and behaviours of leaders and mentors who believed in them and shape their careers and incorporate this into their own leadership styles. This placed the women in a difficult position, however, as at times they needed to determine what worked for their own leadership style, and what did not, and then adjust accordingly. The notion of having to switch between their own leadership and those that inspire them was a challenge, as the women took time to identify their own leadership traits. This view is argued for by Easthope (2009), who suggests that the state of in-betweenness that women of minority groups find themselves in requires a constant shift to adapt to their own identities created at work. This places pressure on women in a minority to find themselves and their voices in organisations that are not set up to support them. Hussein (2022) suggest that Indian women are provided with challenges facing their gender, race, and ethnicity that differ from those of their colleagues, which hinders their career progression and their ability to obtain agency in an organisation.

Indian women experience their sense of belonging differently in South African organisations, as the deleterious effects of apartheid remain prevalent. The women expressed finding racial dynamics destabilising. They also expressed the desire for redress. Scheepers (2018) supports this view by suggesting that Indian women as a minority constitute a growing concern in South Africa, as their lived experiences are different to others, and should not be ignored.

6.6.3 Ceilings

The concept of the 'glass ceiling' used to describe the plight of women in the workplace was broached with the participants. They were asked to determine what concept may be appropriate to describe their own unique plight amongst that of other women (see the bamboo ceiling coined by Hyun, 2005, on behalf of minority Asian women).

The following terms were provided for this question:

- Husband ceiling
- Kitchen ceiling
- Masala ceiling
- Roti ceiling
- Silk ceiling
- Paper ceiling

The husband ceiling was the word that was provided by majority of the women who had answered this question and had a word to share. The common theme that emerged from the words associated with Indian women was that there were factors of culture that played a role in the ceiling that Indian women find themselves unable to penetrate. All the explanations and words used to describe the ceiling had a cultural element of social norms placed on Indian women in both their professional and personal lives. This question links back to the three research questions asked in this study, in the sense that Indian women face challenges in their personal and professional lives that stem from their cultural upbringing as well as the social norms that are placed on them without their consent or permission. The struggle that Indian women face is having to break down these barriers in both their personal and professional lives.

6.7 Summary of discussion for Research Question 3

The research study concluded that the Indian women are affected by their upbringing, in homes that are married to cultural social norms placed on women. When these social norms are placed on Indian women, it affects the ability of these women to progress at the pace of their colleagues entering the workplace. The reason for this is the barriers faced by Indian women in their private and professional lives that stagnates their growth.

Agency and mentorship does have a positive impact in breaking the bonds of submissive and tolerant traits that are given to Indian women by society, however, this alone is not enough for all Indian women. In addition, the study found that Indian women that are part of an ethnic minority in the workplace still associate words such as “husband ceiling” and “kitchen ceiling” with what they believe hold them back from career success.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion for the results obtained through the data gathering and analysis process. The research study found the themes that emerged from answering the research questions comprise of the following:

- Self-doubt and need for validation
- The role of intersectionality
- Discrimination and unfair treatment
- Agency and mentoring
- Ethnicity and effects on leadership

Research Question 1 was answered, and results indicate that Indian women face barriers in their workplace. These barriers have been discussed as presented in the results and themes. Research Question 2 aimed to identify whether Indian women felt marginalised in their work environment. The following interventions were identified as a result: discrimination and unfair treatment, lack of career opportunities, importance of agency and mentoring, and the need to adopt characteristics of colleagues to assimilate in the workplace. Question 3 was answered, and the results indicate that there is a link between Indian women and their upbringing. Not all the outcomes of this question from the research study reflected a positive effect on Indian women.

The following chapter will provide a conclusion for this research study.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of Indian woman as a minority group in South African organisations. The lived experiences of minority groups in the workplace is a research topic that has been understudied (Tomlinson 2019; McGee 2018; Rosette et al., 2018; Sales et al., 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). The experiences of minority groups in the workplace are necessarily different from that of majority groups, and for ethnic women there is an even larger gap that exists in understanding the challenges faced for career progression in particular (Sales et al., 2019). Eighteen Indian women's lived experiences in senior leadership positions in South African organisations were explored. This was done to understand if there was a relationship between ethnic minority groups and corporate culture that has a negative relationship in supporting women in an ethnic minority group.

The topic of leadership has been researched for decades, however the leaders that exist within the leadership field must be understood for the different cultures and intersectionality that exists within this field of study (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Women that are in an ethnic minority group in their workplace face challenges that are twofold, being female and then being part of the minority, and these two challenges pose different barriers. Organisations needs to understand this and begin cultivating workplace cultures that are inclusive of minority groups as opposed to ignoring this conversation (Scheepers et al., 2018).

This section of the research study presents the findings of the study and proceeds to integrate the findings that is presented in the outcomes. A discussion then follows of the contribution of this study to academia. This chapter is concluded by discussing the limitations and recommendations of this study.

