

**"Follow-her-ship": Exploring Followership of female
leaders in the manufacturing sector in South Africa**

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science,
University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of
Master of Business Administration

17 March 2025

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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Abstract

The primary aim of the research was to explore the followership of female leaders within the manufacturing sector in South Africa, to gain deeper insights into how female leaders foster and maintain support from their workplace followers. The research explored the perception of male and female followers and demonstrations.

A qualitative phenomenological study of 20 participants, chosen through purposeful sampling of followers who had reported to a female leader. Using an inductive approach the study investigated how gendered expectations and societal norms shaped the followership of female leaders.

The research found that social roles and gendered expectations influence the perception of female leaders. Competency and empathy emerged as essential enablers of effective leadership. Furthermore, the research findings highlighted that while male and female perceptions are shaped by prior leadership experiences and gendered expectancies, enabled by societal norms, female leader also navigate the “Double-Bind” phenomenon, the challenge of balancing communal and agentic traits with followers having differing views.

The research identified awareness activities on gender expectations of followers' leadership, including empathetic leadership and recommends that organisations actively mitigate the “Double Bind” phenomenon female leaders experience, ensuring leadership structures are inclusive and equitable. The study was limited to the manufacturing sector in South Africa. Further research could extend to other industries and cultural contexts to deepen the understanding of Followership dynamics.

Keywords: female leaders, followership, gendered-expectation, gender bias

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List of Acronyms

BBBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
EE	Employment Equity
EQ	Emotional Intelligence
IFT	Implicit Followership Theory
ILT	Implicit Leadership Theory
PPPFA	Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

This research aims to explore the followership of female leaders in a manufacturing environment to better understand how female leaders can foster the support of their followers in the workplace. The study is positioned within the context of the literature on followership and leadership with a specific focus on the dynamics of gender in the workplace. The study explores gender biases on followership, examining if these biases are present and how these biases influence perceptions and behaviours within organisational settings. This research's academic framework is rooted in social role theory (Eagly, 1987) and implicit leadership and followership theories (Hopton & Han, 2020). This provides insights into how gender roles and expectations shape individual actions and interactions in manufacturing environments.

1.2 Women Leaders in Manufacturing

The manufacturing industry presents a unique context for studying followership and gender bias due to its traditionally male-dominated workforce and hierarchical structures (Teruel, Parra & Blasco, 2015). These factors may influence how employees perceive and respond to female leaders, making it a critical setting for examining implicit biases, leadership expectations, and the dynamics of followership (Teruel *et al.*, 2015). By exploring these dynamics, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced ways in which gender biases affect workplace relationships and outcomes.

In the manufacturing sector, where women represent a mere fraction of the workforce, the potential for transformative change through gender equity remains critically untapped. Turban *et al.* (2019) assert that there needs to be equal representation of men and women in the business to foster diversity. The percentage of women employed is reported at less than 17.3 of women in senior management as reported by Deloitte South Africa (Women @ Work 2022: A Global Outlook, 2022) (Deloitte, 2022). Gender equality is imperative for sustainable development, particularly in developing countries, and this aligns closely with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed by the United Nations (UN, 2023). SDG 5 has the outcome of achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls, and ensuring human rights and dignity for all, regardless of gender. Gender equity

breeds social justice and is imperative for economic growth, health outcomes, and overall social health. Broadly, gender advancement contributes to their goals, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), making it a critical imperative for building inclusive and prosperous societies. One of the challenges of achieving gender equity is that the positions of power in institutions remain male-dominated, including in the leadership within business organisations (Braun *et al.*, 2017).

The South African landscape lacks specific cultural studies into gender relations and its effects on leadership equality in the workplace for women. According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2024), the manufacturing sector contributed 12.9% to the GDP. In addition to this significant contribution, this sector employs 1.6 million employees. Growth in manufacturing results leads to stability in the country (UN, 2023). Diversity has been shown to improve the performance of both organisations and nations (Sundari, 2018). However, in a study conducted by Jayachandran (2015), gender bias was found to be more pronounced in developing countries. A statement concluded that 'men make better executives than women', where the participants from developed countries agreed more with the statement than those from developing countries Jayachandran (2015). Furthermore, it was found that significant gender bias exists in leadership evaluations. Men rated their leadership behaviours confidently, and these ratings aligned with their team's perceptions. They received higher performance ratings and were seen as less likely to derail.

In contrast, women who demonstrate equally strong leadership and receive consistent feedback from their teams do not experience the same positive recognition (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). This indicates the change in biases that is required in developing countries and an understanding of followership dynamics and the impact of how perceptions and behaviours affect female leaders within the manufacturing industry is required.

Booyesen and Nkomo (2010) emphasise that despite increasing numbers of women in leadership positions, they have not reached an equitable position concerning the representation of women in top management and C-suite roles. Je *et al.*, (2022) highlight that even when women occupy more roles in a sector, they are still underrepresented in management. In South Africa, the effects and legacy artefacts of apartheid still embedded themselves in the social and economic structures (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). Due to the historically gendered inequality in locations such as Africa and Asia lag behind in various

aspects such as employment, health, education and earnings. The history of patriarchy in society establishes a culture that creates challenges for women in terms of achieving economic equality and emancipating women from traditional family roles. This extends into perceptions and biases women experience in the workplace. Understanding leadership and the followership dynamics of women contributes to the body of knowledge that can break down these assumptions and biases.

1.3 Women in Leadership and Followership

The construct of leadership implies that a leader is created by combined acts of leading and following (Brown & Treviño, 2006). While a significant amount of attention has been given to the concept of leadership in academia and business, developments in the leadership literature have begun to include the interaction between leaders and followers (Holzinger *et al.*, 2006). Literature encompassing follower characteristics has increased the potential to understand this complex relationship. The dualistic context of the follower-leader relationship proposes that what people deem to be repeatable behaviours can impact how effective the relationship is. Bastardo and Van Vugt (2019) uphold that there are no leaders without followers, and in the two-way relationship between the leader and the follower, the role of the leader overpowers that of the follower. As the evolution of thought and interactions continues, Inderjeet and Scheepers (2022) state that existing and institutional ways of thinking are being challenged in terms of leadership. This questioning extends to leadership and the overlooked concept of followership as the inextricable second facet of leadership. According to Bastardo and Van Vugt (2019), leaders influence the direction and movement of people, and followers are those who will agree to take the influence of a leader. Followers are no longer regarded as passive and merely taking instructions. Lemoine *et al.* (2013) state that followers affect both the effectiveness and the ability of a team to deliver on its objectives

Followership is primarily theorised in two ways by Inderjeet and Scheepers (2022), who assert that it is a role or rank using the role theory approach and by Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017), who highlight the social theory constructs. Followership is theorised as a role or rank (Inderjeet & Scheepers, 2022) or as a relational dynamic shaped by social constructs (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). In manufacturing, where leadership remains male-dominated and hierarchical, role theory suggests that employees may struggle to reconcile female leadership with traditional leadership norms, leading to bias (Teruel *et al.*, 2015). Studying

followership in this context provides insight into how gender biases influence perceptions of female leaders and workplace dynamics (Koeng & Eagly, 2014). These theories help understand how followership is established and provide insights into how one could grow followership. Carsten *et al.* (2018) propose that the construct of followership has been overlooked and is now emerging as a concept. Typically, implicit follower theories have been assessed from a leader's perspective (Güntner *et al.*, 2021) rather than a follower's perspective, which creates a gap in understanding a significant part of the workforce. With the limited number of women in leadership roles and the gender norm of male leaders in organisations, this poses the question of how followership is influenced by gendered expectations and how the current imbalance is perpetuated by the perception of what gender a leader and follower should be.

Gender roles and gender norms, as supported by society, tend to subordinate women, which is replicated in the workplace (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). With leadership viewed and carried out as a largely male-dominated tier of work, followership's inextricable and counter-dependant aspect is automatically gendered. For leaders to exist, they must have followers and subscribe to the leadership criterion related to guiding, directing and possessing an authoritative position over someone in a subordinate position (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Kinnear and Ortlepp (2016) explore the challenges of power faced by women who occupy a place of leadership and yet do not have the same authority as their male counterparts due to entrenched patriarchal systems of power and privilege. Therefore, having the position to lead does not automatically result in the power to influence followers to follow.

Followership contributes to the lack of female leadership in organisations because females in leadership roles can only be followed by followers who are willing to be subordinate to a woman (Korabik, 2010). The stereotypical characteristics of women that relate to nurturing, caring, and being less outspoken feed into gender dynamics that propose women to be less worthy of being followed as opposed to their male counterparts (Hoption & Han, 2020). For this reason, gender equality in the workplace (and in leadership specifically) cannot be achieved if there is not a deeper understanding of what influences followers to follow and the role gender norms play in how followers choose to follow women leaders.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This research study aimed to explore the followership of women in the South African manufacturing sector, a traditionally male-dominated industry (Teruel *et al.*, 2015). The overarching purpose was to understand how female leaders can cultivate and maintain the support of their followers, both male and female, in a context where gender biases and historical power dynamics persist (Mayer & Barnard, 2015). Specifically, the study sought to answer the primary research question: "Exploring followership of female leaders in manufacturing in South Africa."

To delve deeper into this study, three secondary research questions were formulated:

- (1) How do followers perceive their female leaders?
- (2) How do followers relate their perceptions to gender expectations?
- (3) How do followers demonstrate their followership of female leaders?

To address these research questions, qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, evenly split between male and female followers, all of whom had previously reported to a female leader within the manufacturing environment. The interviews explored participants' perceptions, beliefs, and actions related to female leadership. The collected data was then subjected to thematic analysis, a method chosen to uncover recurring patterns and themes within the participants' narratives. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between gender, leadership, and followership. The theoretical framework guiding this analysis drew upon Social Role Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig & Eagly, 2014), Cognitive Development Theory (Bussey & Bandura, 2014), and Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories (Braun *et al.*, 2017; Sy, 2015), providing a robust lens through which to interpret the findings.

A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was employed to gather and analyse data to achieve the study objectives. This qualitative method allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of individuals in organisational contexts, focusing on how they perceive and respond to women leaders. The structure of this report is as follows: a purpose defining why this study is necessary and the gaps that exist, a literature review which establishes the theoretical foundation and contextual background, followed by a detailed

methodology section outlining the research design and data collection process, followed by an analysis of the data, discussion and recommendations.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

The research revealed that followers' perceptions of female leaders are significantly influenced by their pre-existing mental models of "good leadership," often shaped by prior experiences and societal expectations (Hoption & Han, 2020). Competence and expertise emerged as highly valued traits, particularly among male followers, reflecting the influence of Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT) (Braun *et al.*, 2017), while both genders appreciated emotional intelligence and a balanced leadership style (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014). However, female leaders frequently encounter the "double bind," phenomenon where they are perceived negatively for exhibiting either traditionally masculine or feminine traits (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). Implicit biases, reinforced by workplace culture, further complicate the landscape, with some followers even actively sabotaging female authority (Shen & Joseph, 2021).

1.5.2 Practical Significance

These findings have significant implications for both industry and academia. For manufacturing organisations, the research underscores the need to implement comprehensive unconscious bias training, develop inclusive leadership development programs, and foster a culture of psychological safety (Heilman, 2012). By addressing gender disparities and creating more equitable workplaces, organisations can enhance employee engagement, improve organisational performance, and gain a competitive advantage (Badura *et al.*, 2018). For academia, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between gender, leadership, and followership. It highlights the need for interdisciplinary research that explores the intersectionality of gender with other social identities and the importance of conducting longitudinal studies to track the development of female leaders and their follower relationships. Moreover, the study emphasises the necessity of developing and testing interventions aimed at reducing gender bias and promoting inclusive leadership, particularly within the South African manufacturing context, where historical and cultural factors play a significant role (Herbst, 2020). Ultimately, this research provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for female leaders in manufacturing, paving the way for more equitable and supportive workplaces.

1.6 Structure of the Report

Chapter One provides an introduction to the study detailing the aim and purpose of the study. This chapter also presents a compelling case for why manufacturing is at the heart of this research and growth and provides insights on both manufacturing and women in leadership in manufacturing. Chapter two details the literature that was available and analysed for this study. These include Implicit Leadership theory, social and cognitive theory, expectancy theory and ILT and IFT. Further to this, the lens of gender was applied to better understand how female leaders can cultivate and sustain the followership of other players in the workplace. Chapter Three dives deep into the primary and secondary research questions detailing the three secondary research questions. Chapter Four presents the research methodology followed to align with the primary research questions., the scope of work and the target population. In Chapter Five the findings from the qualitative research are presented using quotations of participants anonymously, this data is analysed for themes and the themes obtained are utilised to answer the research questions in Chapter Six. In Chapter Six, the findings are compared and contrasted with Chapter Two, Chapter Three, Chapter Four, Chapter Five and discussed in depth. The final chapter, Chapter Seven contains the recommendations and conclusions as well as a graphical representation of the theories and how they collectively contribute to the understanding of gender and followership, including how female leaders can sustain the support of their followers in the workplace.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Hopton and Han (2020) define leadership as a process in which leaders and followers work together to develop and manage relationships. Brown and Treviño (2006) highlight that leadership is built on relationships characterised by motivation, power, communication, and diversity. Moreover, Ibrahim & Daniels (2019) state that leadership can be seen as the art of influencing others to achieve the required results. However, Alvesson and Blom (2019) argue that cohesion among people can be created through alternative means and that leadership is distinct from merely influencing behaviour. While leadership can foster a sense of belonging and a shared vision, Pearce (2018) notes that few leaders effectively embody these qualities.

Followership is theorised as a role or rank (Inderjeet & Scheepers, 2022) or as a relational dynamic shaped by social constructs (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017) and represents the person's willingness to accept the influence of others. As workplace dynamics continue to evolve in an ever-changing society, the intersection of female leadership and followership presents a critical area of study. As social norms and ideas surrounding gender and gender roles change, so do the expectations and opportunities for women in the workplace (Heilman, 2012). While a substantial amount of research has examined leadership through a gender lens, the role of followership has not seen as much exploration. Followership is a role built on relationships where follower supports their leader, by contributing to the group's function to attain shared goals (Loyola & Aiswarya, 2023). This is crucial because workplace dynamics occur in an interdependent manner; followers cannot be followers without a leader to follow, and leaders cannot lead without followers who uphold that leadership (Ford & Harding, 2018). This gap of interest is especially true in the South African context, where tradition and cultural influences on gender also play a part in influencing follower-leader dynamics (Herbst, 2020).

Gender expectations reshape the traditional dynamics of followership, transforming it from a passive organisational role to a complex social interaction. While followership was historically viewed as a passive component of leadership (Hollander, 1992), contemporary research (Inderjeet & Scheepers, 2022, Cerbara *et al.*, 2022.) revealed that gender significantly complicates these workplace interactions. Heilman (2012) demonstrated that

gendered expectations profoundly influence how followers engage with leaders, directly impacting how their contributions are perceived and valued within organisations. These expectations create a nuanced landscape where follower behaviours are not merely responsive, but actively mediated by deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and cultural assumptions (Heilman, 2012).

In the South African context, this workplace dynamic takes on added complexities due to the intersection of traditional values and historical gender roles (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012). The legacy of patriarchal systems continues to influence workplace relationships, particularly in how female leaders are perceived (Mayer & Barnard, 2015). These influences manifest in various ways, from subtle behavioural expectations to more overt biases concerning which gender suits the stereotypical characteristic traits of leaders and followers (Mayer & Barnard, 2015). Gender stereotypes (preconceived notions about the characteristics and behaviours of men and women) can influence how followers perceive female leaders (Heilman, 2012). For instance, women may be perceived as less authoritative, affecting their effectiveness as leaders. The power dynamics of the relationship between males and females arise from such gender stereotypes (Braun *et al.*, 2017).

Understanding these dynamics requires an examination through multiple theoretical lenses, such as social role theory, cognitive theory, and implicit leadership and followership theories, which are suitable for this study. Mar Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.* (2023) explored how gender diversity can accelerate inclusive innovation, fostering the ideation and execution of novel ideals that may ultimately enhance the living conditions and economical sustainability of previously disadvantaged societies. This has far-reaching consequences for South Africa which has both a high unemployment rate and the highest genie coefficient rate in the world according to World Population Review Report (2025).

A study by Kincaid *et al.* (2022) gave a basic insight into individual roles by exploring how individuals act and conduct themselves within the roles they hold in a social context, also known as role theory. In manufacturing, where leadership remains largely male-dominated, role theory suggests that employees may find it challenging to align female leadership with traditional norms. Furthermore, Teruel *et al.* (2015) conducted a study on social role theory, emphasizing how organisational culture and gender expectations shape leader-follower interactions.

Understanding these functions and power dynamics necessitates an analysis through theoretical frameworks, namely social role theory, cognitive theory, and implicit leadership and followership theories. These frameworks provide overlapping perspectives on how gender expectations contribute to shaping perceptions of followership and organisational behaviour patterns. This literature review examines these theoretical frameworks and their application to leadership, with a focus on gender dynamics and followership roles in the workplace.

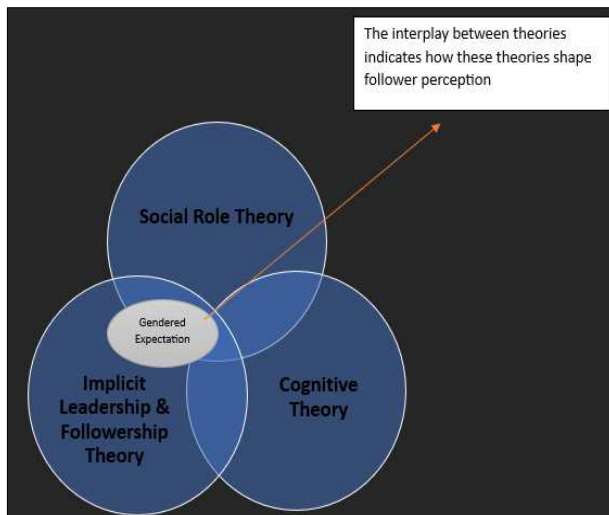


Figure 2.1 Intersectionality Diagram

The Intersection Diagram illustrates the interplay between Social Role Theory, Cognitive Development Theory, Implicit leadership and Followership theory and adds another dimension to the model by integrating the Gendered Expectation element in shaping followership perceptions.

Explanation of Intersections:

- Social Role Theory & Cognitive Development Theory: This intersection highlights how societal norms and cognitive schemas contribute to implicit biases and leadership schema formation. Individuals internalize expected leader and follower roles based on social conditioning and cognitive development.

- **Social Role Theory & Gendered Expectation:** This intersection addresses role congruity and workplace norms, emphasising how theories of gender expectations reinforce traditional leadership perceptions, often disadvantaging female leaders.
- **Cognitive Development Theory & Gendered Expectation:** This intersection focuses on perceptual shifts and adaptive followership, showing how experiences related to gender influence how individuals cognitively process leadership and followership roles.

Central Intersection:

At the core of all three theories lies the Integrated Followership Support Framework, which encapsulates how these perspectives collectively shape follower perceptions, behaviours, and the overall leadership-followership dynamic in organisations. Although Gendered Expectations is not the primary focus, they play a significant role in influencing perceptions of followership concerning female leaders.

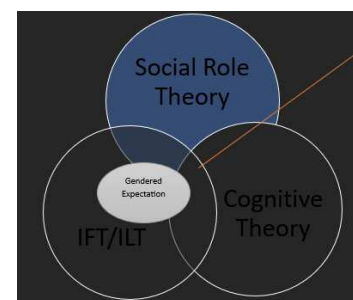
Core Theoretical Frameworks

The core theoretical frameworks are Social Role Theory, Cognitive Development Theory, and Implicit Leadership and Followership Theory. These three theories provide the foundation for understanding how followers perceive and engage with female leaders.