7.2 Indian women experience barriers in the workplace

Barriers faced are related to the lack of agency and support provided as they are not seen as part of the majority and not afforded value. Indian women must consciously push against the barriers to be part of the conversation and to add their views. This is done by educating themselves to ensure career progression, and providing agency for themselves where there is no agency on offer for Indian women.

The research study found that these barriers create a sense of self-doubt and lack of confidence in Indian women. Indian women entering the workplace not only have to face these barriers, but also contend with being female. This research study found that being female and being part of the minority to be challenges that are often interlinked and the feedback from the interviewed participants is that Indian women must manage both challenges, which places them at a disadvantage from the onset of their professional careers.

7.3 Marginalised in the workplace

The research study found that Indian women are marginalised in the workplace; often told that they are either not white or Black enough in application processes for career progression; and shared a lack of sense of belonging at work. In addition, the research study found that Indian women are not given the same agency and opportunities to progress as their colleagues, where it is only through mentoring that agency is provided which leads to career progression.

The women in this research study emphasised the importance of mentoring and coaching and the positive effect that this had on their own careers. The research study found that the success of the Indian women interviewed for this study resulted from mentoring, and therefore that these women are passionate about mentoring others in their workplace.

The research study found that Indian women face the challenges experienced with vigour, and a sense of commitment to succeed against all odds. The women expressed that the values instilled in them do not allow for failure and this has provided the basis for them to push forward, regardless of any challenges, in ensuring career success.

7.4 Cultural upbringing and the influence on leadership style

The research study confirmed that there is a relationship between the upbringing of Indian woman and their leadership style. The participants of this study confirmed this. The positive relationship shows that empathy and respect instilled from a young age into Indian women means that they are able to place themselves in the positions of those that they lead, and this allows them to see the views of others when leading.

The negative relationship that exists is that of submissive behaviour and tolerance that is expected from the Indian woman from an early age. The research study found that Indian women are not part of decision making in their families as a result of being female, and this affects their ability to advocate for themselves in the workplace. Salary negotiations

was a theme shared in this study, where Indian woman shared that they are unable to negotiate for their salaries based on what their perceived sense of self-value, and this is from an upbringing that thought them to accept the decisions made for them.

The pressure for success academically and as home makers are placed in Indian woman from an early age. Indian communities place the requirement for Indian woman to succeed at any cost in both their schooling and marriage on them from an early age. The research found that Indian women are expected to be successful in their careers, as well as fulfil expectations when they come home, which makes the balancing of these two worlds difficult. Indian women understand the kitchen and notably their husbands, as metaphorical ceilings that they still must contend with and break through to achieve success in their careers.

7.5 Academic contribution of this study

Whilst earlier research related to ethnic minority groups did not include South African Indian women, it is only recently that scholars have recognised the importance of ethnic minorities and the different lived experiences of these groups within organisations. It is important that research is conducted to understand intersectionality in a different context and extend the debate into more homogenous settings.

Scheepers (2018) and Carrim (2020) called for more studies exploring the experiences of ethnic groups in South Africa to improve the understanding of leaders within these minority groups and the barriers that these women face. Intersectionality and gender scholars have focused much of their efforts investigating the experiences of Black African women and very limited research has been conducted on South African minority groups and Indian women. This research study made use of an inductive approach, which allowed for novel insights related to the factors that affect Indian women as a minority in the workplace.

Few leadership and gender scholars have previously sought to understand the experiences of Indian women, and those that did, have explored Indian women who were based in Pakistan and Lebanon (Masood 2018; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019). This research study contributes to current literature, it does this by providing insights from previous literature that did not explore the constructs researched in this study.

This study builds on the work of other scholars. Extant literature has reported on barriers and challenges faced by minority groups in the workplace (Etherington et al., 2020; McGee 2018; Roberson et al., 2020; Yu, 2020; Hussein 2022) where intersectionality and social

identity theory provide context (Carrim & Nkomo 2016; Sang 2016; Love et al., 2015; Rosette et al., 2018). This research study offers new insights identifying specific barriers and challenges.

In addition, this research study expands our understanding of leaders of this cohort, and the manner in which these leaders navigate corporate culture. The research gives an insight into the lived experiences of Indian women in the workplace, which will allow for organisations to understand the barriers faced by ethnic minority women. The study has found that Indian women leaders experience barriers and challenges in both their personal and professional lives which they need to navigate to progress in their careers. This research study aim was provide additional insight to the understanding of ethnic minority women and provides a lens into the barriers faced by women in a minority group. Organisations have the opportunity to relook at its culture and ensure inclusivity of minority groups by creating agency, structure and support for women who are in ethnic minority groups.