2.2 Social Role and Cognitive Development Theory

2.2.1 Social Role Theory

Social role theory suggests that societal norms and stereotypes assign specific roles to men and women (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019). In leadership, women are often expected to personify collective qualities like nurturing and teamwork, while leadership itself has traditionally been associated with agentic traits like assertiveness and decisiveness (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). The theory posits a mismatch between these expectations, which may lead to bias toward female leaders, in how they are perceived when they exhibit agentic traits.



Gender roles refer to societal expectations that define the behaviours, attitudes, and responsibilities deemed appropriate for men and women (Blackstone, 2003). Social role theory suggests that these roles influence individuals' self-perceptions and behaviours (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). The theory proposes that behaviours associated with gender can lead to expectations in various contexts, including the workplace.

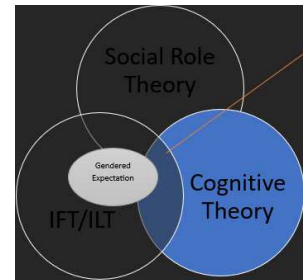
Social role theory emphasises the influence of socialisation processes in reinforcing gender roles from an early age, which shapes individuals' behaviours, perceptions and expectations throughout their lives (Blackstone, 2003). This socialisation is often thought to begin from a young age, where influential figures like parents, friends and society as a whole create expectations as to what people of each gender should think, feel and behave (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019). For instance, women are often expected to be nurturing and communal, while men are expected to be assertive and dominant. These expectations can impact leadership styles and followership dynamics (Shen & Joseph, 2021). The parent-child relationship is one with similar leadership-followership roles that can reflect the leader-employee relationship. Similarly, gendered behaviours may lead to gendered expectations. An example, girls are often gifted toys like cooking sets or baby dolls, socialising girls to believe that the attributes related to these toys (nurturing, motherhood, care) are inherently tied to their identity as girls (Cerbara, Ciancimino & Tintori, 2022). These formative gender socialisations are carried through into adulthood. They can influence how individuals perceive themselves and others (Kincaid *et al.*, 2022), especially on how they should behave and what roles are suitable for them aligned with these gendered characteristics (Cerbara *et al.*, 2022).

Society shapes individuals, who are often expected to conform to the behaviours associated within their social roles. These dynamics are further shaped by formative gender socialisations, that influence perceptions of appropriate behaviours and roles (Blakemore & Centers, 2005). Individuals are expected to conform to behaviours aligned with their social roles, reinforcing implicit biases about leadership and followership (Cerbara *et al.*, 2022). These perceptions of behaviour arise when expectant behaviour and traits are anticipated from a certain gender type (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). Gendered expectations of female leaders add to the complexity of the organisation and the dynamics that ensue. This raises ongoing debates about whether gendered leadership perceptions stem from deeply ingrained stereotypes or adaptive social expectations (Badura, Grijalva,

Newman, Yan & Jeon, 2018). Therefore, examining followership in a manufacturing setting through social role theory, cognitive theory, implicit leadership theory and followership theory, including gendered expectations, provides a framework for understanding these complexities.

2.2.2 Cognitive Development Theory

Cognitive Development Theory (Bussey & Bandura, 2014) explains how individuals develop cognitive frameworks based on socialisation and lived experiences. Followers' perceptions of leadership are influenced through developmental stages, shaping how they internalise gender roles and react to female leadership (Campbell, 2023).



While social role theory provides a sociological lens through which gender roles can be studied, the cognitive development of gendered concepts explores how individuals understand gender roles in social and organisational contexts (Bussey & Bandura, 2014). Through this theoretical lens, followers form their leadership expectations and behaviours based on their cultivated experiences, self-perceptions, and observed social patterns (Bussey & Bandura, 2014). For leaders, females, in particular, the cognitive development process influences how they navigate their leadership identity within existing gendered frameworks. When followers develop their understanding of leadership through social cognitive processes (Loyola & Aiswarya, 2023), they create mental models that can either support or hinder female leaders based on their accumulated experiences and cultural conditioning. Cognitive Theory asserts that gender development is a result of talents that individuals cultivate, conceptions that they hold of others and themselves, socio-opportunities, barriers they experience, and occupational paths are influenced by their gender typing (Campbell, 2023). Drawing from Bussey and Bandura's (2014) cognitive theory, this development occurs through the intersection of experience, social observation, and cultural reinforcement.

Using gendered role socialisation as a foundation, cognitive theory posits that there are several ways in which gender development occurs through the cognitive process. In Bandura's (1986) study on modelling behaviour, individuals conceptualise gender through the examples they see and observe, along with the consequences of those actions that

they encountered. In terms of these consequences, gender-related behaviours are reinforced or discouraged through social feedback, which further reinforces existing role expectations (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). These are ongoing multi-level processes that tend to reinforce each other. For example, growing up, learning that girls are more inclined to be soft, nurturing and passive, may result in those characteristics being honed, leading to one's conceptualisation of gender. This may result in individuals becoming particularly good at their gendered roles, which reinforces the idea that these roles are inherent to gendered expectations (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

2.2.3 Gender Bias as a Result of Social Role and Cognitive Development Theory

Gender bias refers to the tendency to give preferential treatment to one gender over another (Heilman, 2012). Socialisation Theory (Koenig & Eagly, 2014) attributes passive, nurturing or docile characteristics to women, where women tend to feel the need to prove themselves in organisational spaces, as explained by Heilman (2012). This behaviour can result in women being more cautious, which may lead to them not using their power or being more management-focused rather than leadership-oriented (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016)

Challenges of Female Leaders

Kark and Buengeler (2024) suggest that female leaders' discourse of power needs more focus to enable effective transformation. Leadership and power are created and thrive within a patriarchal context, meaning that they are inherently shaped by and influenced by this context, rather than existing in a neutral or unbiased state (Shen & Josep, 2021). The understanding of power is integral to personal transformation. Kinnear and Ortlepp (2016) state that the current male-dominated social and cultural context has prevented women from defining this power in their own terms. They further stated that, while some have argued that power is no longer a male construct, women have not typically sought out this power.

The Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers (2016) study indicated that women who adopt authoritarian leadership styles are negatively appraised due to the expectation for them to

be more relational. This has resulted in a concept known as the "Queen Bee" syndrome, whereby women adjust their behaviour, accept patriarchy and do not identify themselves with other women, with the aim to achieve and maintain positions of power (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). In a group study conducted by Simpson (2000), involving 85 participants, the male-to-female ratio was found to be 15:1. These women who were described as 'tokens' in the study, were subjected to increased pressure to perform (Simpson, 2000). Furthermore, the study revealed that men's camaraderie increased in a skewed group, whilst women were marginalised and excluded from opportunities to engage socially. When tokenism is at the top of an organisation, there is more abundance of stress (Simpson, 2000). As some women experience successes, they can be seen to be behaving like their male colleagues and are alienated from the inner group of women within the workplace. Being part of the "Boys Club" can make women seem unsympathetic to their followers. Furthermore, in skewed organisations, where men are dominant in numbers, issues related to sexuality often arise. The study also found that women were drawn to men who held positions of economic power (Simpson, 2000)

Shen and Joseph (2021) posit that women grapple with the concept of power, feeling torn between embracing powerlessness and fully stepping into a position of authority or influence. Women face challenges in asserting authority due to gender stereotyping as the leadership style traditionally associated with men is often considered the standard. According to Braun *et al.* (2017), women may exhibit lower power motivation compared to their counterparts, potentially influenced by a tendency to pursue power by aligning more closely with their male colleagues. This further contributes to the widening chasm of female leadership. In contrast, when women are in power and lean toward the female stereotype, they may be liked but are often not respected in that role. This challenges female leaders' credibility due to the organisational culture that is biased towards her authority. The female-gendered role is then misaligned with that of a typical leader role, where they are perceived as seemingly not the best fit for these leadership roles and are then not considered for roles they are qualified to fill (Braun *et al.* (2017). It then seems women taking on more leadership positions or garnering greater followings are set up for failure given this double bind.

This highlights the misunderstood or omitted element of understanding followership and leadership through a gendered lens. Women are seen to be less aligned with a leader's

role because the agency traits of leaders overlap more with the stereotypical males than females (Güntner *et al.*, 2021). Leadership and followership are two sides of the same coin, and understanding the cultural influence behind them may highlight why females are less followed than their male counterparts Hopton & Han (2020). Hofstede (2011) then challenges that cultures affect perceptions, and within a group of people with shared culture and values, the management styles become aligned to that common culture. Variations in national cultures may result in structure variations that account for this difference.

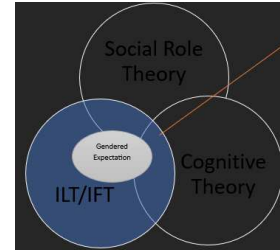
Studies have indicated that women who adopt authoritarian leadership styles are negatively appraised due to a more relational expectation from followers. This has resulted in the "Queen Bee" syndrome whereby women adjust to and accept patriarchy, and do not identify themselves with other women (Simpson, 2000; Derks *et al.*, 2016; Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). The challenge of patriarchy disempowers while giving power to a few (Braun *et al.*, 2017) and creating further inequality. Equality is critical to breaking stereotypes, as perception and stereotypes play a pivotal role in how female leaders are perceived. It is critical to understand the role of patriarchy and explore the steps leaders and organizations must take to challenge and dismantle this power structure.

Kinnear and Ortlepp (2016) stated that the challenge of power facing women is occupying a place of leadership does not give women equality, as this setting is still a male-dominated system of power and privilege. Networking of women in male-dominated settings is limited due to a lack of high-end status contacts likely aligned to gender stereotypes. Further, the impact of motherhood excluding women from leadership roles causes women to not take roles that conflict with family commitments. Contrasting this with the power of followers, as Pandey *et al.* (2021) stated, followers have a gendered response to male and female leaders, particularly if there is an ethical concern. They claimed that a follower is likely to fight an unethical female leader but flee from an unethical male leader, indicating the power impact in the gendered response.

2.3 Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories

2.3.1 Implicit Leadership Theory

Implicit Leadership and Followership Theory propose that individuals possess unconscious schemas for what constitutes an ideal leader or follower (Hopton & Han, 2020; Sy, 2020). Such implicit biases shape the way how female leaders are assessed, often in comparison to male leadership standards which may lead to resistance, scepticism, or distinct dynamics in followership.



Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT) examines the cognitive schemas (mental frames) or prototypes individuals hold regarding ideal leadership traits and behaviours (Hopton & Han, 2020). That is the set of ideas, opinions and notions that make up their conceptualisation of what "leadership" entails and looks like. One key concept within ILT is leader prototype mental representations highlighting what an ideal leader should be (Hopton & Han, 2020). According to this prototype, an ideal leader should be shaped by personal experiences, societal expectations, and cultural norms. A study undertaken by Eagly & Karau (2002) concluded that gender biases influence these prototypes, leading to differing expectations for male and female leaders based on traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The ILT framework posits a structure of common traits and behaviours (Ali, 2022). This, however, has been questioned as the theories focus on how the leader is recognised and not on the role the follower plays. A follower-centred focus on attributes specific to the followership (Loyloa & Aiswarya, 2023), understanding how followers can influence leaders. Leadership, according to Scott *et al.* (2018), must consider the relationship dynamics such as trust and leader-follower exchange.

Several aspects of Implicit Leadership theory help further define concepts relating to leadership and followership in terms of expectations and characteristics of leaders. Leader attributes are the characteristics and behaviours that individuals believe are essential for effective leadership. Common attributes include intelligence, dominance, masculinity, and charisma (Braun *et al.*, 2017). ILT suggests that individuals have implicit theories about the roles and responsibilities of effective leaders (Hopton & Han, 2020). These are referred to as leadership roles and include providing vision, making decisions, and motivating followers. When leaders align with their followers' prototypical expectations of

leadership, it significantly influences three interconnected organisational outcomes: leader effectiveness, follower satisfaction, and organisational performance (Hoption & Han, 2020).

Perception and Gender Bias

Another fundamental aspect of ILT is implicit theories (Schyns & Riggio 2016) which are general theories that followers hold about leaders. Implicit theories refer to individuals' unconscious beliefs about the characteristics of effective leaders, shaping their perceptions and expectations in organisational settings. ILT also emphasises the reciprocal nature of the leader-follower relationship, where both leaders and followers hold implicit assumptions about each other's roles and behaviours.

Braun *et al.* (2017) define implicit leadership theories as those that define the image of a specific group. When a member of a group is pictured, the characteristics of an average member are used to describe a typical member. Braun *et al.* (2017) clarify gender bias in implicit leadership theories, with the mental picture of a leader having more masculine attributes and being associated with the male gender, having a perception that the attributes of a female are not congruent with that of a leader. Women are described as affectionate, helpful, and gentle, and men as ambitious, dominant, and independent, while men are seen as confident, decisive, aggressive, dominating and resilient (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). These 'masculine' traits align with typical leadership traits that focus on directness and authority (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). Furthermore, Da'as and Zibenberg (2021) stated that a leader should be charismatic, visionary, inspiring, upright, decisive, efficacy-orientated, integrative, dependable, and diplomatic and should not be aggressive or malicious. The gender bias in implicit theories creates a greater inherent bias towards women. Shien (2004) found that a typical leader has more stereotypically masculine attributes than female attributes. Thus, individuals perceive the attributes of a man as that of a leader, which leads to women not meeting the expected perception of a leader (Braun *et al.*, 2017). Based on the arguments, it can be inferred that implicit leadership theories emphasize a perception of the ideal leader as being predominantly male-oriented.

Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) assert that the style of leadership has an impact on organisational performance. The participation of leadership and the effective delegation of duties can therefore improve employees' performance and aid with the attainment of goals

and objectives. Where a leader-follower relationship is good, followers are more inclined to perform at high levels and garner support for the leader. When a leader's role is self-centred and does not offer the followers what they need, the relationship shifts inward which may lead to negative behaviours by followers such as resistance (Loyola & Aiswarya, 2023).

Empathy and Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is a critical component of a leadership trait, having the ability to recognise and balance cognitive and emotional skills, whilst relating to the emotions of others (Sanders, 2024), whereas empathy embodies shared experiences. Heilman (2012) showed that empathic communication, actions or strategies adopted by leaders led to positive behaviour and relational responses. Equally, Troth, Jordan and Ashkanasy (2023) suggest that leaders' use of interpersonal EQ influences the quality of work relationships. Whilst it is known that empathic leaders can improve an organisation's ability to achieve further goals, Hoption & Han (2020) propose the stereotypical characteristics of women being more emotional could be perceived as being a weak trait in leadership.

2.3.2 Implicit Followership Theory

Implicit followership theory (IFT) focuses on the cognitive schemas or prototypes that followers have about their traits and behaviours in followership (Sy, 2015). Follower prototypes refer to the way that individuals develop mental representations of how well they match the follower prototype of an ideal follower (Sy, 2015). Personal experiences, societal expectations, and cultural norms shape these prototypes. IFT suggests that followers have implicit theories or inherent ideas about the attributes and behaviours of effective followers (Loyola & Aiswarya, 2023). These implicit theories guide their perceptions and expectations of followers in organisational settings. Followers categorise other individuals as good or bad followers based on how closely they match their follower prototypes, and those who closely match the prototype are more likely to be perceived as effective followers (Yang *et al.*, 2020).

The characteristics of an ideal follower are the ability to manage themselves, commitment to the purpose or vision of the organisation or a person, high standard of competence and skill, courageous and believable (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi *et al.*, 2022). Effective followers manage themselves well and place honesty as the most important trait of a follower. The

information and change in the workplace have made it more important to understand followership whereby organisational literature has many studies focusing on leadership characteristics (Bjugstad *et al.*, 2006). This reflects the belief that leadership is an outcome of the organisation. However this does not take into account that leaders need followers to achieve these goals, so, the effectiveness of a leader is dependent on the willingness and co-operation of the follower (Bjugstad *et al.*, 2006). It is therefore necessary to understand the nature of followership in relation to leadership as a co-dependant of followers (Loyola & Aiswayra, 2023).

A follower's willingness to be led is a result of external and inward inputs. To increase follower motivation, a results-orientated environment with a follower-centric ethos needs to be cultivated (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi *et al.*, 2022). This must be coupled with feedback. Sy (2015) explains that the current follower-leader dynamic requires trust, not solely based on what the leader wants, but what the follower needs. Followers then have different responses to the same leader's behaviour and followers were drawn to leaders whose behaviours are aligned with theirs.

Da'as and Zibenberg (2021) discuss IFT and ILT theories and mention how these theories are impacted by culture and control. For example, in a school with both Jews and Arabs, Da'as and Zibenberg (2021) claim that students are perceived as a result of the state of conflict; further, due to a deviation in culture. Arabs perceive the best students as compliant and the correct, effective teachers (leaders) as masculine. Da'as and Zibenberg (2021) further found how teachers are perceived by their identity. This affects their professional identity and development in how they navigate change.

Whilst some studies portray followers as passive, not as critical as leaders Inderjeet & Scheepers (2022) and Bastardo & Van Vugt (2019), other research emphasises a distinct dynamic relationship exists between leaders and followers (Hopton & Han, 2020; Scott *et al.*, 2018).

Followership relations are likely to give rise to the concept of "role congruity", which refers to the alignment (or misalignment) between an individual's gender and the expectations of their role (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). Women in leadership roles often face a "double bind," a phenomenon where women must navigate the expectations of being a leader whilst

conforming to traditional feminine traits that are socially regarded as not being aligned with leadership qualities (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016; Wessels, 2020).

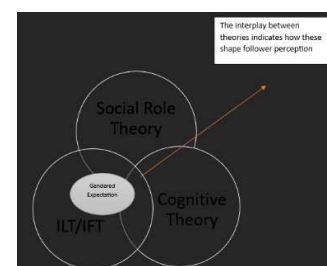
Within the organisational setting, IFT and ILT theories become noticeable as they intersect with deeply held cultural and societal ideals of what it means to be a follower and what traits are associated with followership. Often, this following has connotations of obedience, loyalty, and willingness to be led (Braun *et al.*, 2017). When supplementing these traits with stereotypical gender roles and socialisation, these traits tend to align with what is seen as typically feminine traits (Hoption & Han, 2020). For example, when followers hold implicit theories that associate followership with traditionally feminine traits, female leaders may face additional challenges in establishing their authority and leadership credibility (Braun *et al.*, 2017), especially in traditionally male-dominated environments such as manufacturing. An alternate view from Schyns & Schilling (2011) suggests that leaders who align with the mental models of their followers are often viewed as more competent and trustworthy, resulting in greater acceptance of their authority. This alignment may potentially help to counteract gender role stereotypes, with those from traditional sectors like manufacturing. This alignment directly impacts follower satisfaction and more authentic relationships (Hoption & Han, 2020). These studies imply that incongruence exists between implicit conceptualisations of followership behaviour and the idea of a female leader. IFT theory, in this context, helps explain why followers may resist female leadership, as traditional gender roles often position women as having communal traits and less agentic traits.

2.3.3 Gender Expectations and ILT and IFT

Gender expectations and ILT and IFT frameworks provide overlapping perspectives on how gender perceptions shape workplace relationships and behaviours in followerships.

The role of Gendered Expectation, while not the core focus, does contribute to shaping perceptions of followership in the way of:

- Cultural and organizational norms
- Past experiences with male and female leaders
- Media portrayals of leadership
- Workplace policies and structures



When female leaders deviate from traditional leadership norms, gendered expectations can create cognitive dissonance, influencing the way they are perceived and followed.

Resistance

Follower resistance toward female leaders can manifest as scepticism, non-compliance or defiance, which can undermine leadership effectiveness (Güntner *et al.*, 2021). Research by Güntner *et al.* (2021) suggests that leaders often perceive resistance as a challenge to their authority, triggering negative emotions and leading to destructive leadership behaviours, such as micro-management or controlling leadership styles. These dynamics can be especially pronounced for female leaders, who may already struggle with follower perceptions shaped by traditional gender norms that associate leadership with masculinity (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). When followers resist female leaders, it may affect their confidence and decision-making and contribute to workplace tensions, lack of team synergy, and diminished organisational effectiveness (Jones, Jones, Taylor & Yarrow, 2021). Understanding these outcomes is crucial for addressing gender disparities in leadership and promoting more inclusive workplace environments (Jones *et al.*, 2021). This resistance can be a significant barrier to achieving gender equity in leadership (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Braun *et al.*, 2017).

Perceptions

While feminist theories argue that gender is a result of a social phenomenon (Eisenchlas, 2013), perception maintains that social relations are based on whether someone is male or female. Gender introduces a layered system that influences, cultural beliefs, models behaviour and influences what those roles should look like in society and organisations (Mar Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.*, 2023). Individuals' expectations of gender, relating to the performance of individuals and the assessment of others, are influenced not only by the knowledge and skills necessary for the tasks but also by their association with certain groups defined by characteristics such as ethnicity or gender (Eisenchlas, 2013). Gender expectations are significant where the context of those activities is stereotyped as a trait or an ability of a male or female.

Biases

Recent research has expanded on the foundational concepts of IFT, particularly in the context of gender and followership (Loyola & Aiswarya, 2023). Studies indicate that gender biases can influence follower prototypes. For example, followers may have different expectations for male and female followers based on societal gender roles and stereotypes (Güntner *et al.*, 2021). Researchers have integrated IFT with social role theory to explore how gender roles and expectations shape follower prototypes (Güntner *et al.*, 2021; Loyola & Aiswarya, 2023). This intersection highlights how societal norms and expectations can lead to biases in perceptions of effective followership (Carsten *et al.*, 2018). Research by Guntner *et al.*, (2021) examines how follower resistance can be an antecedent of destructive leadership behaviour. When followers do not match the leader's prototype of an ideal follower, it can lead to negative outcomes, such as micromanagement or punishment (Güntner *et al.*, 2021). The next section delves deeper into perceptions and gender expectations, focusing on their impact on organisational behaviour and leadership outcomes.

2.4 Organisational Behaviour and Leadership Outcomes

2.4.1 Leadership Outcomes

Leadership outcomes matter in the context of surveying followership and gender because they directly impact organisational success, employee engagement, and workplace dynamics (Badura *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, when examining how female leaders are perceived, leadership outcomes reveal biases, barriers, and enablers that shape the effectiveness of women in leadership roles (Shen & Joseph, 2021). ILT explains leadership outcomes as congruency between followers' perceptions of good leadership and their leaders' impact (Hoption & Han, 2020). Leadership outcomes influence whether female leaders are seen as competent (Schyns & Schilling, 2011) and effective or whether they face scepticism as a result of deeply held gender biases. This impacts an organisations' perception that a competent leader is conducive to more productive, satisfactory work environments (Yang *et al.*, 2020).

2.4.2 Follower Resistance and Gender

Follower resistance in the context of gender refers to employees' reluctance or scepticism toward accepting female leaders due to implicit biases, societal norms, and traditional leadership expectations (Braun *et al.*, 2017). This resistance can manifest through things like questioning authority or undermining decisions, ultimately affecting leadership effectiveness. Female leaders often face greater scrutiny than their male counterparts, questioning their competence when they display authoritative traits yet, they are perceived as weak when they adopt a more communal leadership style (Shen & Joseph, 2021). Organisations that fail to address gendered follower resistance risk fostering toxic workplace cultures, lowering employee morale, and hindering innovation by limiting diverse perspectives in decision-making (Shen & Joseph, 2021). This resistance can also impact organisational performance, as disengaged teams reduce productivity and cohesion, while diverse teams breed innovation and employee satisfaction, according to Teruel *et al.* (2015). Additionally, companies that do not actively counteract these biases may struggle with talent retention and suffer reputational damage, deterring diverse talent from seeking leadership roles (Heilman, 2012). Drawing on Cicchiello *et al.*, (2021) study evidence shows the positive impact women's voting has had on sustainability, and sustainability reporting in developing countries. Building on this, when boards improve diversity, these initiatives are met with positive outcomes including profitability and innovation (Mar Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.*, 2023).

2.4.3 Organisational Power Dynamics and Gender

Power dynamics refer to the ways authority and decision-making are distributed within a workplace, and gender can play a significant role in determining who holds power and how it is exercised (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). Tabassum and Nayak (2021) assert that organisations play a critical part in the dissolution of discrimination. Their study states that judging whom to hire and selection is often made in a discriminatory space, where prejudice and tokenism largely impact female leaders due to gender bias. This includes polarisation discrimination. Historically, leadership structures have favoured men reinforcing systemic barriers that limit women's access to high-ranking positions in organisations (Teruel *et al.*, 2015; Inderjeet & Scheepers, 2022) and environments such as manufacturing.

Social role theory is considered to be instrumental in gender stereotyping, via leader expectations and default behaviour aligned with the social roles that are often segregated by gender. Gendering stereotyping in the workplace is deeply rooted in historical and cultured structures, based on patriarchal norms, where the cognitive approach of everyday work life is shaped by the environment (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Even when women attain leadership roles, they often experience encounter resistance, bias, and scrutiny, making it harder for them to exert authority compared to their male counterparts (Shen & Joseph, 2021). When these dynamics go unaddressed, they can create an unequal work environment that stifles talent, innovation, and diversity of thought (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021; Inderjeet & Scheepers, 2022) contends that although barriers of resistance have diminished, gender stereotypes continue to hinder the advancement of women's development.

A skewness of gender balance in the workplace can affect an organisation's culture and make it more resistant to women (Simpson, 2000; Shen and Joseph, 2021). The balance of males to females is considered an important factor in career progression, as is the level at which the imbalance occurs. Simpson (2000) states that a well-balanced gendered top management structure is the most critical factor in creating a culture where females feel both valued and safe. In contrast, a study by Uhl-Bien *et al.*, (2014), stated that emotional intelligence and balanced leadership styles were appreciated by both genders, whilst (Braun *et al.*, 2017) imply that competence and expertise are highly valued as leadership effective traits, that overall contribute to leadership development (Loyola & Aiswarya, 2023).

Tabassum and Nayak (2021) claimed that female employees are cautioned against exhibiting feminine traits that may impact their workplace, as such behaviour is often deemed unacceptable in roles governed by a male-dominated code of conduct. As a result of gender bias, deep-rooted patriarchy in some societies further entrenched the inequalities and created barriers to females' career progression (Cicchello *et al.*, 2021). In developing countries, the employment of women takes a moderate approach, whereas in developed countries women have far more powerful voices. (Women @ Work 2022: A Global Outlook, 2022) (Deloitte, 2022)

Mar Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.* (2023) whose study was set in the European market, claimed that gender diversity in management and senior levels have a supportive effect on

innovation and a firm's performance. This study is encouraging as it indicates the value and ripple effect of diversity. According to Booysen and Nkomo (2010), a study set in the South African market, emphasises that despite increasing numbers of women in leadership positions, they have not reached an equitable position concerning the representation of women in top management and C-suite roles. This study can be interpreted as a 'double-whammy' for women in South Africa, who are wanting to reach equitable positions in the manufacturing sector.

2.4.4. Organisational Support and Structures

The introduction of gender dynamics reshapes the traditional organisation in understanding followership, by transforming it from a passive organisational role (Hollander, 1992), to a complex social interaction. Since followership is relational by nature, this nuance crafts a complex environment in which follower behaviours are shaped not only by reactive tendencies but also by the influence of deeply rooted gender stereotypes and cultural norms (Heilman, 2012). Sanders (2024), suggests that organisational growth is a shared responsibility between leaders and followers, achieved through enhancing employee engagement to cultivate future leaders. Therefore organisations that neglect to tackle gender-based resistance among followers, may inadvertently cultivate toxic workplace environments, diminish employee morale, and stifle innovation, by restricting the inclusion of diverse perspectives in decision-making processes (Shen & Joseph, 2021). Organisational success and longevity may hinge not only on cultivating strong leadership but also on fostering effective followership, as followers play a significant role in influencing organizational results (Sanders, 2024).

2.4.4. Diversity and Institutions in the South African Context

The transition from apartheid to a democratic and equal society is rooted in the context of South Africa, and the country's legal framework is steeped in the constitution, which is the cornerstone of social and human rights. In the workplace, legislation such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Affirmation Actions (AA) and The Employment Equity Act states that legislating transformation is imperative for businesses in South Africa. The Employment Equity Act mandates businesses of a mandated size to develop and implement a plan indicating how the business will align its workforce with the

economically active population of the country. Whilst some progress has been made, The Global Gap Report 2024 predicts the gender gap stands at 134 years to gender equity. (Global Gender Gap, 2024). Bonti-Ankomah, J. (2020) reports that while 44% of academics at a South African University are female, black women continue to face barriers relating to gender and institutionalised culture. Despite these institutions that have been legislated, women still only occupy 17.2 % of senior management roles as stated by Deloitte. This calls for more inclusive practices that address inequalities (Shackleton *et al.*, 2006; Naidu, 2018)

2.5 Chapter Summary

Braun *et al.* (2017) assert that it is well-known that women are underrepresented in leadership. Women remain underrepresented in South African corporate leadership despite laws that propose equal representation (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016).

Some factors contributing to this are selection and the queen bee phenomenon. As stated by Derks *et al.* (2016), striving for power is perceived to have more male role characteristics, and women are perceived to have lower motivation for power. Braun (2016) concludes women are not seen as typical leaders and are not considered for positions of leadership as often as men.

In synthesising the reviewed literature, several key factors emerge as potential contributors to gender bias, significantly impacting the context of female leadership. When considered in tandem, these factors paint a complex picture of the challenges women face in leadership roles. Firstly, the perceived attributes of a woman leader, often measured against male-skewed leadership prototypes, create a mismatch that can diminish their perceived authority. Secondly, the intersection of culture and gender introduces unique dynamics, particularly in contexts like South Africa, where traditional norms and historical power structures persist. Thirdly, the pervasive nature of gender bias, stemming from both explicit and implicit sources, shapes expectations and behaviours within organisations. Fourthly, the power dynamics between leader and follower, influenced by gender stereotypes, can lead to resistance and undermine female leaders' authority. Finally, the leader outcomes, assessed through a lens of gendered expectations, determine whether female leaders are perceived as competent and effective and whether they garner followership support or resistance. Understanding and addressing these interconnected factors is crucial for fostering inclusive workplaces and supporting the advancement of women in leadership.

The frameworks that have emerged are Implicit followership, social role theory, and social cognitive theory. This study on followership and women provides insights into how followership is developed and nurtured. By unpacking the perceptions and biases towards women leaders, organisations themselves can develop mechanisms to eliminate these gender biases and nurture the followership of women to foster diversity in the workplace.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to describe and explain the perceptions and experiences of followers of female leaders in manufacturing organisations, in the South African context. The purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership dynamic between leaders and followers through a gendered lens. Additionally, the objective of the study is to explore and critically examine how gender stereotypes, cultural expectations, and caregiver roles influence follower perceptions and experiences of female leaders in the South African workplace. By investigating the nuanced dynamics between leadership and followership through a gendered lens, the research aims to unpack the subtle mechanisms of gender bias in workplace interactions. It also aims to provide empirical insights into follower behaviours towards female leaders. In doing so, the purpose is that this research contributes practical knowledge to followership literature and offers usable insights for organisations seeking to create more equitable leadership in manufacturing environments.

The application of Implicit Leadership Theory and Followership Theory is used as a method of delving into and understanding the leadership dynamic between leaders and followers through a gendered lens. As a result of the literature review, the following questions were formulated to address the research question exploring how followers perceive female leaders from the manufacturing sector.

3.2 Secondary Research Questions

The research design methodology has been developed to be appropriate to the current study and specifically developed for the questions below. The research explores the followership of female leaders in the workplace and

Through a detailed literature review and research, this study investigates the following secondary research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ 1)– How do followers perceive their female leaders?

The question above was formulated to gather information regarding followers' perceptions. Various factors, including workplace culture, individual biases, and societal norms, shape leadership perceptions were explored. From the perspective of a developing country like

South Africa in the manufacturing sector context, these perceptions may be influenced by traditional gender roles and expectations about leadership styles. This question explores whether followers view female leaders as competent, authoritative, and effective or perceive them through a gendered lens that may challenge or reinforce stereotypes rather than seeing them as more nurturing, lacking confidence and emotionally inclined. These are the binary gender perceptions that emerge from the literature. By understanding these perceptions, the purpose was to gain insight into how female leaders are viewed in their leadership roles.

Research Question 2 (RQ2) - How do followers relate their perceptions to gender expectations?

The question was formulated to gather information about the role that gender expectations play. From the literature review, gender expectations play a crucial role in shaping leadership dynamics, often influencing how followers receive authority and decision-making. This question examines the extent to which followers' views of female leaders, either align with or challenge the expectations of females in leadership roles. It also seeks to understand how gendered expectations create barriers or advantages for female leaders. The impact that gendered expectations could potentially influence their ability to command respect and be effective leaders. By exploring these connections, the study aims to shed light on the broader impacts of gendered leadership norms on workplace interactions and career progression.

Research Question 3: (RQ3) - How do followers demonstrate their followership of female leaders?

The question was formulated to explore how followers engage with their female leaders, adopting the Followership theory that delves deep into prototypes of followers including attitudes and behaviours toward female leaders. Followership is not a passive process but an active engagement that includes collaboration, passive and active compliance or even resistance. This question investigates how followers respond to female leaders in practice, looking at whether they openly support and trust their leadership, challenge their authority, or demonstrate biases in their behaviour toward female leaders. By analysing how followership is carried out, this research aims to provide insights into the factors

contributing to successful leader-follower relationships, and the challenges female leaders face to maintain-good organisational relationships with followers.

3.3 Chapter Summary

This research aims to explore the phenomena of followership through the lens of gender while understanding that this is the lived experience of both male and female leaders in the organisation. As defined by Leung (2015), qualitative research is a sense-making method that helps the researcher find arrangements of words that build into something meaningful while being cognisant of its depth and multiple dimensions. Although human emotions may be biased, it is critical to explore these to contribute to understanding phenomena such as followership and gender bias.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the perceptions and experiences of followers of female leaders in the manufacturing workplace in the South African context. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership dynamic between leaders and followers with a gendered lens. Gender dynamics and the leadership-followership dynamic are constantly evolving and are as complex as the work environment itself (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). By exploring the experiences and perspectives of individuals within organisations, the researcher uncovered new patterns, themes, and relationships that have not been previously considered.

An exploratory design is suitable for this research because it allows for the in-depth exploration of relationships, influences, and phenomena (Alase, 2017). Exploratory research is used in design when the findings are not known (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Myres, 2024). The research used an exploratory design to gather qualitative data for a deeper understanding of the nuances and intricacies of the phenomenon of gender bias and followership, which can inform future research directions and practical interventions (Alase, 2017). Qualitative research is well suited to understanding phenomena from the perspective of those inside the environment (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Leung, 2015).

4.2 Research Design

The research followed an interpretivism philosophy. Interpretivism is used when the researcher can interact with the study, the context is subjective and complex, and there is a personal element and an inductive process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). While there are multiple approaches to qualitative research methods, the researcher ensures that there is a 'participant-orientated' approach (Alase, 2017) and that the approach is agile enough to adapt to the life journey of the participants. The qualitative approach to a phenomenon gives the person conducting the research a chance to understand the personal element of an experience due to the approach being 'participant-orientated' (Alase, 2017). Interpretivism allows understanding of social phenomena by exploring the perspectives and meaning-making of individuals within a particular context (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

It necessitates space to gain fuller conceptualisations and thicker descriptions of human experiences.

Gender bias in the form of cultural norms and its influence on followership is subjective and dependent on the context in question, which means that a deep exploration of the experiences and perceptions of individuals in the organisation is required. It is also understood that the reality is that individuals are influenced by their historical, cultural, and social factors. By adopting this philosophy, the researcher explored this complexity with the diversity of the workplace. Therefore, phenomenology provides a framework for free expression without changing the essence of the content (Alase, 2017). With the subject of followership and gender, the complex work environment, and the underlying reasons for women taking up or not taking up leadership spaces, phenomenology in qualitative research using the interpretivism philosophy was best suited, as stated by Shinebourne and Smith (2011), as the cohesion between interpretivism and phenomenology.

Due to the complex nature of various factors and their influence on followership, an inductive approach to theory building was followed. This method works well when discovering or unearthing themes, behaviours, patterns, or relationships that have not been previously considered and, in that process, creating new insights and theories. Gioia *et al.* (2013) argue that a rigorous and systematic approach to conducting inductive research is essential. The inductive methodology involves a structured data collection process, coding, categorisation, and interpretation, allowing researchers to uncover patterns and themes in the data. Inductive reasoning uses conclusions from data analysis and observation. Ryan (2018) suggests that one's reality comes from interactions and experiences; this yields qualitative data, which, while subjective, is rich and can then be used to qualitatively build a theory from the collected data.

The study uses a qualitative methodology for data collection and analysis. Saunders and Lewis (2018) state the qualitative method allows for continuity in the participants' sharing of their perceptions and experiences and allows the researcher to iteratively use information as it is discovered in the interview process (Alase, 2017).

The qualitative method allowed the building of theory through a deeper understanding of the relevant concepts explored. Qualitative is well suited to understanding perceptions and behaviours of followership in a familiar environment (Leung, 2015).

Qualitative data was gathered from individuals across different organisational settings using a semi-structured questionnaire to identify patterns and themes related to followership and gender expectations. Parry *et al.* (2004) propose that a qualitative approach facilitates the study of the social context and contextual items that can impact the interviewee. The qualitative method provides for different perspectives, and the intention is to try to educate oneself or understand the context of the other person (Alase, 2017) as well as the phenomena under study.

The qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis of the phenomenology being studied. Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of individuals, making it ideal for exploring how gender biases affect followers in the workplace (Alase, 2017). Gender biases are often subtle and deeply embedded in personal and organisational culture, affecting individuals' perceptions and experiences in unique ways. Phenomenology allows the consideration of the context in which experiences occur. Organisational culture, societal norms, and individual interactions influence gender biases and their impact on followership. By employing a phenomenological approach, one can examine how these contextual factors interact with gender biases to influence followership dynamics.

A phenomenological study explains the common understanding of a concept or a lived experience. This approach is commonly used to explain personal experiences, which is why it is best suited to study such as this on followership and gender (Alase, 2017). The distinction is that phenomenology describes an experience and allows a framework or interpretation of these experiences (Shinebourne & Smith, 2011).

4.3 Population

The target population for this study was defined as middle-management employees who are permanently employed and have been led by a female leader at some point in their careers. Middle management was selected based on a study by Deloitte (2022), which revealed that the largest gender gap in leadership emerges between middle and top management levels. Focusing on this population provided valuable insights into the role that followership played, by looking at the perspectives of leaders who were once followers of the use of phenomenology, which is the method best aligned to participant-oriented. This methodology adopted a respectful approach and sensitivity (Alase, 2017).