7.6 Limitations

As a qualitative research study, there are limitations to the generalisability of the results presented in the research study. Noting the researcher bias in qualitative research that exists (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), the researcher noted additional limitations of the study which include the following:

Researcher Bias – Assumptions and biases are one of the highlighted factors in qualitative research that the researcher can introduce. These biases and assumptions may affect the results of the research study. In recognising and managing these biases, the researcher introduces external interviewers into the data collection process.

Time horizon – Interviews were conducted at only one point in time during 2023 due to time constraints, therefore a cross-sectional research study was conducted. Views and behaviours as noted in this research study are subject to change, for this reason no inference could be made on the transference of identified behaviours into future periods (Williams, 2007). Trust plays an integral in the interview process, as only when people feel safe will they openly express themselves (Newman et al., 2017). The researcher made use of tactics such as maintaining a relaxed conversation at the onset of the interview,

making small talk with the participant, and providing background on herself to build trust with participants.

Cultural and language differences – All interviews in this research study was conducted in English, as this was the home language of the participants.

Quality of data collected – Due to the inexperience of the researcher (interviewer) the quality of the data collected could have been compromised (Roulston, 2010). A pilot interview was conducted by researcher, this was done as the researcher has limited interviewer experience.

7.7 Suggestions for future research

Based on the results of this research study, the following areas still require further research as proposed below:

- *Different age bands*

A few differences were noted in the responses from participants from the different age groups. Future research could study the lived experiences of Indian woman as a minority by comparing the experiences between different age groups to note if older woman experienced challenges are different to perhaps a younger age band.

- *Level of education*

One of the findings was that the women placed emphasis on upskilling and educating themselves to assist with career progression. Future research could look into the levels of education that Indian women have and compare this to their career progression to identify if there is a relationship that exists between education and career progression for minority groups.

- *Indian religious background*

This research was conducted with participants from different Indian religious backgrounds. Future research could as an example research woman from Muslim religious backgrounds compared to Hindu religions.

- *Husband Ceiling*

Feedback from 3 of the women was that a ceiling that hindered progression of Indian women was husbands, and provided the term associated with ceilings for Indian women as the husband ceiling. Future research could look at a study

conducted on Indian husbands and their views on the limitations placed on Indian wives.

- *Ethnic groups in South Africa other than Indian women*

There are multiple ethnic minority groups in South Africa. Future research can study other ethnic groups to determine whether the lived experiences of women from ethnic groups in South Africa face the same challenges as Indian women in this study share.

7.8 Conclusion

The relationship between ethnic minority groups and Indian women leaders reflects that there is work that needs to be done in understanding the lived experiences of Indian women as a minority in organisations. The experiences of leaders cannot be recorded by studying leadership under a single lens. The challenges, barriers and experiences of leaders depends largely on how different leaders add to the conversation based on their experiences in the culture that forms their organisations (Roberson et al., 2020).

Based on the literature reviewed, little is known regarding Indian women as an ethnic minority in the workplace. The findings from this study provide a clear understanding of the factors that affect Indian woman in the workplace and the barriers and challenges faced by Indian women from both a professional and a socio norm perspective. The result of this study advances the conversation related to the lived experiences of Indian women in South African organisations, by discussing the themes that emerged on barriers faced by Indian women, marginalisation of Indian woman as an ethnic minority and the role that culture placed on Indian women to show up in all aspects of their lives.

This study could be useful in improving the effectiveness of Indian women in the workplace by providing these leaders with the agency and support required to add value in their organisations and be part of conversations where diverse views are required in a world where business is constantly evolving. The voice of diversity is required in business, as we now note that businesses are looking to expand if not already global.