The sample of followers was male and female, and the focus of this study is centred on gendered expectations of leadership regardless of the gender of the follower. The study intended to gain insights into the followership of female leaders, and given that female leaders have both male and female reportees, the population was both male and female. While there is no defined age for the population, they needed to be in a management position that created some degree of homogeneity in the sample in relation to work experience. The sample came from various organisations within the manufacturing ecosystem and were chosen as they are located within the community and create a microcosm of the real world. The organisations were located in different sectors of the manufacturing industry, which created more real-world applicability for that data.

Participants were selected using Carstens *et al.*'s (2010) role-based definition of a follower as an individual who has been in a position of followership by the structure of the organisation. Due to organisational structures, employees at some point in other careers take on the role of follower, even if they are leaders themselves. This allowed the study to reach a depth of participants (Leung, 2015). Finally, phenomenology was best suited for this type of research as it allows for a relational element (Alase, 2017); This approach allowed the researcher to build trust and extract valuable information in a psychologically safe space.

4.4 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study stemmed from the responses to the semi-structured interviews. The unit of analysis is the data from the semi-structured interviews (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

4.5 Sampling Method and Size

The study made use of purposive sampling as it is best suited to qualitative sampling to ensure that the participants contribute meaningfully to the phenomenon under study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Whilst sample size can range between 2 and 30 participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) and the number of participants is dependent on variables (Alase, 2017). The-sample size used for this study was 20 participants, which consisted of 10 male and 10 female participants. This sampling allowed the researcher to gain sufficient insights from a diversity of gender perspectives. Qualitative studies typically deem sample

sizes of approximately 12 as sufficient (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2019), implying that a sample of 20 was adequate. The study used thematic analysis and theoretical saturation was reached with the chosen number of participants. Data saturation was achieved when the participants were no longer providing the researcher with new information. This implies the contents of the interview have been shared and recorded by previous participants; therefore, du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2019) considered it prudent to not just focus on sample size but rather on ensuring that the sample is large enough that the data saturation point is reached within the samples size.

The criteria for participation in the study are that the individuals were South African or working in the manufacturing sector or the manufacturing ecosystems; middle managers with no age specification; and having been follower of a female leader at some point in their career.

4.6 Saturation

Thematic saturation, also known as theoretical saturation or data saturation played a crucial role in determining the adequacy of the sample size and data collection process in this qualitative study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). Using the concept of theoretical sample size as stated by Creswell (2014) and a sample size of greater than 15 ensured that saturation was achieved within the participants.

4.7 Measurement Instrument

An interview guide, which incorporated semi-structured open-ended questions linked to the research problem, theory and literature review was utilised for the purpose of this study. The use of semi-structured interviews allows flexibility and some agility on the part of the interviewer. The interview guide (Annexure C) served as a guide to understanding the followership of female leaders in the workplace. The use of semi-structured interviews was best suited due to the versatility of both the participant and interviewer and the possibility of exploring the issue being discussed (Miguel, 2011). Data was extracted via semi-structured interviews (Shinebourne & Smith, 2011) as the chosen data collection strategy.

The interview guide provided a structure for a line of questions that the researcher can use to prompt and guide (Alase, 2017). A pilot test was conducted by the interviewer with participants outside the population, using the interview instrument to ensure questions

were easily understood, and to get a feel for conducting an interview. Pilot testing also allowed the interviewer to test for any issues with the questionnaires, process, timing, and transcription.

4.8 Data Gathering Process

Data was gathered from the semi-structured interviews. At the start of these interviews, participants were assured of impartiality and the desire to gather information. The interviewer reiterated confidentiality and that the interview was independent of the company they worked for. Further to this, no markers such as company names, employees' names, numbers or any personal data would be shared guaranteeing anonymity.

With the assurance of impartiality and anonymity, the interviewer ensured that a convenient time was agreed upon, where there was a conflict or reduced time due to the participant constraints, the interview was moved to a convenient time. This ensured that the participant was fully engaged and that the interview's integrity and depth were not compromised by time or a lack of focus. In-person interviews were held in a closed room with minimal disturbances. Interviews began with a meet and greet and participants' permission to have the interview recorded on camera. Thereafter in both cases, all participants were informed of the intention to record the interview for ease of transcription. All participants agreed to the recording and the interview commenced. These actions helped to build trust and create a safe space for the interviewer to gather information.

These interviews were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was completed. This transcription was maintained verbatim to avoid incorrect capturing and biases. Atlas TI and Excel tools were used for the researcher to analyse data to identify patterns and concepts.

4.9 Analysis Approach

Sandelowski (2010) matches descriptive research to a thematic analysis approach. Therefore, a thematic approach was used. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed using an online transcribing tool. The recording was coded thematically (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). Once the transcription was coded, it was analysed to identify patterns and themes. Atlas TI, a university-issued software program that manages the data of formal qualitative studies, was used to facilitate thematic analyses and prevent bias.

This created a safe and backed-up place for data to be stored. Using Clarke and Braun (2013) six-step framework for the analysis of the qualitative information, including Data familiarisation, Code generation, Thematic analysis, Theme review, Theme consolidation, and Data reporting. The researcher ensured that the transcription was documented as close to the completed interview as possible to ensure the integrity of the information. This approach is aligned with Alase's (2017) study that states data analysis that best suits this research comes from the process described as coding, summarising, and forming themes.

4.10 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted before the start of the planned interview. The researcher conducted a pilot interview to ensure sufficient time was allocated, the recording device was working well, and the outcome of the interview was met. Initially, the researcher expected the interviews would take an hour, but the outcomes of the pilot interview indicated that 30 to 40 minutes was sufficient to extract the information required. The pilot interview showed the recording device to be working well and able to capture the contents of the interview. The researcher conducted a mock interview and reviewed the outcome before proceeding to the first interview.

4.11 Quality Controls

In conducting a qualitative study, Sandelowski (2010) explains that researchers must ensure the integrity and essence of the data collected. This was achieved by ensuring the reliability and validity of the data using triangulation between interviews, transcription and interview notes.

4.11.1 Reliability

Smith *et al.* (2009) state that using the phenomenology methodology creates a more constant and refined analysis of the data. This method adds depth and credibility to the results. Reliability supports the consistency and dependability of the results. This is particularly important when doing qualitative research as the researcher did not have the method available for qualitative research. Using Smith *et al.* (2009), the researcher achieved this by maintaining data controls, and ensuring that all necessary records were

kept. Further to this, the researcher adopted consistent processes and an interview guide to collect the information and analyse the interviews. The researcher used the triangulation of data and sources to ensure reliability. Triangulation was used to corroborate data from the interview, transcription and the researcher's notes if there was a point to be confirmed or compared. These interventions ensured reliability and gave credibility to the results whilst understanding and mitigating the variability in qualitative data.

4.11.2 Validity

Detailed and concise research design plays a critical role in ensuring the quality and integrity of a study. The research objectives, methodology, and data analysis are well-defined to ensure the validity of the data. Using Saunders and Lewis (2018), the areas highlighted are design, data collection, and interpretation. During data collection, the researcher ensured that only what was communicated by the participant was recorded. Recording all interviews and then transcribing ensured that full attention was given to the interview process and that data was correctly and effectively collected. Great care was taken to follow the process, including ethical clearance and ensuring confidentiality and protection of identity. Smith *et al.* (2009) propose that phenomenological research is systematic and enables reflection on personal experience and validations deployed here ensured effective capturing of the data.

4.11.3 Researchers Role

Using the interview guide (Appendix C), the researcher presented questions to explore the views and opinions of the participants. The interviewer was careful not to enforce her bias onto the participant. The interview questions guided the interview and were adhered to unless the participant said something that required clarification or further discussion. In addition, the researcher used the interview process of repeating what the participant said and asking if that was stated correctly. This ensured the correct statements and the validation of the participants were indeed what they were saying. The voice recording, interview transcripts, initial codes and final codes are stored to ensure this process can be independently checked.

4.11.4 Credibility of the study

The credibility of the study was maintained by ensuring the interviews lasted for a significant time and that the researcher was sure that the participants were comfortable to share and share their perceptions and experiences.

The researcher was aware of her bias and ability to influence the interview and ensured the interview guide was used. All responses were captured, not any particular view.

4.12 Limitations

Saunders and Lewis (2018) caution against drawing definitive conclusions from research. The population was derived from a sample and, as such, cannot be used to generalise behaviours. The data collected and analysed, and the findings, apply to the scope of the design of the study and cannot be broadly applied to another context. In this study, the following limitations were identified:

4.11.1 The selection of participants was limited and may be subject to bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher mitigated this by defining the population sample with attention to detail and not excluding anyone within the sample.

4.11.2 The sample size of 20 may be a limitation, albeit practical. This is a limitation as the time frame and type of study restrict the sample size. The researcher ensured that a broader spectrum of industries and target populations were sought. The researcher ensured the population identified was adhered to.

4.11.3 Access to followers that report or report to a female was difficult as female leaders are limited therefore their followers or reportees are equally difficult to find. This was mitigated due to the researcher's network and years in the manufacturing industry.

4.11.4 The study called for the participant's view on followership; however, it remains a subjective account, and participants may respond by how they think followership should be conducted and not by their actions. Therefore a lack of congruency may be a limitation as the researcher is relying on participants' subjective perspectives and reflections on how they behave in situations.

4.11.5 The researcher is a female and acknowledges the possible bias that may occur if participants are not forthright with their answers, particularly those that focus on female leadership or being led by a female. The mitigation of this occurred on multiple levels, the first being the initial contact and the assurance of researcher independence. The next was the consent, which emphasised independence and the ethical process. Before the start of and during the interview, the participant was assured that the intention was to explore and that there was no correct answer.

4.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought before the commencement of any interviews or contact with participants. The Ethics Committee required that an application for ethical clearance be made before interviews were sought. The Committee reviewed the application and granted ethical clearance (Appendix D) to ensure the rights of the participants were protected. Alase (2017) states that the researcher in qualitative studies must make sure all steps are taken to safeguard the privacy and rights of the participants, The research must ensure the participant is not marginalised or compromised (Alase, 2017). The interviews were stored on the researcher's computer and backed up to a limited access drive. Consent letters were shared before the interviews and signed by all participants. All participants were informed of the ethics process that was followed, the process that governs the research and that they can withdraw without prejudice at any point. (Appendix B)

4.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology used to fulfil the research objectives to understand how followers perceive female leadership in a manufacturing setting. A qualitative study was necessary for this type of research as this was explorative in nature. Research questions were derived from the literature review in Chapter 2, which informed the interview questions. A sample of 20 interviews was conducted through purposeful sampling from followers who reported to female leaders and from leaders who were once followers leading from the 'participant-orientated' approach. Through the interviews insights into social behaviours were documented by recording and then transcribing interviews. The data was coded and analysed. To ensure the trustworthiness of data the interviewer conducted all interviews and analysed all data.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter displays the results of the research process described in Chapter four to answer the three research questions presented in Chapter 3. The research questions were formulated from a literature review undertaken in chapter two, which explored the followership of female leaders from the manufacturing sector to gain an understanding of the perceptions and factors that influence followership intending to understand what cultivates support of female leaders. The participants in this interview consisted of both men and women from the manufacturing sector, who currently report or previously reported to a female leader.

5.2 Description of the Sample

The sample was an equal mix of male and female managers in the manufacturing sector who previously reported to or currently report to a female leader; as displayed in Table 5.1. The sampling was purposive, where participants were chosen by the researcher based on the initial criteria of them being in the manufacturing industry, holding a leadership role, and having subordinates. Once the participant list was drawn up, the researcher contacted each participant on the WhatsApp messenger app or via phone to ensure they currently or had previously reported to a female leader.

The participants were aged 32 to 63, with no minimum number sampled at any age. The participants were from various sectors, including automotive, medical, food, and general industrial manufacturing. Additionally, the criteria ensured a diverse group of people from the manufacturing sector in South Africa were included in the study. The criteria did not specify which part of the organisation the participants worked in. These included participants from, finance, operations, sales, planning, management and human resources departments.

There were no age limitations, gender limitations or restrictions on the sample. In addition, there were no criteria applied to the organisation, except that the organisation shall be a manufacturing sector or a critical supplier. Due to female leaders not occupying spaces in the manufacturing landscape, the sample consisted of men and women who had reported to female leaders. This manifested in an extended time of trying to find a candidate who

has reported to a female leader. Despite this, the required number of participants was identified, and all interviews were conducted, within the timeframe. Table 5.1 represents the sample used for this study.

Table 5.1: Study Sample

Code used	Race	Sex	Age	Job Title	Years in organisation	Years @ current
Participant 1	I	F	30	Financial Manager	4.5 yrs	6 months
Participant 2	I	M	30	Engineer	10	7
Participant 3	A	F	34	Manager	3	2
Participant 4	C	F	35	Human Resources Manager	2	1.5
Participant 5	C	M	50	Financial Manager	3	1.5
Participant 6	I	M	48	Operations Manager	7	1,5
Participant 7	C	M	51	Quality Assurance Manager	5	5
Participant 8	I	M	40	Key Account Manager	8	2
Participant 9	I	F	34	Financial Manager	7	7
Participant 10	A	F	40	Sales Manager	10	6
Participant 11	A	M	53	Tech. Manager	6	5
Participant 12	I	F	32	Technology Manager	6	4 months
Participant 13	W	F	33	Planner	6	6
Participant 14	A	M	46	Technical Manager	5	5
Participant 15	A	F	38	Communication Manager	9 months	9 months
Participant 16	A	F	32	Consultant	5	2
Participant 17	A	M	46	Manager	21	2
Participant 18	I	M	62	Operations Manager	47	6 months
Participant 19	I	M	61	Human Resources Executive	9	9

Participant 20	I	F	30	Financial Manager	3	2
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5.3 Appropriateness of the Sample

The sample size of 20 was deemed to be appropriate as purposive sampling was used to select participants. Managers in the manufacturing industry were invited to be part of this study. The sample was an equal distribution of males and females that currently report or previously reported to a female. This ensured that the participants chosen met the criteria as defined in chapter four and provided the richness of data required. Whilst the risk of researcher bias in choosing the participant exists, the clear criteria ensured that this was mitigated. Using Guest *et al.* (2020) proposition of saturation levels being reached at 11-14 interviews, the sample size of 20 was deemed to be appropriate.

5.4 Data Validation

To maintain the integrity of the study, the data collected in the interviews was put through extensive rigour of checking and validation to ensure that the essence of the interviews was captured and that the interviewer remained unbiased and maintained independent from the data.

The interviews were conducted in person or online, depending on the method that suited the participant. Once the interview was started, the participant was informed of the intention to record and the purpose of recording. Before the interview, a consent form was sent (Appendix B) that detailed the confidentiality and gained consent from the participant.

The recording was started, and the interview was conducted. After the interview, the recording was stopped and saved. The interview recording was then transcribed from voice to words, read through for errors and omissions and saved. The transcriptions were then uploaded into a project on Atlas TI and analysed for codes that captured what the participant was communicating in a shortened manner. To ensure errors such as incorrect capturing, researcher fatigue and omissions, this analysis was repeated at least twice to check the contents. In each of these reviews, minor adjustments were made to the codes.

The researcher then set out to reduce the overall number of codes; once the researcher was satisfied with the coding, themes and subthemes emerged. This process was reviewed and data validated by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the data.

The inductive method of analysis was used throughout this process, and the researcher ensured what the participant was saying was documented.

5.5 Saturation

Thematic or theoretical saturation as described in chapter four was based on a minimum number of interviews. This methodological approach enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by ensuring comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon under investigation, while also providing a transparent and defensible rationale for concluding the data collection phase. The significance of reaching saturation lies in its demonstration that the study has captured the full dimensionality of the research topic within the specified contextual boundaries, thereby strengthening the validity of the qualitative findings and their theoretical implications.

5.6 Coding Process

Using content and thematic analysis, the coding process was extensive and iterative to ensure the correct capture of the essence of the interview. Table 5.2 indicates how once the transcripts were analysed for codes for research question 1, these codes were reduced a second time and then linked to categories and a theme. This theme is the basis on which the research question was answered.

5.7 Analysis of Data

Content and thematic analysis were used post the interview by reading through the transcripts and then identifying groups of words that had similar meanings to the researcher. This was done based on the researcher's view and informed by literature. The grouping process was followed by putting together words with similar meanings and conveying a similar view on the subject, and subthemes and themes followed this process.

The data was collected, coded, and themed, and these themes were used to answer the research questions as presented in Chapter 3. A total of 8 themes emerged and are discussed further in the chapter as they apply to each research question. Appendix 5 holds

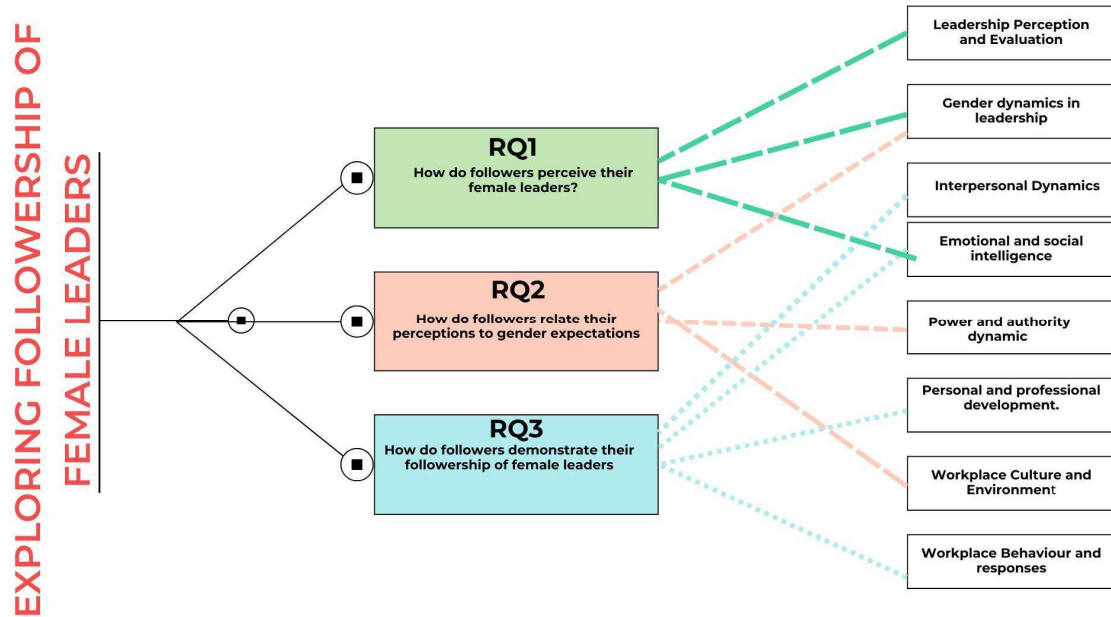
the full list of codes that have been linked to subcategories and themes. Table 5.7.1 illustrates the codes to the theme for one theme, ie. Leadership Perception and Evaluation. The sub-category was created and matched back to a theme. These themes were used to address the purpose of the study by exploring the followership of female leaders from the manufacturing sector in South Africa.

Table 5.7.1: Extract of Theme, Category, Sub-categories and Codes (Appendix 5)

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
· Adaptability	Leadership Traits	Leadership Attributes & Competency	Leadership Perception and Evaluation
· Ambiguity			
· Confidence			
· Directness			
· Independence			
· Authenticity			
· Good Leadership traits			
· Poor Leadership traits			
· Neutral			
· Observation			
· Intellectual superiority	Competence		
· Competence			
· Intelligence			
· Means and ability	Experience		
· Experience			
· Strategies/Strategic	Expertise		
· Expertise			
· Detail orientated	Effectiveness		
· Effective leadership			
· Professional development	Professional development		
· Individuality			

This chapter presents the research findings on the themes defined in Figure 5.1. Themes emerged from categories that emerged from the codes. Codes emerged from the actual transcript and were used to capture what the participant stated.

Figure 5.7.2: Mapping of the research question to themes



RQ1: How do followers perceive their female leaders?

Research question one aimed to understand how female leaders were perceived by their followers. The question aimed to explore and understand the diverse follower perception. Perception is defined as how something is understood and interpreted. Research question one examined what a follower perceived to be valuable or impactful and what a follower perceived to be difficult in a female leader. Participants were encouraged to share freely and include significant examples or instances of these times with the followers. Research question one is linked to one or more themes (Table 5.7.1. and Appendix E) Themes of leadership perception and evaluation, gender dynamics and emotional and social intelligence emerged due to the perceptions of personal beliefs, gendered bias leadership and the emotional intelligence of both the leader and follower.

RQ2: How do followers relate their perceptions to gender expectations?

Research question two explored how followers related these perceptions to gendered expectations and delved into the complex interplay between gender dynamics and followership behaviours in a manufacturing setting. The question examines how followers' perceptions, genders and societal expectations influence their perceptions and how this interpretation impacts female leadership. This question is critical as it explores how deeply embedded gender stereotypes and cultural norms in the traditionally male-dominated manufacturing sector may shape followers' conscious and unconscious bias toward female leaders. The themes linked to Research Question Two are gender dynamics, power and authority and workplace culture and environment.

RQ3: How do followers demonstrate their followership of female leaders?

Research question three builds upon the foundation of the previous question by investigating the behavioural manifestations of followers, focusing on how followers actively engage with female leaders and respond to female leadership. Research question three seeks to understand the demonstration of women's followership. Interview questions explore the follower-leader relationship when gender dynamics are explicitly considered in the manufacturing environment.

5.8 Research Questions 1 and 2

The results are presented using themes derived from categories as displayed in Figure 5.1. Eight themes mapped in 5.7 linked to research questions in Chapter 3 are discussed. Due to the overlap of Leadership perception and Gender, themes relating to research Research question one and Research question two are presented in the same subsections.

RQ1: How do followers perceive their female leaders?

RQ2: How do followers relate their perceptions to gender expectations?

5.8.1 Leadership Perception and Evaluation

Leadership traits such as competence, experience, expertise, effectiveness and professional development featured this theme of perceived leadership and evaluation. When exploring the nature of followership of women in the workplace, certain factors emerge as defining traits. These leadership traits included competence, confidence, decisiveness, and emotional intelligence. Competence emerges as a significant influencing factor regarding followership. It speaks to the fact that followers are interested in how effectively leaders can execute their responsibilities and expectations as leaders. Female leaders seem to be more susceptible to harsher judgement in terms of proving their competence to followers.

Experience and expertise also shape follower perceptions, with experience referring to the richness of a leader's career history, while expertise looks at the depth of specialisation. Female leaders may encounter challenges in attaining equal recognition, particularly in male-dominated industries where leadership pathways have traditionally favoured men.

This theme directly addresses Research Question One on how followers evaluate and perceive their female leaders' capabilities. The participants highlighted leadership qualities such as competence, expertise, and effectiveness, capturing followers' assessments of professional capabilities and leadership attributes.

Competence emerged as an important factor in how followers perceived leaders. When asked how they would react if a female leader lacked competence, Participant 11, a male, stated,

"So I just did the job I had to do and ignored the staff, which I felt exposed her incompetence."

This sentiment was echoed by Participants 7, 18, and 6, all male, indicating a willingness to provide support or do the job in cases where perceived competence was insufficient. However, in most cases, the female leader lost some credibility in receiving this support. Conversely, Participant 19 expressed concern over the negative impact of appointing leaders prematurely or based on gender rather than merit, stating,

"If you're given a position where you are incompetent, or too soon, or because of your gender, it hampers your ability to succeed. And I think in both my experiences, the emotional intelligence (EQ) of the females that were given those jobs are far diminished compared to the males."

Indicating that incapacities were justified by how willing the follower was to support their leader and possibly manage upward.

Leadership traits and effectiveness were also highlighted in follower perceptions. Participant 20, a female reflected on the leadership style of their female leader, stating,

"My leader led with heart. And I think that's what I value. I think, to some extent, to have a leadership position, one must have a somewhat domineering personality. But I think when you lean perhaps more towards your masculine and forget some of the feminine aspects of care, growth, you know, things that we are valued for, then it can be a little bit conflicted."

This view was supported by Participant 8, a male who said,

"...most times females are in a male-dominated industry, But she always has a voice. So, as a female, she always makes a point."

This response emphasises the balance followers perceive between traditionally masculine and feminine leadership traits and how this influences their evaluations of leadership effectiveness.

Conclusion: Leadership Perception and Evaluation

Followers regarded leadership traits and competence to be the most critical. It was gathered from this that followers perceive leaders to be good leaders if they possess the

leadership traits they think are significant. Leadership perceptions have both negative and positive impacts and differ from male to female participants.

5.8.2 Theme Gender Dynamics in Leadership – Gendered Expectations

The theme of gender dynamics was defined to address the questions relating to Research questions one and two. Gender-based perceptions play an important role in the followership of women in leadership roles, influencing how they are received. Unconscious gender bias can affect how followers perceive female leaders. These biases can come from societal norms that impact their perceptions. These biases can be demonstrated or observed by communication styles and willingness to accept leadership from a female. Gender stereotypes propose the issue of exacerbating these biases by leading followers to expect gender-based behaviour. In this line of thinking, men are expected to naturally be more assertive and confident while women are expected to be nurturing and supportive. This poses a challenge for female leaders whereby they need to constantly be aware of these gender-stereotypes and actively work to assert their authority within the organisation in the face of gender-based resistance.

Gender equality is important in ensuring that biased perceptions do not undermine transformation, evaluations, and authority. Workplace discrimination remains a persistent challenge and can result in questioning of female leaders' authority. Female leaders can develop adaptive strategies, such as changing their communication styles or balancing assertiveness, to gain credibility and lead effectively. Understanding these gender-based perceptions important in manufacturing and any leadership context

5.8.2.1 Follower Perceptions of Female Leadership

Gendered expectations play a significant role in shaping follower perceptions of female leaders. Participant 13 noted,

"I think I guess women are more receptive, generally, so they like to receive people and to welcome them into their space. The caring aspect, I've noticed with men, less, like it's not important to them, and just that sometimes it's not on their radar at all."

This perspective reflects an expectation that women embrace a nurturing leadership approach. Both Participants 13, a female and 14, a male, concurred strongly with the caring, nurturing nature of their leader. At the same time, Participant 13 described her

manager as "really intense" and "intentional," emphasising that female leaders may feel compelled to demonstrate mentorship and sincerity as part of their leadership approach.

Participant 14 contrasted leadership styles, stating,

"With ladies, which is unique, I guess. My previous male bosses are always firm. They're always steady."

This highlights the perception that male leadership is associated with being consistent and assertive, whereas female leadership is often viewed through a nurturing, caring lens. Similarly, Participant 4 stated,

"For me, the female leadership style is a lot more maternal. It's a lot more understanding, and there's a lot more emotional guidance and mentorship opportunities that you receive from women. Not to say that we don't get it from men, but for me, my experience is it's been more prominent from female leadership."

This reinforces the view that certain traits like nurturing are associated with women leaders from the participants' experience.

While both male and female participants had positive views of female leaders, the majority of male participants had positive views of their female leader when their leader displayed technical prowess, high EQ, supported the team and feedback and mentorship freely. This provides insights into what the participants perceived good leaders should display and their actions that resulted in a positive follower response.

5.8.2.2 Bias and Challenges in Leadership Authority

The responses indicated that implicit biases can undermine female authority. Participant 1 stated what he observed,

"Certain females that I've seen as leaders, it's just that the authority is not taken seriously in a way... if you stand in front of a male, they would obviously tend to listen to the male more."

Similarly, Participant 3 expressed a preference for male leadership despite acknowledging female competence:

"Yes. I've had an example of a good female leader. And I know that they are capable. But on any random day, I'd rather go for a man to lead me."

These reflect embedded gender biases that influence how authority is perceived and validated in leadership contexts regardless of leader competence, highlighting that while competence is important, biases such as gender can enable stereotypes and make it difficult for female leaders to gain support.

Participant 6 reflected on the impact of male-dominated environments, stating,

"The world, if not industry, is male-dominated. So, I think what I'm sort of saying, in essence, is that be yourself, but sort of try and be the male version of yourself. You know, until we get to the point where there is absolutely no difference between the genders."

This illustrates why female leaders try to conform to traditionally masculine leadership traits in order to gain credibility as leaders. Participant 18 provided an example of gendered expectations in behaviour, stating,

"She basically blurted out by using vulgar words, and basically everybody got shocked and said, listen, I didn't expect it from a lady to do that. You expect an outburst from a man when they're upset and angry. They will throw out everything on the table and end their frustration."

We see how behaviours acceptable for male leaders may be viewed differently when displayed by female leaders.

5.8.2.3 Adaptive Leadership Strategies

Some followers noted the adaptability expected of female leaders. Participant 14 described a leader who adjusted her approach based on context:

"She would take a more follower role. And then in other aspects, let's say in sales and pursuing other businesses or partnerships with our suppliers, which were designers, she would play a more driver and leadership role. So, I often had to adjust and moderate the way I actually showed up in those interactions."

Similarly, Participant 3 positively reflected on a female leader's ability to balance authority and support, stating,

"...but she would do so in a very respectful manner. If a person is wrong, she would really go out of her way to make sure that people are supported, understanding that being a female leader is very tough in such environments."

However, some followers highlighted the paradox of the expectations of female leaders. Participant 4 noted,

"When you're used to a certain management style, and a woman you don't know comes in and tries to emulate better or improve without the context, you tend to be a little bit harsher because you also expect that as a woman, she's going to understand that this is not the way. I don't know, there's just almost this unconscious bias in your head, where you expect women to behave differently because they should understand."

This highlights the complexity of gendered leadership perceptions, where women are expected to be assertive and both relatable and authoritative, and judged poorly for being too assertive.

5.8.2.4 Emotional Intelligence and Gender Perceptions

Participant 19, an outlier as the only male participant who held a negative view of female leadership, suggested that female leaders were often viewed as having lower EQ than their male counterparts, stating,

"For any position, but I think you need to understand and it's an EQ space. And I think in both my experiences, the EQ of the females that were given those jobs are far diminished compared to the males." This perspective suggests that EQ may be an additional criterion by which female leaders are judged, potentially reinforcing biases in leadership evaluation.

Conclusion: Gender Dynamics in Leadership – Gendered Expectations

EQ was seen as important and participants saw no significant differentiator between the EQ of male leaders and female leaders. These findings illustrate the complexities of gender dynamics in leadership. Followers' perceptions are shaped by embedded gender

norms and expectations, which can influence how the female leader is judged. Implicit biases and gendered stereotypes continue to shape how followers engage with and evaluate female leaders in the workplace.

5.8.3 Theme – Emotional and Social Intelligence

This theme addresses RQ one and three. Emotional competencies such as empathy, self-awareness, and emotional awareness influence workplace interactions and leadership effectiveness. Followers evaluate female leaders on how they manage emotions, cope in challenging situations, and care for their teams.

5.8.3.1 Emotional Intelligence and Self-Awareness

Emotional intelligence can create strong interpersonal connections, but it may also lead to conflict resolution challenges. Participant 4 observed,

"Whenever you then tried confronting situations, it would almost be like an emotional reaction to things, which I have found with women leaders, and that might be one of the reasons why—they are very emotional, they take things very personally."

Followers may incorrectly perceive some female leaders as struggling with emotional issues, potentially affecting their ability to engage unemotionally.

Participant 9 reflected on self awareness in this dynamic, stating,

"I think their leadership style would have been influenced because, I suppose, coming from a female perspective, they've got a lot to balance. But there's your family life and your personal life. And I think that influences some of the thinking and balancing sort of... I think that that is... it's influencing the way you interact with people because you've got this other sort of emotional side to you as well."

This highlights how external pressures like work-life balance may shape leadership styles and decision-making processes.

5.8.3.2 Empathy and Emotional Regulation

Empathy is a defining characteristic of leadership and can create vulnerabilities. While participants valued the benefits of empathetic leadership, others were negative.

"So she was very empathetic, and I think that eventually, what hurt her in the long run was that she probably cared too much. And then it impacted some of her behaviours. She was very big on integrity, like, you know, making sure you're congruent."

This shows excessive empathy can lead to difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries.

Accepting that emotional awareness is crucial in high-stress environments, participants observed that female leaders sometimes cannot separate emotions from decision-making. Participant 9 reflected on how stress impacts leadership behaviour, stating,

"She was very authoritative. So it's like what she says goes. But I think sometimes it comes from an emotional place."

Additionally, Participant 9 shared their approach to managing emotional interactions with a female leader:

"I think in times of stress, when emotion brings out the bad side of us, the way I respond is just to support in the best way I can. Because instead of getting my emotions and pushing that back on her, between the two of us, one of us has to be calm. If she's having a bad day, I just need to support her with what she needs to get through whatever we're trying to get through for the day."

This shows how followers adapt their responses based on their leader's emotional state, sometimes assuming a leadership role in emotional situations. This brings to light again the challenge of being assertive as seen as a lack of emotional regulation.

5.8.3.3 Social Dynamics and Emotional Influence

Some participants described how emotional communication builds deeper connections, while others noted that it sometimes leads to blurred boundaries between personal and professional interactions. Participant 14 illustrated with an example:

"What I found is that emotions are always attached to the job at hand, and there's no separation of the emotion, the passion, the human element that goes with a job, be it a positive or negative aspect. So, quite recently, I was driving, and I experienced an accident on the road. I was in shock and a state, and this was on

my way to work. I was teary and just emotional, and my manager allowed me to be. Similarly, my previous boss—if I went to her and we had a catch-up session, chances are it was going to end up in tears, in sharing."

This raises questions about how emotional engagement impacts workplace professionalism and also shows how leaders can create safe spaces for employees.

Conclusion: Emotional and Social Intelligence

Emotional and social intelligence does play a role in how followers perceive female leaders. Empathy, self-awareness, and emotional support can strengthen leader-follower relationships, not regulating this can indicate a lack of emotional control. While some participants often adjust their behaviours to accommodate the emotional needs of their leaders, this impacts the dynamics of the leader-follower relationship.

5.8.4 Theme – Power and Authority Interplay

The interplay between power and authority addresses research question 2

5.8.4.1 Power and Authority

Power dynamics, hierarchy, decision-making, and leadership styles play an important part in authority in leadership. Gender can influence how leaders assert control, how followers respond, and how organisations respond to this. Participants revealed that male and female leaders navigate authority differently, and are influenced by gender norms and organisational structures.

5.8.4.2 Power Dynamics and Hierarchy

Male leaders are often perceived as authoritative, while female leaders may not. Participant 6 noted how gendered expectations affect authority.

"We have a meeting, and you've got your female manager sitting in there. She's telling you what you need to do, and she's in no way disingenuous. She's just doing her job. But the second, either her equal or her superior, walks into the room, and then she immediately defers to that person."

When a female leader feels compelled to adjust their authority in response to the presence of higher-ranking individuals, this can impact gendered imbalances.

Similarly, Participant 3 described how some women feel the need to overcompensate to establish authority, saying,

"So, there is this typical approach one has, 'I have to be a tough cookie to make it in management. I have to break people down to be seen as though I'm a strong leader.'"

Female leaders' pressure to be taken seriously in hierarchical environments is highlighted here.

5.8.4.3 Decision-Making and Leadership Styles

Participants also noted how male and female leaders exert authority and engage in decision-making. Participant 14 observed that male leaders tend to focus on strategic priorities, stating,

"Male leaders, I found them happier to look at the bird's eye view, the big picture and not delve too much into the detail and the granularity. Whereas female leaders are, I think they're more versatile in terms of going right down to that level of detail, even in a technical space."

From this statement, we understand that female leaders feel the need to demonstrate deep knowledge to establish credibility, while male leaders can rely more upon the power within the organisation.

Participant 17 described how male leaders vary the use of power by often using an assertive or confrontational approach, saying,

"There's a tendency when you're reporting to a man to sort of learn to be defensive because you know there's going to be that attack at some point."

In contrast, Participant 15 highlighted the expertise of female leaders, stating,

"If I have to maybe reflect on one quality, it's competence and expertise. That's one thing I definitely admired about all the female leaders that I've worked under. Very, very competent."

A distinction in leadership styles was raised, male leaders may assert authority through dominance, while female leaders often establish it through technical competence and diligence.

Female leadership styles were also perceived negatively. Participant 19 recounted a challenging experience with a female leader, saying,

"So, I've never experienced the kind of leadership like that, the kind of autocratic, masochistic, for want of a better word, kind of leadership before. There were males in male leadership where that happened to varying degrees, but never to the intensity that it happened with this female leader."

Some female leaders can adopt a higher level of control, possibly, as a result of the additional scrutiny they face in leadership roles.

5.8.4.4 Power Struggles and Workplace Dynamics

Power struggles between female leaders and their teams were discussed. Participant 4 noted,

"And that was her insecurity as a woman. So, there was almost a sense of competition, you know, needing to take credit for work that was done."

Participant 14 further explained how forms of exclusion were used to exert power, stating,

"A lot of the time, the female leaders don't realise that they're doing it, but you pick it up in the hidden, you know, the body language, the ones that are being used, or there's a level of passive-aggressiveness. You'll be excluded from emails or brought in deliberately at the last minute to contribute to something."

Power struggles among female leaders may manifest in indirect ways, can may shaped by the expectations placed on women in leadership.

Participant 3 compared a female leader's approach to a male leader's authoritarian style, saying,

"He was very militant in his approach to us. He was quite disrespectful, and he tended to overly use his power to just put people down."

This comparison highlights the range of leadership styles that exist and how gendered expectations can shape perceptions of authority.

Conclusion: Power and Authority Interplay

Gender power and authority unpack a complex leadership space where societal and organisational expectations impact structures, decision-making, and leadership styles. Male leaders are often seen as naturally authoritative, while female leaders must navigate additional challenges to establish and maintain power. Female leaders employ different strategies to assert authority, often facing greater scrutiny in leadership roles. A more nuanced understanding of power and authority in female leadership is required.

5.8.5 Theme – Workplace Culture and Environment

The theme of Workplace Culture and Environment addresses Research Question Two.

Cultural factors, workplace dynamics, and diversity and inclusion initiatives influence how leaders are perceived and the expectations placed on them, these are all present in the workplace and may be impacted by gender.

5.8.5.1 Organisational Context and Gender Expectations

Gendered expectations can be reinforced through workplace norms and leadership perceptions. Participant 6 highlighted traditional gender roles in manufacturing:

"Because I am a male, I'm supposed to get my hands dirty. Especially if it's a female."

This suggests a belief that physical labour is a male responsibility, reinforcing stereotypes about female leaders being less involved in hands-on tasks.