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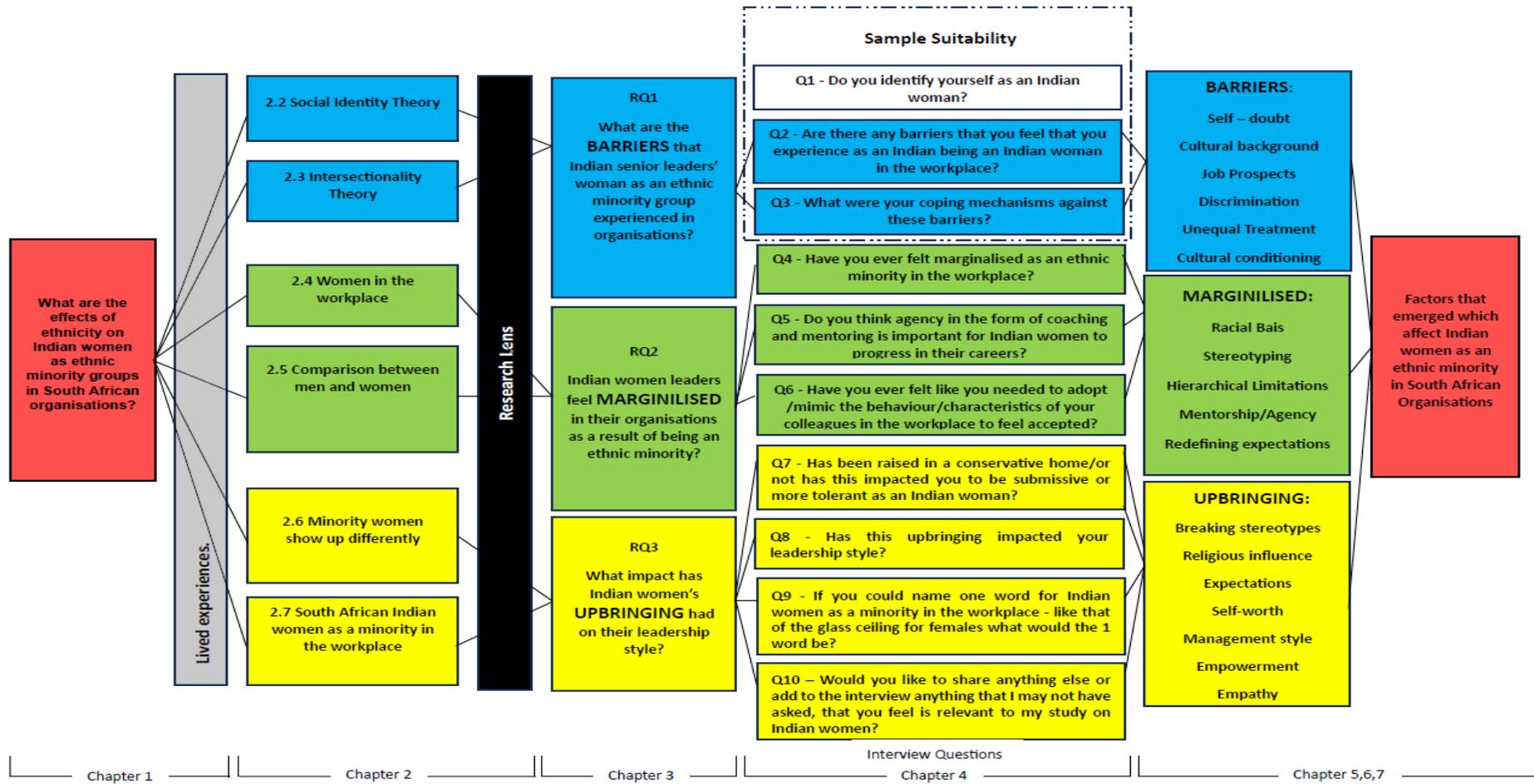
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APPENDIX 1: THE GOLDEN THREAD



APPENDIX 2: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethical Clearance Approved External Inbox x

GIBS

Masters Research  <MastersResearch@gibs.co.za>
to me, Masters ▾

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear NABEELAH MAHARAJ,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

Research Study Consent Form

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on leadership and am trying to find out more about "*The effects of ethnicity on Indian women leaders as a minority group in South African organisations*".

Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will help us understand the lived experiences of Indian women in the workplace in a South African context. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: |

Research Supervisor Name:

Email:

Phone:

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

Name:

Surname:

Race:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

Interview Question 1

Do you identify yourself as an Indian woman?

Interview Question 2

Are there any barriers that you feel that you experience as an Indian being an Indian woman in the workplace?

Potential prompt: Difficulties encountered, experiences, challenges.

Interview Question 3

What were your coping mechanisms against these barriers?

Potential prompt: Overcome barriers, strategies, learnt behaviours.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Interview Question 4

Have you ever felt marginalised as an ethnic minority in the workplace?

Potential prompt: Excluded, lived experiences, inequality.

Interview Question 5

Do you think agency in the form of coaching and mentoring is important for Indian women to progress in their careers?

Potential prompt: Relevance, impact on personal journey, experience.

Interview Question 6

Have you ever felt like you needed to adopt /mimic the behaviour/characteristics of your colleagues in the workplace to feel accepted?

Potential prompt: Behaviour, acceptance, fit in.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

Interview Question 7

Has been raised in a conservative home/or not has this impacted you to be submissive or more tolerant as an Indian woman?

Potential prompt: Culture, role of a women, comparison to males.

Interview Question 8

Has this upbringing impacted your leadership style?

Potential prompt: Perspective, cultural dynamics.

Interview Question 9

If you could name one word for Indian women as a minority in the workplace - like that of the glass ceiling for females or bamboo ceiling for Chinese women, what word comes to mind?

Potential prompt: Bamboo ceiling example.

Interview Question 10

Would you like to share anything else or add to the interview anything that I may not have asked, that you feel is relevant to my study on Indian women?

Potential prompt: Add value to research, did not ask that would like to add.