Similarly, Participant 6 observed differences in expectations between male and female managers:

"I've had male managers that didn't have a problem getting in there, getting their hands into the grease, getting that machine running, or doing whatever needed to be done. With the female, I found that I would be the one that waking up at six o'clock on a Sunday morning, going to the factory, making sure the product was

made, making sure they were packed, and all the documentation was filled in and out the door."

This reflects a perception that male leaders are more engaged in operational challenges, while female leaders may be seen as delegating or removed from such activities.

Participant 18 reinforced this sentiment, citing a lack of commitment from a female leader during critical moments:

"There were times when the lady was present, and we had breakdowns. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon, she just took her bag and walked away."

This perception contributes to a workplace culture that doubts female leaders' dedication and can result in female overcompensating.

Due to differing expectations, males and females respond differently, affecting how employees interact with them. Participant 18 admitted to adjusting his behaviour based on gender:

"Because of my personality, I maybe have a slightly different approach when I'm with a woman and a slightly different approach when I'm with a man, where I would expect more from the men than from the women."

Biases that shape workplace interactions and performance expectations are demonstrated with these differing expectations.

There are some cases where gender bias results in resistance to female leadership. Participant 19 openly admitted to sabotaging a female leader's success:

"Because she's useless, you know? She's a female. So, outside of achieving the departmental goals, I'd make it difficult for her."

This reveals a deep-seated bias that associates incompetence with gender rather than individual capability.

5.8.5.2 Workplace Dynamics and Cultural Factors

Organisational culture can influence leadership, sometimes reinforcing stereotypes and resistance to diversity. However, workplace dynamics are also shaped by broader cultural

factors beyond gender. Participant 7 pointed out that existing workplace norms shaped leadership relationships:

"It's not because she's female. It's the same type of relationship I had with some of my male technical mentors within the factory. You know, I think it was just a culture thing of that organisation at that particular time."

This suggests that resistance to female leadership may be a byproduct of broader cultural issues rather than outright gender bias in some cases.

Participant 3 described an environment where both patriarchal and competitive dynamics influenced leadership:

"For everyone, it's a little bit of queen bee. And it's a little bit of patriarchy."

Suggesting a workplace where women in leadership may adopt dominant, sometimes exclusionary behaviours.

Participant 10 stated that a female leader changed her behaviour to fit into a male-dominated industry:

"I thought she was not comfortable in her feminine energy, per se, and thought that there's certainly a personality type that she thought would make her successful in a male-dominated world. This character will almost be exaggerated in trying to put herself across, not just only in internal meetings, but also in external settings as well."

This reflects the pressure on female leaders to conform to masculine leadership traits to gain acceptance highlighting the impact of gender identity.

5.8.5.3 Diversity, Inclusion, and Leadership Preparedness

How well female leaders integrate into the organisation can be impacted by workplace culture. Participant 19 emphasised the importance of both self-awareness and organisational support:

"For a leader, if there's a lack of a decreased sense of self-awareness in terms of my competence, my abilities, my knowledge, my experiences, my education—if

there's not an understanding from that leader, then whatever that organisation does is going to expose that person. And I think again, so the preparedness in that ecosystem of the organisation and its goals and ambitions is important."

This raises the issue that the success of female leaders is partly dependent on how well they are integrated into the organisational culture and whether they receive the necessary support to lead effectively.

Sub-conclusion: Workplace Culture and Environment

Traditional gender norms often lead to different performance expectations for men and women, with female leaders facing more focus than their male counterparts may not encounter. Cultural factors shape perceptions of leadership; in some cases, employees actively resist female authority. However, leadership challenges are not always purely gender-related—organisational culture, mentorship, and preparedness play essential roles in shaping leadership effectiveness.

Conclusion of Research question 1 and Research question 2

The findings revealed that leadership traits of competence appeared to be most critical to followers, however, the perception of leadership traits differed amongst male and female participants regarding leadership effectiveness. Whilst most participants viewed EQ as important and saw no significant differentiator between the EQ of male leaders and female leaders, implicit biases and gendered stereotypes continue to shape how followers evaluate female leaders. Participants revealed their need to adjust their behaviour to accommodate the needs of leaders. Furthermore, the findings discovered that gender expectation coupled with power and authority exposed a landscape where societal norms and organisational culture influence hierarchical structures and leadership styles. Whilst leadership challenges are not always gender-related, organisational culture, mentorship, and preparedness play essential roles in shaping leadership effectiveness for female leaders.

5.9 Research Question 3

How do followers demonstrate their perception of female leaders?

5.9.1 Theme – Interpersonal Dynamics

Interpersonal dynamics contribute to research question three

The way followers build and maintain relationships with female leaders is impacted by interpersonal dynamics. These dynamics impact how authority is exercised and received and how mentorship develops. Participants expressed both positive and negative experiences, focusing on the various elements of interpersonal interactions in leadership.

5.9.1.1 Communication and Trust

Trust plays a significant role in establishing relationships and is a critical component in leader-follower relationships and communication. Many participants described how female leaders' communication styles influenced their levels of feeling safe at work. Participant 10 expressed appreciation for a female leader's empathy, stating,

"What I was very comfortable with her, obviously being a female myself, is being able to share any personal experiences. For example, if my child is sick, I thought she was very open to it or that she understood very well without me feeling uncomfortable."

This indicates how female leaders often create an environment where personal circumstances are acknowledged and trust is built.

However, trust is not always easily established as noted by Participant 13

"Even now, if I was to have been led by a female, I guess I would be probably more cautious than a male. Because I know, I've maybe been aware of more, like women who've been led by females that haven't been the greatest."

This lack of trust might reveal hesitancy in female leadership, potentially rooted in prior leadership or bias.

Some participants also pointed out rigid communication patterns among female leaders. Participant 14 shared,

"Almost all of them have a very specific way of executing a task. And if you venture outside of that, there's a difficulty in them actually accepting that you know, maybe there's a different approach to certain things."

The participant indicates that some female leaders may be perceived as less adaptable which can affect trust and collaboration.

5.9.1.2 Respect and Supportive Relationships

Participants noted both the positive and negative aspects of female leadership in these areas. Some described female leaders as more emotionally attuned and supportive. Participant 4 stated,

"For me, the female leadership style is a lot more maternal, right? It's a lot more understanding, and there's a lot more emotional guidance and mentorship opportunities that you receive from women."

Indicating that female leaders can be seen as providing emotional support and guidance, fostering a sense of psychological safety among their teams.

Conversely, other participants expressed concerns about female leaders struggling to balance emotional intelligence with work expectations. Participant 2 highlighted this tension, stating,

"On the one hand, being emotional makes it easy to approach for conversation. And then at the same time, the emotional creates difficulty in terms of insecurity, competitiveness, and conversations."

While emotional intelligence can enhance approachability, it can also contribute to challenges in maintaining professional boundaries.

The ability to provide constructive feedback also plays a role in relationships. Participant 4 noted,

"Because, you know, you have some leaders that say real-time feedback is important. And on the flip side, you know, the conversation about EQ also comes back down to, is the person ready to receive the feedback I'm giving them right now?"

This highlights the complexity of balancing directness with emotional awareness in leadership interactions.

5.9.1.3 Professional Relationships and Workplace Dynamics

Teamwork and workplace culture can impact how female leaders navigate professional relationships and team dynamics. Some participants described difficulties in building initial rapport with female leaders. Participant 4 stated,

"These female managers almost always start on a bad note. So always very professional initially, no friendliness, etc."

While some female leaders may establish a strong professional boundary early on by asserting authority this can negatively influence how relationships develop over time.

Participants raised further challenges related to leadership competence. Participant 11 remarked,

"She was just incompetent as a manager, and that caused frustration amongst some of us on the team."

Similarly, Participant 6 was faced with a manipulative leader, stating,

"She would sort of get close to you, and sort of, I'm not saying she would use her womanly charms to get information out of you, but make herself seem to be the weak female, get your sympathy sort of thing, and then when she got the information that she needed out of you, oh my god, she was so quick to turn around and stick it to you."

These statements show how follower perceptions of fairness and authenticity impact workplace relationships and leadership effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, some participants expressed strong loyalty and appreciation for female leaders who created positive professional environments. Participant 5 shared,

"Absolutely, because I knew that she would always protect us as the people that were on her team. And because we would be on a team, we would learn more because she always got the more difficult jobs. And she would make it fun when we were there."

Fairness in leadership was raised by Participant 5 who further elaborated,

"If we had to use our own vehicles, we got paid our kilometres. So, she was very fair, if that makes sense. So, even though she wanted you to go the extra mile or she asked you to go the extra mile, she always made sure that you were fairly compensated for it."

Whilst not all followers responded positively to female leadership styles. Participant 15 noted,

"My response to this type of leadership, is and I almost feel like I have to hold back. That's my responsiveness. I have to do the bare minimum."

Conclusion: Interpersonal dynamics

Trust, respect, and communication play a role in shaping the interpersonal dynamics in the workplace. Some female leaders are seen to develop supportive environments, offering mentorship and emotional support, others struggle with trust-building, rigidity, or challenges in maintaining professional relationships. Communication is critical and trust can be cultured on fairness and consistency.

5.9.2 Theme – Workplace Behaviour and Responses

This theme addresses research question three. Behaviours in the workplace show how followers interact with and adapt to female leaders. These behaviours include communication styles, conflict resolution, and how people collaborate. Followers often adjust themselves and how they work together as a team based on leadership expectations.

5.9.2.1 Assertiveness and Adaptability

Participants indicated how differences in female and male leaders assert themselves impacted them. Participant 4 highlighted a difference:

"So for me, the difference within a male leader is that it's not to say that they aren't competitive, but I think that you almost always know where you stand, like, he will give you that feedback, it's immediate feedback. And then you deal with it at the moment, and you both kind of get over it, which you find with the female leaders,

they're less likely to say, 'This is how I feel about how you behaved.' And then it comes out in a different way."

While some female leaders may struggle with confrontation, In contrast, others are seen as overly assertive, particularly in male-dominated environments. Participant 10 shared,

"I thought when, for example, if we would go to meetings in trying to get the point across, it'd be just far too—it'd be trying too hard, almost aggressive in the male-dominated space, because she's trying to assert herself and for her to be taken seriously. So, I thought, sure, it's excessive. And I had difficulty in dealing with this."

The challenge of balancing assertiveness without being perceived as overly aggressive seems to plague female leaders. In addition, Participant 10 noted,

"It was very evident that she was trying to prove a point, overly so, because of the environment that we, women, find themselves in. When there's a table, and the seven seats already belong to men, it's the men that I think she wanted to impress. And the way that she would try to impress them is obviously by coming on very strong because I think, in her mind, that's what men understood."

These statements show that drawing on dominant behaviours is deployed by some females to establish credibility.

5.9.2.2 Conflict Resolution and Communication Styles

Strong conflict resolution skills are required to be effective, yet participants noted differing ways female leaders responded. Participant 10 recalled a leader's willingness to escalate conflicts:

"I was at first very uncomfortable because I had never experienced anything of that sort. For example, if we go to customers, and she would be willing to walk out of a meeting because we were not coming to an agreement."

And participant 8 added:

"It's very male dominated and I think what surprised me is that my leader was able to stand out at times so that they're able to get their point across and be taken seriously in the role.

From this participant, we see that some female leaders may use confrontation as a strategy to assert authority and the participants also adjust their own behaviours in response to this. Participant 10 reflected on their adaptation, stating,

"What made it easier is that when she requested anything that she wanted, I would immediately get onto it because she wanted things done there and then, regardless of what you were doing at that stage. So, I do think I made her job a bit easier so that she could be powerful, prove a point, and do whatever other political movements she wanted to do within the organisation. Where I think I made her job hard is perhaps by not giving her the direct feedback that she needed to hear."

The impact of power dynamics on workplace interactions is evidenced above, where followers may choose compliance over constructive feedback.

5.9.2.3 Teamwork and Collaboration

Workplace behaviour was raised by participants as something that impacts teamwork and working together. Participant 11 expressed frustration with a leader's management approach:

"To give you an example, this person that I'm saying was incompetent. One of the things she used to do was to treat us like children, and to be honest, that used to annoy me. I would not want to go to the office and be treated like a preschool child."

Perceived micromanagement can negatively impact team morale and shape how team members respond.

Conversely, the insecurity of female leaders can come from workplace expectations and external perceptions. Participant 16 reflected on a leader's reluctance to assert authority:

"When others are directing the questions at me and seeking clarity, they're seeking advice. And so I think that the insecurity came from there, not because she was incompetent."

The extent of responsibility also plays a part in workplace dynamics. Participant 11 observed that a leader's willingness to take on additional tasks affected team expectations:

"And because of her availability, people tend to ask her to get involved in things like facilities management, for example, which is not her area. And for me, that sometimes becomes a concern—that maybe it is her expectation as well that people that report to her are available for everything and anything that happens within the organisation."

How a leader's approach to delegation and boundary-setting impacts team roles and responsibilities is highlighted here.

The responses also captured participant behaviours, indicating both support and resistance to leadership decisions. Participant 19 shared,

"I worked to support her decisions, even when I didn't agree with them, to ensure the team succeeded. At the same time, I would vent my frustrations to colleagues, which probably made it harder for her."

Participants indicate here how they may publicly support their leader while privately questioning their decisions, influencing team cohesion and leadership effectiveness.

Conclusion: Workplace Behaviour and Responses

These findings illustrate the ways in which followers perceive and respond to female leadership, highlighting the impact of competence, leadership traits, and effectiveness. Supportive and critical views were revealed, indicating that individual experiences and broader workplace expectations of leadership shape followers' perceptions.

The leadership style, assertiveness, and decision-making approach of female leaders influence follower behaviour. Some female leaders are perceived as overly assertive, and confrontational and display conflict resolution difficulties. Other participants praised their female leaders for establishing team spirit, empowering and creating safe spaces. Ultimately, leader and follower adaptability and communication styles will impact how to engage with female leaders to foster team effectiveness.

5.9.3 Theme –Personal and Professional Development

This theme addresses research question three. Under female leadership, participants reveal how they experience growth, skill development, and career progression. Participants' experiences vary, with some finding female leadership empowering while others experiencing challenging leadership and empowerment.

5.9.3.1 Growth and Learning

There are distinct differences in learning under male and female leaders that the study highlighted. Participant 4 reflected on role models in leadership, suggesting that certain leadership traits perceived as effective are more associated with male leaders:

"I'm more inclined to want to be or emulate my male leaders, and the qualities that I've admired in them, be it resilience, be it in the manner that they give feedback, be it in their ability to almost just draw a line and then stick to it."

Female leaders are also acknowledged for their ability to balance emotional intelligence and cognitive abilities. Participant 10 expressed a positive response to female leadership:

"I'm excited by the idea of a female leader. The reason is, I think, females, in terms of being able to tap into both the emotional side and the IQs (intellectual quotient), have just so much more to offer in terms of leadership. And playing around with both doors would not necessarily come naturally to men, especially in a manufacturing instance."

The unique strengths that female leaders bring to the workplace appear to be appreciated by participants. In contrast, some participants felt that female leadership did not empower them sufficiently. Participant 15 noted:

"And I think then that makes it really difficult because empowering others is something that is non-existent, which is unfortunate. That's where I found myself growing more under male leadership than under female leadership. And I think the positive output is that it made me resilient."

This raises a perceived gap in mentorship and skill development. Similarly, feelings of belonging or a lack thereof with female leadership. Participant 15 shared:

"Then, I think what really surprised me, was around a sense of belonging. I didn't feel like I belonged under female leadership."

Participants highlighted that inclusion and psychological safety are key factors in their professional growth.

5.9.3.2 Career Advancement and Mentorship

While participants hold different perceptions of career advancement under female leadership. Participants associated female leadership with professional growth, while others felt held back. Participant 15 revealed a preference for male leadership:

"My initial instinct is definitely to go for the male, right? And yet the other part of me is everybody deserves a chance because I don't know what to expect, but I would definitely probably resonate towards a male leader."

Participants revealed that confidence and authority play a role in how female leaders are perceived. Participant 16 remarked:

"With both male and female leadership, it's all good until it's not good. Their leadership is good until it's not good. I'm going to put it like this: We have very insecure female leaders. So I think whatever experiences that were not so good, I think in my view, I think they were coming from a place of insecurity because things will come out that you must know that I have been doing this for this long and you must listen to me when I say this."

Despite these challenges, some participants acknowledged positive experiences. Participant 4 recognised achievements under female leadership:

"From an output point of view, I've done great things with female leaders and been able to accomplish a lot. And there have been a lot of smiles through tears and frustration. So it has had its moments of glory."

Participant 7 shared positive experience and negative experiences :

"The one thing was she was a very good educator in terms of teaching you new things in the lab, in terms of testing or procedures. She was very patient and very

giving in terms of opening up about her knowledge and her experience working in that type of environment."

And conversely:

"...the one negative I found was there was another young lady that worked in the lab. I felt that she was a lot tougher on that young lady than on others in the workspace."

5.9.3.3 Skill Development and Experience-Based Learning

While professional growth often comes from hands-on learning and leadership exposure. Some participants felt they were playing a supportive rather than a developmental role. Participant 9 reflected:

"I think this current role, I suppose because she's just newly in here, it feels like it's the other way around like I'm helping her develop to some extent, which is, I think, fair to get grounded into the company."

A female leader's career ambitions and competitive dynamics can influence leadership behaviour and how she is perceived. Participant 10 observed:

"Definitely. I think that the aggression part that I spoke about is due to the fact that there is a minority of women in her band. Actually, they were performing the exact same role. And she was eyeing an executive position that definitely influenced the way that she would come across and express herself."

Followers also identified micromanagement as a hindrance to development. Participant 12 stated:

"I was micromanaged, and micromanaging didn't help us either because, for people that needed to do stuff, we always had to get involved for them to do the job right."

Similarly, Participant 15 noted:

"I've tried saying... You critiquing me and rather telling me what to do and how to do it, then giving me a little bit of leeway really just makes me hold back."

Personalities can affect development under female leadership. Participant 11 reflected on their introverted nature:

"I think my introversion and playing my cards close to my chest—what I mean by that is when it comes to my long-term plans, personal long-term plans, I don't share as much. I share what I think is necessary for my leader to support me. So there are things that I don't share, and I think sometimes there is that concern that if somebody is as introverted as this guy, what else is he thinking?"

Conclusion: Personal and Professional Development

While some participants are drawn to the balance of emotional intelligence and cognitive leadership, others find empowerment and mentorship lacking. Career advancement can be influenced by the female's leadership style, how much she mentors and how well she communicates with the team. Participants who were given autonomy and mentorship tend to grow, while those who feel micromanaged or unsupported feel stifled.

Conclusion on Research Question 3

The findings revealed the interpersonal dynamics between followers and female leaders are shaped by communication, trust, respect, and professional relationships, noting that, trust is often reliant on perceived fairness and consistency. These findings illustrate the many ways in which followers perceive and demonstrate leadership to a female, in particular concerning competence, leadership traits, and follower development in the workplace. In addition, adaptability and communication styles play a significant role in how followers engage with female leaders, shaping both individual and team effectiveness in the workplace.

5.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter Five presents the results of the research process followed when collecting data from the participants to answer the three research questions presented in Chapter Three. The participants shared their experiences of followership being led by female leaders highlighting positive outcomes and challenges viewed through a gendered lens.

From data analysis undertaken when generating codes, themes that emerged were similar in nature to address Research Question One regarding the perception of female leaders and Research Question Two regarding perceived gender expectation. Due to the

overlapping of themes both research questions were addressed under the heading Leadership Perception and Evaluation. The theme directly addressed how followers evaluate and perceive the capabilities of their female leaders. The participants highlighted leadership qualities such as competence, expertise, and leadership effectiveness, capturing the essence of followers' assessments of professional capabilities and leadership attributes.

The themes emerging to address Research question three were addressed under the heading of Interpersonal Dynamics which focused on how followers demonstrate their followership to female leaders. Participants expressed both positive and negative experiences, highlighting the complexities of interpersonal interactions in leadership.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

This study aims to better understand how female leaders can gain and sustain the support of their followers. The primary research question is to explore the followership of female leaders in the manufacturing workplace. Women do not occupy the roles and spaces as projected or expected by various bodies, as noted in Stats SA (2023). Currently, women occupy less than 17.3% of leadership roles, according to Deloitte (2022) and 10% of C-suite roles. Turban *et al.* (2019) state that companies that promote diversity and have a competitive edge are more likely to be successful in helping women to achieve leadership roles. While innovation is encouraged through diversity, and whilst transformation holds significant social value both can foster competitiveness for leadership roles.

Successful businesses have proven leadership and trust are important leadership traits among their employees. Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) state that the support of a leader is shown by how willing a follower subordinates to their leader. Leadership is defined as guiding and directing individuals or teams; followership is the other side of the leadership coin (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). Without followers, leaders cannot achieve their mandate (Brown & Treviño, 2006), and followers need the guidance and boundaries set by a leader (Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019). In understanding this dynamic between female leaders and followers the gendered expectations of followers give insight into both the challenges for female leaders and the opportunities for followership support

Twenty participants, 10 male and 10 female, were interviewed to better understand their perceptions, beliefs, actions, and demonstrations related to female leaders. The population chosen was both males and females to understand differences in perceptions between a male follower and a female follower. A leader is described as one from whom others can take instructions (Kark & Buengeler, 2024), and in the context of this, the study was defined as an individual with at least one person reporting to them. All participants in the study have previously reported to a female. The data from the interviews were coded into themes, and presented in the findings of the study in Chapter five in relation to the research questions under investigation.

The chapter details how the research questions have been answered by drawing on the models presented in Chapter two and linking each research question with the theme that best applies. Due to the nature of the study, it is possible, and in this case, it does occur,

that one theme answers multiple research questions. This is due to the common themes of gender and leadership in this study.

6.2 Recap of the Research Questions and Analysis

The themes were identified by conducting interviews and analysing the data as stated in Chapter Five (see Figure 5.1):

- Leadership Perception and Evaluation
- Gender Dynamics in Leadership
- Interpersonal Dynamics
- Emotional and Social Intelligence
- Workplace Behaviour and Adaptation
- Power and Authority Dynamic
- Personal and Professional Development
- Workplace Culture and Environment

6.3 Research Question 1

6.3.1 Data Analysis Findings

Perceptions of female leaders are shaped by the follower's view of what a good leader should be (Bussey & Bandura, 2014; Eagly & Sczesny, 2019). A large number of male followers noted competency and expertise as important traits, while more female followers valued support and development. All followers placed importance on one or more of the qualities of empathy, consistency, personal development and emotional astuteness. Whilst it is known that gender bias shapes and affects how followers perceive their leaders (Heilman, 2012), gender is not the only single criterion that can impact how followers support female leaders. From the participant's response, prior leadership creates the participant's benchmark for defining and measuring a good leader.

A complex interplay of leadership traits, competence, effectiveness, authority, and emotional intelligence shapes the perception of female leaders. Using Social Role Theory (Koenig & Eagly, 2014), Implicit Leadership Theory (Hopton & Han, 2020), Implicit Followership Theory (Sy, 2020), and Social Cognitive Theory (Bussey & Bandura, 2014) we can explore how followers interpret and evaluate female leadership.

Of the participants interviewed, all had reported to a female leader in the past, with far fewer (8 approximately) currently reporting to a female leader. Due to the qualifying criterion imposing that a participant had to have reported to a female leader, the data then suggest that participants who have reported to female leaders in the past, no longer do so. When defining a good leader, participants leaned heavily on three things: leadership traits that their leader possessed, how those traits were impactful or meaningful to them and the negative actions of that leader which have shaped them. Participants viewed negative actions as poor leadership traits.

Leadership traits such as competence, effectiveness, and decision-making emerged from the data as positive qualities in a leader that would make participants adopt the position of a follower (Daft, 2011; Pearce, 2018). Additionally, followers apportioned importance to the female leader's expertise and the female leaders' technical astuteness. Female leaders who could hold their own technically and support the team were well supported. There was a strong dominance of competence, effective leaders, and expertise among male followers. Leadership qualities were accentuated through the demonstration of traits such as empathy, compassion, and support. It was not just the emotional competencies that were important to the leaders and followers. Both males and females wanted a leader to balance and regulate these emotions. When a leader strikes the right balance between empathy, social engagement and strong leadership traits, the follower almost always develops a connection to this leader (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019), and followers would go so far as to say they would choose this leader or move to a job where they could report to this person. These traits were highly impactful for a follower.

6.3.2 Literature Review Findings

Leadership can be described as guiding and directing individuals or teams (Kark & Bengeuler, 2024). The participants generally linked the perception of leaders to what they thought good leadership was.

Brown and Treviño (2006) and Hopton and Han (2020) define leadership as a process built on relationships and that creating teamwork is the real outcome, not just changing behaviour. Their study revealed that while this is still relevant, it is also very important for a leader to be impactful. Participants found it easy to recall when a female leader had a significant and negative impact. Since followers' perceptions are often shaped by biases and societal norms, it is advisable for female leaders to place special emphasis on nurturing teamwork and fostering team cohesion.

Implicit leadership theories (Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Braun, 2017) state that individuals create a leadership ideal from their own experience, societal expectations and cultural norms. Participants' responses are well aligned with this, with less emphasis on cultural norms and more on their experience and expectations. Further to this, both men and women appreciated a leader's empathic and caring qualities, and both found that when this was not regulated, it did not add to the relationship.

The characteristics of Implicit leadership theories (ILT) (Hoption & Han,2020) regarding masculinity and the bias towards male leadership were evident from the study, particularly in the manufacturing context. There was an innate bias that a leader would hold masculine traits, Braun *et al.* (2017); were more of an effective leader in a manufacturing environment, then a female leader. This was evident that women do not have the physical capabilities to learn manufacturing. Conversely, the study revealed that empathy, caring, and helpfulness are traits that followers look for in a leader. This is a slight shift of preferred leadership to move away from the dominant prototype to a more collaborative style.

6.3.3 Analysis

6.3.3.1 Perceptions of Female Leaders

Followers perceive female leaders based on their leadership traits as having consistent importance and competence, both of which significantly impact perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Females are recognised as leaders by followers, who are willing to follow them if provided they fulfil follower's expectations and exhibit the traits that define a good leader in their eyes, as aligned with Peace (2018). Participants considered effective traits such as competence, empathy, assertiveness, emotional control, and empowerment. Conversely, leaders who possessed traits such as authoritarianism, competitiveness, lack of emotional regulation, and disingenuousness were regarded as poor leaders. There was generally an alignment of what a good leader and a poor leader were, with the difference being the strength of the number of times the code was mentioned. Overall, both male and female participants shared similar views on the qualities of a good leader.

6.3.3.2 Gendered Perceptions in Leadership

Female leaders were evaluated through the lens of what society has traditionally expected from a leader (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019). Since there have always been more male leaders than females, males have been leaders for longer, and because they have been leaders for longer, they have continued to perpetuate this cycle and hire more men (Shen &

Joseph, 2019). This creates a male-skewed work environment, and female leaders have been expected to fill the shoes of a male leader all while maintaining their own identity and embracing femininity. Whilst Badura *et al.* (2018) suggest a lack of willingness from followers to take instructions from a female, the participants generally did not raise this as a reason for not giving their support to female leaders. Gendered stereotypes played out by imposing gender-based expectations on female leaders (Cerbara *et al.*, 2022). Male leaders are expected to be aggressive, make decisions quickly and provide solutions; female leaders are expected to get those same results by being nurturing and caregivers (Blakemore & Centers, 2005). An important element emerged from a majority of the participants who believed that empathy trait in a leader was essential to leadership. The participants' views on gender perception correspond with the findings in the literature (Braun *et al.*, 2017; Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019) who state empathy as a defining factor in good leadership, further highlight the importance of empathy and emotional intelligence.

Using ILT as the starting point, the findings suggest that followers have their perceptions of what qualities make a good leader and that female leaders may possess those qualities (Yang *et al.*, 2020). However, followers may struggle to reconcile female leaders with having good leadership qualities, as they are perceived to be more male-leaning (Braun *et al.*, 2017). This struggle between the leader prototype and unmet gender expectations may create complex perceptions of female leaders.

Female leaders often face resistance to their authority, particularly in male-dominated environments, where leadership is implicitly linked to dominance and hierarchy (Gutner *et al.*, 2021). Some followers view female leaders as highly competent and strategic, while others hesitate to fully acknowledge their authority, requiring them to prove themselves over time. Hoption and Han (2020) further support this, as followers may struggle to integrate female leaders into their pre-existing mental models of what a leader should be (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Leaders who establish their credibility through technical expertise and strategic thinking tend to earn more respect, as these qualities are harder to dispute regardless of gender (Pearce, 2018). This was reflected in the data, suggesting that competence was the largest ruling factor in followers' overall perceptions of female leaders' effectiveness. Conversely, females who exhibited firm, male-like leadership characteristics were perceived to lack feminine traits and lost the credibility and support of their followers.

6.3.3.3 Prior Leadership

Followers who have had prior experiences with male leaders as role models may struggle to recognise the effectiveness of a different leadership style (Hoption & Han, 2020). However, female leaders who successfully balanced directive leadership with emotional intelligence tended to be more positively perceived by followers, as they aligned with both traditional leadership expectations (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014). Some participants associated their prior male leadership experiences with consistency and assertiveness and reflected an expectation that female leaders embodied relational and nurturing leadership styles. Mayer and Barnard (2015) similarly state gendered leadership expectations to be in line with societal gender norms that assert men as authoritative and direct, and women as nurturing and communal. The majority of male participants held positive views of their female leaders, particularly when those leaders demonstrated technical expertise and strong emotional intelligence.

6.3.3.4 Emotional Intelligence

While some participants appreciated the emotional intelligence of female leaders, viewing it as a strength that fosters trust and psychological safety, others perceived high emotional engagement as a weakness, particularly if it is seen as interfering with decision-making. ILT (Hoption & Han, 2020) suggests that emotional regulation is a key component of how leaders are judged. Followers are more likely to view leaders as effective when they maintain composure and objectivity under pressure (Hoption & Han, 2020). This may cause conflict when followers view female leaders to be more attuned to their follower's emotions and interpersonal concerns. This sensitivity is often interpreted as a sign of weakness, undermining their perceptions of composure and objectivity.

6.3.4 RQ 1 Summary

Research question one sought to understand how followers perceive their female leaders. Some followers strongly admire and support female leadership, recognising their unique strengths. In contrast, others remain sceptical due to ingrained cognitive biases that female leaders do not possess the stereotypical masculine traits attributed to good leaders. Female leaders who demonstrate competence, fairness, and adaptability are more likely to be positively received. However, they often navigate additional scrutiny compared to their male counterparts due to this perceived deviance from those masculine

attributes. It suggests that female leaders are evaluated based on how their followers define them to be good leadership traits.

6.4 Research Question 2

How do followers relate their perceptions to gender expectations?

Research question two sought to explore how the perceptions of followers on gender and their expectations related to how they perceived the female leader. Additionally, the study sought to understand the balance and power in gender dynamics and follower behaviour. It is apparent from the previous research question that perceptions do exist amongst followers, Moreover, question two seeks to understand how gendered expectations and social norms influence the assessment of female leaders by their followers.

6.4.1 Data Analysis Findings

Followers seemed to have certain conceptualisations of how the quality of being female may impact one's leadership as described by Hopton and Han (2020). Some participants tended to perceive females in line with traditional gender roles that assert women to be more nurturing, relatable, empathetic, and emotionally intelligent. Studies from (Heilman (2012), Mayer & Barnard, (2015) agree that male leaders are associated with more assertiveness, directness, decisiveness and firmness. Furthermore, they suggested that female leaders were subjected to expectations surrounding their emotional inclinations.

Female leaders who exhibited more traditionally masculine traits like directness and assertiveness may be viewed as too aggressive and unaligned with typical female qualities. Heilman, (2012) supports the view that those female leaders who embraced typically feminine traits, lean more into emotional sensitivity, and may be perceived to struggle with asserting authority.

Implicit bias appeared to affect the credibility and authority of female leaders. Some participants explained that they did not necessarily think female leaders were less competent, but they would nonetheless prefer to be led by a male. (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Braun *et al.*, 2017). Whereas male participants indicated they would be led by a female leader, provided competence was displayed. (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi *et al.*, 2022) This appeared to be a result of ingrained bias with little explanation provided as to why followers held this preference or the idea that female leaders were inherently viewed as less credible due to their gender.

Women in leadership face heightened scrutiny and often feel the need to overcompensate to gain authority (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). Followers perceived female leaders to attempt to offset gendered leadership expectations by being more assertive, dominant, or strong. Participants demonstrated perceptions that suggest that they think that female leaders are aware of the incongruity between gender stereotypes of women and expectations of leaders. As a result, they must emulate these masculine traits to be seen as aligned with leadership expectations. (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Kinnear & Orllepp, 2016; Wessels, 2020)

Participants held gendered perceptions about decision-making styles and how they reinforce perceptions of power. Male leaders were associated with big-picture strategic thinking, while female leaders were expected to be detail-oriented to prove their expertise. Some female leaders adopt more authoritarian or exclusionary behaviours, possibly as a reaction to these power struggles. Some participants perceived female leaders as manipulating to maintain credibility and avoid accountability in order to maintain their perceived integrity in the workplace.

Organisational expectations often reinforce gendered labour divisions, leading to assumptions about male and female responsibilities (Badura *et al.*, 2018). A small group of participants agreed that in manufacturing, intense labour seems to be attributed to work for men, where female leaders exhibited limited involvement in the groundwork processes.

Women's leadership was sometimes met with resistance, with one participant actively sabotaging female authority. One participant stated, "*Because she's useless, you know? She's a female. So, outside of achieving the departmental goals, I'd make it difficult for her.*" (Participant 17)

In some cases, workplace resistance may have been more about organisational culture than outright gender bias. A participant alluded to resistance to female leadership was a result of traditional workplace culture rather than outright gender bias.

Ultimately, followers associated leadership styles with gender norms and expectancy theory – nurturing leadership is seen as feminine, while assertive, direct leadership is seen as masculine. This leads to contradictory expectations for female leaders whereby their gender does not correlate with their role as a leader because of gender biases that complicate the dynamic (Braun *et al.*, 2017; Kark & Buengeler, 2024). In organisations where power and authority are unevenly distributed (Mar Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.*, 2023),

male leaders are more naturally granted authority, while female leaders find ways to prove themselves repeatedly when facing resistance or scrutiny. Workplace culture can reinforce gendered expectations, influencing how followers engage with female leaders. (Jones *et al.*, 2021)

6.4.2 Literature Review Findings

Social Role Theory suggests that from an early age, individuals are socialised into gendered expectations, which influence their perceptions of who is suited for leadership and followership (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Traditionally, men are seen as assertive and dominant, while women are expected to be nurturing and communal (Blackstone, 2003). These conceptions affect how followers assess leaders, with women often facing a 'double bind' (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). When female leaders exhibit authoritative (more stereotypically masculine) traits, they may be viewed as too aggressive. However, adopting a more nurturing (stereotypically feminine) style may be perceived as being weak (Shen & Joseph, 2021).

ILT (Hoption & Han, 2020) (and IFT (Sy, 2015) further demonstrate how followers' unconscious beliefs reinforce gendered leadership expectations. According to Braun *et al.* (2017), the prototype of an ideal leader is often male-skewed, with traits such as decisiveness and dominance associated with leadership effectiveness. These traits align with typically masculine traits (Braun *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, female leaders may struggle to be accepted as legitimate authority figures due to a misalignment between their perceived attributes and the stereotypical leader archetype. When female leaders challenge these expectations, they face resistance, scepticism, and outright defiance from followers (Güntner *et al.*, 2021). This resistance is exacerbated in male-dominated industries like manufacturing, where leadership remains aligned with traditional masculine norms (Teruel *et al.*, 2015).

Power dynamics within the workplace further contribute to gendered perceptions of leadership (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Even when women achieve leadership roles, they often encounter scrutiny, bias, and barriers to asserting authority (Shen & Joseph, 2021). The concept of 'Queen Bee' syndrome describes how some women in leadership roles may distance themselves from other women to secure their positions within male-dominated environments (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). Additionally, female leaders often struggle with exerting power due to ingrained stereotypes, which leads to limited networking opportunities (Inderjeet & Scheepers, 2022).

6.4.3 Analysis

6.4.3.1 Gender Expectations and Follower Perceptions

Studies on Social Role Theory, suggest that people are exposed to gender expectations from early on in life and that these expectations create frameworks that determine what traits, actions and abilities are associated with men and women, respectively (Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Eagly & Sczesny, 2019; Cerbara *et al.*, 2022). Women generally tend to be perceived as maternal, nurturing, more submissive and relational, while men possess traits aligned with assertiveness, dominance and directness (Cerbara *et al.*, 2022). This seems to feed into gendered leadership perceptions where perceptions of female leaders are skewed as nurturing and emotionally inclined, while male leaders are perceived as more decisive and dominant. The research agreeably finds that participants indeed associate female leaders with nurturing, empathy, and emotional intelligence. This aligned with general gender norms that associate these characteristics to females.

As a result, these gendered expectations lead to questions about women's abilities as authority figures in leadership. There is a misalignment between gender norms for women and typical leadership traits. Because typical leadership traits are aligned with stereotypically masculine traits like dominance, assertiveness, and confidence, it may be assumed that a female leadership does not possess these qualities, largely because of her gender (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). This assumption is based on expectations that influence the way women are perceived in terms of what they are capable of as a direct result of their gender.

Social Role Theory suggests that socialisation instils notions of what qualities are deemed appropriate or inappropriate for men and women to possess (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Gntner *et al.* (2021) assert that female leaders can face resistance, scepticism, and defiance due to these perceptions. Whilst some participants' responses supports this theory, agreeably suggesting that the quality of their female leader made some of them not want to follow. This resulted in resistance by them thereby shaping workplace dynamics by making it difficult for their leaders to carry out their job. According to Teruel *et al.*, (2015) and Lusithi (2020), this resistance is intensified in male-dominated industries such as manufacturing, where leadership continues to be associated with traditionally masculine traits. The findings did not overwhelmingly conclude this to be the case in this study, with a minority of followers aligning with this resistance to female leadership.

6.4.3.2 The Double-Bind Phenomenon

The double-bind phenomenon asserts that female leaders may be perceived as "too aggressive" when exhibiting masculine traits but incompetent or struggling to assert authority when exhibiting feminine traits (Chikweh *et al.*, 2024). The data confirms this, whereby female leaders who demonstrated traditionally masculine traits were perceived as overly aggressive, while their followers saw those who adopted more traditionally feminine traits as having difficulty asserting authority.

This causes a complex dynamic where female leaders are scrutinised on two bases. One, emulating masculine traits does not align with traditional gender expectations, and two, emulating feminine traits does not align with traditional leadership expectations (Shan & Joseph, 2021). As a result, scrutiny and resistance can emerge in both instances, resulting in female leaders facing a faceted issue whereby any sway towards a particular set of traits is seen as misaligned with competent leadership.

These associations appear to be deeply ingrained in follower perceptions and expectations of female leaders. Implicit Leadership Theory may explain this double-bind phenomenon in supporting that this resistance to female leadership has less to do with perceived leader competence and more to do with bias that asserts that women are not fit, attuned or suited to being leaders regardless of the traits they possess (Hoption & Han, 2020).

The data shows that followers admitted they "*would nonetheless prefer to be led by a male*" even when they couldn't provide clear reasons why and acknowledged female leaders weren't less competent. Braun *et al.* (2017) suggest unconscious or internalised biases that exist regardless of a leader's competence or effectiveness. This seems to result in resistance to female authority and consistent gender-trait associations, aligning with Koenig and Eagly's (2014) social role theory predictions about early socialisation and the gender biases it can ingrain. While these patterns suggest internalised gender biases, the findings also indicate that organisational culture can play a significant role in shaping these perceptions. Here, the data showed that sometimes, the general workplace environment and culture stimulate dissatisfaction with a leader, regardless of the leader's gender, and is more closely linked to the leader's actions and leadership style (Cerbara *et al.*, 2022; Blakemore & Centers, 2005).

6.4.3.3 Compensation Strategies

The findings revealed patterns of perceived compensating behaviour among female leaders. Followers suggested that female leaders actively attempted to offset gendered leadership expectations through increased assertiveness and dominance (Cerbara *et al.*,

2022). This, too, is supported by Implicit leadership theory and expectancy theory (Mar Fuentes-Fuentes *et al.*, 2023), demonstrating that these inherent biases about gendered leadership may not only be held by followers but by female leaders themselves (Braun *et al.*, 2017). It is unclear, whether female leaders engage in this compensatory behaviour because they believe they lack certain leadership qualities or because they want to change perceptions about their perceived lack of leadership qualities. Some participants perceived female leaders as consciously trying to be 'more assertive, dominant, or strong'. These participants agreed that female leaders who exhibited more dominant traits were perceived as 'overcompensating' rather than embodying those traits -naturally either as individuals or as leaders (Zibenberg 2021; Kark & Buengeler, 2024)

6.4.4 RQ 2 Summary

Research question two explores how perceptions of gender compare with the perceptions of female leaders. From the literature, followers had a concept of how being female may impact one's leadership as described by Hopton and Han (2020). The research confirmed this with participants viewing females in line with traditional gender roles who liken women to be more nurturing, Meaning female leaders who displayed traits seen to be male-aligned, were viewed as too aggressive and did not elicit the response a male leader would receive. The credibility and authority of female leaders in manufacturing were impacted by implicit bias to some extent. While some female leaders were accepted, other participants (mostly female) would choose to be led by male leaders. This aligns with the social role theory by Koenig and Eagly, (2014) which suggests that individuals are socialised. Positively, women are well-received by followers who display high levels of competency and empathy. With some participants preferring that type of leadership. Due to the perceptions followers are socialised in, women are sometimes questioned in positions of authority. The lack of alignment between gender stereotypes and norms creates a double bind for female leaders.

6.5 Research Question 3

How do followers demonstrate their followership of female leaders?

Research question three builds on the previous question by exploring how followers embrace and accept being a follower of a female leader. The questions—expand the understanding of the female leader by uncovering the dynamics that arise out of perception and beliefs within the followership. Furthermore, questions provide insight into

the-relationship between a follower and a leader. The aim is to explore how perceptions translate into behaviour and whether behaviour, in turn, shapes or alters perceptions, particularly when examining gender dynamics.

6.5.1 Data Analysis Findings

The participants responded to questions about how they perceived their female leader. Participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences and insights. The themes that arose from this part of the research were intrapersonal dynamics, emotional and social intelligence, personal and professional development and workplace behaviour dynamics.

Participant 10, a female, expressed having a high level of comfort and trust, allowing her to share personal experiences with her leader. Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) suggest that leaders are expected to create a healthy and safe environment. A female leader dynamic to a female follower, in this case, amplifies this trust. Conversely, a few female participants raised concerns about women leading women that extended to communications, micromanagement and female leaders being rigid in their approach. The study further highlighted the perceived negative behaviour that female leaders displayed, thereby causing female followers to be cautious about being led by females in the future-

Whilst women are perceived as supportive and undertake maternal roles, an imbalance in these qualities that make a female leader appear overly emotional can diminish the trust of followers. Most participants alluded to the stigma of perceived power struggles that female leaders carry, and how their female leaders have navigated this in the past. Consequently, power struggles may give rise to Queen Bee syndrome (Derks *et al.* (2016) whereby behaviour displayed by female leaders could result in a follower becoming passive-aggressive or disengaged. More participants agreed that maintaining professional relationships was essential for followers to support their leader, however, few participants noted being too professional was perceived as leader aloofness. This boundary can be misinterpreted by a follower as asserting too much authority and power (Mayer & Barnard, 2015)

Competence was defined as a criterion that a leader must have. The lack of it also creates frustration, and when manipulation or disingenuous behaviour is used to mask this, followers no longer support the leader; this breaks down professional relationships and impacts workplace dynamics. However, when competence, support and leadership are

present, followers choose the leaders over the job and are willing to follow this leader states Alvesson and Blom (2019). This highlights how job satisfaction can be the outcome of creating a professional environment and positively impact team dynamics (Hopton & Han, 2020). Followers perceive male and female leaders to assert themselves differently. This is noted by participants as an aversion to confrontation as female leaders are less likely to provide immediate and constructive feedback, and the double bind for female leaders is when they are forthright, they are perceived to be overly assertive and dominant. (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Wessels, 2020).

Participants report these behaviours and actions in a few defined ways: when they are engaged, they are willing to do more, and they adapt to take on a moderating role if the leader is too agreeable. They also feel uncomfortable with female behaviour being too aggressive.

Participants noted that female leaders who did not display traits supporting developmental, mentoring, and professional advancement, led to them being divided about how they respond to and behave towards their female leaders. An array of behaviours was demonstrated by participants towards their leader. Some participants subordinate to followership, and others become destructive or resist the followership. From the interviews conducted, positive female leadership and an enabling environment increased the likelihood that a follower will choose to support the followership. (Sy, 2015; Yang *et al.*, 2020)

6.5.2 Literature Review Findings

6.5.2.1 Gendered Behaviour

Heilman (2012) iterates that expectations for women in the workplace evolve as the ideals and stereotypes around gender and gendered roles change. In the South African context, Herbst (2020) states that the interplay between traditional and cultural and follower-leader dynamics is not well known and relies on research on gender and leadership. Mayer and Barnard (2015) reported that the leader-follower dynamic embraces further complexity. This is due to historical gender roles with the presence of patriarchal roles impacting the organisational dynamic and perceptions of female leaders, which results in a demonstration of followership, which was previously considered a passive role (Hollander, 1992).

6.5.2.2 Follower Behaviour

Leadership outcomes matter in the context of surveying followership and gender because they directly impact organisational success, employee engagement, and workplace dynamics (Badura *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, when examining how female leaders are perceived, leadership outcomes reveal biases, barriers, and enablers that shape the effectiveness of women in leadership roles (Shen & Joseph, 2021). ILT explains leadership outcomes as congruency between followers' perceptions of good leadership and their leaders' impact (Hoption & Han, 2020). Leadership outcomes influence whether female leaders are seen as competent and effective or whether they face scepticism as a result of held gender biases and this impacts organisations in that having a perceived competent leader is conducive to more productive, satisfactory work environments (Badura *et al.*, 2018). Understanding more about how gender influences followers' perceptions of competent leadership outcomes, can provide insight into how organisations can implement leadership choices conducive to satisfied employees.

6.5.2.3 Organisational Dynamic

IFT (Sy, 2015) provides a foundational framework for understanding how followers construct mental schemas regarding ideal followership. According to Sy (2015), followers develop cognitive prototypes based on personal experiences, societal norms, and cultural expectations, which inform their perceptions of effective followership. Individuals categorised as closely aligning with these prototypes are more likely to be perceived as competent and effective followers (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Da'as and Zibenberg (2021) extend this discussion by examining how cultural and societal contexts shape implicit theories of followership. Their study of Jewish and Arab students highlights the role of conflict and cultural divergence in influencing perceptions of ideal followers and leaders, with Arab students associating effective teaching with masculine traits and compliance. This underscores how cultural factors influence both follower and leader prototypes, shaping professional identity and leadership development.

Hofstede (2011) further argues that cultural values affect management styles, emphasising that leadership and followership dynamics align with shared cultural expectations within collectivist cultures. While some scholars depict followers as passive or subordinate to leaders (Zibenberg, 2021; Inderjeet & Scheepers, 2022), other research underscores the reciprocal nature of the leader-follower relationship. IFT highlights this

interdependence, suggesting that leaders and followers maintain implicit expectations of each other's roles, ultimately shaping workplace dynamics and leadership effectiveness (Yang *et al.*, 2020).

6.5.2.4 Leadership and Follower Resistance

Follower resistance in the context of gender refers to employees' reluctance or scepticism toward accepting female leaders due to implicit biases, societal norms, and traditional leadership expectations (Braun *et al.*, 2017). This resistance can manifest through questioning authority or undermining decisions, ultimately affecting leadership effectiveness (Güntner *et al.*, 2021). Female leaders often face greater scrutiny than their male counterparts, with their competence being questioned when they display authoritative traits. Yet, they are perceived as weak when they adopt a more communal leadership style (Shen & Joseph, 2021). As a key negative outcome, follower resistance needs to be better understood particularly in light of gendered dynamics. Organisations that fail to address gendered follower resistance risk fostering toxic workplace cultures, lowering employee morale, and hindering innovation by limiting diverse perspectives in decision-making (Shen & Joseph, 2021). This resistance can also impact organisational performance, as disengaged teams reduce productivity and cohesion, while diverse teams breed innovation and employee satisfaction (Teruel *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, companies that do not actively counteract these biases may struggle with talent retention and suffer reputational damage, deterring diverse talent from seeking leadership roles (Heilman, 2012).

6.5.3 Analysis

In the study, participants felt professional development and personal development were key to how they perceived a leader. Female leaders who were engaged in the followership gave feedback and supported mentoring and development which led to followers being engaged and invested in their leadership. These traits were relevant to leadership as a whole, irrespective of gender. Given the gendered-focused approach and the importance of supporting female leaders, particularly from the manufacturing sector, more critical for female leaders to develop and grow followers.

Most participants, particularly male participants, showed a willingness to subordinate, which contrasts with literature on a personal unwillingness to accept directions from a

female. Male participants who were willing to follow a female leader noted positive experiences of leadership as well as high levels of competence and technical astuteness.

The general resistance to female leaders by females aligns with Braun *et al.* (2017), where resistance to embrace female leaders was due to biases and social norms. Further to this, prior leadership, which was in most cases male leadership, impacted the resistance to female leaders. This meant that if a female follower had a positive experience with a male leader in the past, it increased her resistance to a female leader. Female participants' natural preference was to be led by male leaders again. Whereas, where male participants had poor experience with a female leader, these participants were again willing to be led by a female leader, proving she was competent.

Bandura *et al.* (2018) stated that authentic leadership impacts organisational success and improves workplace dynamics. Followers develop better team cohesion when they collectively support their leader. Similarly, a participant stated that their leader created a safe space and allowed the team to grow. Likewise, Implicit leadership theory posits an alignment between followers' perception of good leaders and the impact of the said leader (Hopton & Han, 2020). This is confirmed and entrenched in the future by the study.

Chou (2012) states that follower behaviour is influenced by the constructive and destructive manner in which a leader leads. Kelley (1988) categorises followers into six types, indicating how they choose to respond to their leader. Thach *et al.* (2006), concurred that constructive and supportive leaders build coherent teams to increase and improve employee participation.

When followers perceive leaders to be misaligned with themselves for reasons such as micromanagement, lack of appreciation, job dissatisfaction, or feeling taken advantage of, they respond by shutting down and giving the bare minimum. The study revealed that there was no distinctive difference in responses from males and females, indicating both male and female followers respond similarly. When misalignment exists, participants 'shut-down' by giving a bare minimum to what was required from them. Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) state that some followers, while they choose not to follow a leader, may still follow an organisation. This was not specifically investigated in this study, and it may be a follow-up study using the gendered lens.

6.5.3.1 Follower Behaviour and Leader Actions

Followers adjust and align their behaviour as a result of the actions of their leader (Carsten *et al.* (2010). This was a significant view of how the role of a follower is perceived by themselves. It reiterated the active nature of followers that are not considered passive as originally assumed (Hollander, 1992), and adds to the complexity of the role. Follower behaviour diverges from this active nature, where followers choose compliance over feedback (Güntner *et al.*, 2021). The participants noted their experiences when they did not believe the feedback was constructive or consistent which led to follower demonstration of conflict avoidance behaviour. The participants were divided on conflict; while some would raise and engage issues even if conflict arose, others would avoid conflict. This behaviour points to the organisational culture or environment and dynamics that foster or destroy trust. Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017) stated that employees feel like they can raise difficult issues with leaders and have courageous conversations in highly trustworthy and safe spaces. A leader needs to understand this behaviour in a follower and understand if the stability or lack of conflict is indeed true or a result of an uncondusive environment.

Participants claimed to have adjusted and aligned their behaviour depending on the leader's actions. Chou (2012), suggests the effectiveness of leadership is a result of the quality of the dyadic relationship between leader and follower, which is shaped by the negotiation between them, Conversely, followers may choose to be compliant to avoid receiving feedback.

6.5.3.2 Gendered Preferences in Leadership and Agency

In this study follower demonstration of a gendered preference in leadership highlights the nuances of gendered perceptions in followership. There is a divergent view among followers of female leaders; some will choose to follow a female leader, others are clear they would prefer to follow a male leader, and a few are neutral. Utomo *et al.* (2022) state that followers demonstrate behaviour by influencing leaders and contributing to their organisation. Participants actively choose if they will follow a female leader in the future. This confirms that followers are not passive (Kelley, 2008) and the power of followers to indirectly adjust a leader's behaviour through self-awareness. Social role theory plays a critical role in how perception impacts belief, and those then turn into actions as demonstrations (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019). The theory highlights the importance of

understanding perception and the impact that it can have on how followers demonstrate their leadership. Active choices contradict the notion of passive followership and highlight the agency that followers exert in shaping leader behaviour. Eagly and Karau (2002) suggest that followers demonstrate their agency through specific behaviours. Social role theory provides a critical lens through which to understand these perceptions, as societal perceptions and beliefs significantly influence follower actions. The fact that male followers overwhelmingly expressed gender neutrality, prioritising competence over gender, challenges traditional societal expectations and suggests a shift towards greater inclusivity. This means that the roles and societal upbringings are shifting and moving towards being more inclusive towards the world.

6.5.3.3 The Complex Power Dynamic and Follower Demonstration

The follower's choice to choose a male leader over a female leader could be attributed to how followers perceive female leaders. Whilst there was an appreciation for good female leadership, it emerged from the study that female participants were inclined to emulate male leaders. Females preferred male leaders for reasons such as they were better mentored, and female leaders were seen to be inhibiting professional development. Professional development is an important criterion for a follower when perceiving a leader as one they will support.

6.5.3.4 Queen Bee

Power and impact on female followers bring into view the power dynamic that patriarchy cultivates. Braun *et al.* (2017) confirmed that females who wanted to remain at the levels that they perceived patriarchy had granted them, intending to keep other females out. Similarly, female participants claimed that insecure females who start on an aggressive and aloof basis does not bode well with female followers. On the other hand, male followers indicated a willingness to be led by females, prioritising competence. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between perceived toughness and effective leadership.

Furthermore, the adaptability of female leaders and female followers, potentially related to emotional intelligence (EQ), warrants further investigation. The ability to navigate complex emotional landscapes and maintain professional boundaries is crucial for effective leadership, regardless of gender (Braun *et al.*, 2017). Understanding these

complex power relationships is a defining factor in creating leadership that is inclusive and nurturing of diversity.

6.5.4 RQ3 Summary

The outcomes are significant as it explores how deeply embedded gender stereotypes and cultural norms in the traditionally male-dominated manufacturing sector may shape followers' conscious and unconscious attitudes toward female leaders. Participants demonstrated their perceptions of their leader by choosing to follow and contribute to the common goal, becoming disengaged without conflict or not accepting the power and authority of the leader.

6.6 Reflection on Theory

ILT suggests that individuals have cognitive frameworks or prototypes of what a leader should look like, often associating leadership with traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and authority (Hopton & Han, 2020). When female leaders demonstrated these traits, they appeared to be competent but risked being viewed as unapproachable or domineering. Conversely, when they exhibited more communal or 'feminine' qualities, such as empathy and collaboration, they may gain trust but face scepticism regarding their ability to make tough decisions.

This aligns with Social Role Theory, which posits that societal expectations shape beliefs about how men and women should behave (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Female leaders experience heightened scrutiny in proving their expertise and decision-making abilities, with some followers offering support. In contrast, others remain critical, even suggesting that they would make their female leaders' jobs harder. This suggests that the perception of leadership competence is based not only on actual performance but also on how well a female leader aligns with or challenges existing leadership prototypes.

The effectiveness of female leaders is also subject to implicit cognitive biases shaped by Social Cognitive Theory, which explains how people develop expectations through observation and reinforcement. Even when female leaders delivered strong outcomes, some followers questioned their capabilities due to unconscious biases that associate leadership effectiveness with male-dominated characteristics. IFT (Sy, 2020) suggests that followers develop frameworks about what makes a leader legitimate, and these frameworks will influence their willingness to accept a leader's authority.

Emotional intelligence emerged as a dual role in shaping perceptions of female leaders. Social Cognitive Theory (Bussey & Bandura, 2014) suggests that individuals learn from observed behaviours. This means that followers' perceptions of emotional intelligence are shaped by previous experiences and reinforced by societal norms.

By applying Social Role Theory, IFT, ILT, and Social Cognitive Theory, it becomes evident that the perception of female leaders is not solely based on their actions but is also deeply influenced by the cognitive frameworks and societal expectations that shape leadership evaluation and linked to gender norms.

6.7 Chapter Summary

The finding revealed that followers' perceptions of female leaders are partly shaped by gender, but also by leadership traits associations. These perceived leadership traits can be seen as competence, empathy, and emotional intelligence which emerge as critical factors influencing followership support.

It emerges that followers bring complexity into the evaluation process for female leaders who must navigate the double-bind phenomenon. The double-bind phenomenon refers to being perceived as either too aggressive (when displaying traditionally masculine leadership traits) or ineffective (when embodying feminine characteristics) (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016; Shen & Joseph, 2021).

Gender expectations influenced how followers perceive and respond to female leadership. There is a misalignment between traditional gender norms for women and typical leadership traits associated with masculinity. This creates a challenging organizational environment where female leaders must constantly prove their merit while navigating limiting gender norms. Implicit leadership theories (Braun *et al.*, 2017; Hopton & Han, 2020) help explain how these deeply ingrained biases affect follower perceptions, often unconsciously. This creates a space where gender bias and its real-world manifestations can be explored within the organizational context. This is especially in relation to the concept of leadership within that context.

Follower behaviour manifests in complex ways. This can vary from active support and engagement to resistance and reduced compliance. The findings suggest that followers are not passive recipients of leadership but rather are active agents. This agency allows followers to make conscious decisions about their level of support and challenges

traditional views of followership (Kelley, 2008). Further to this, it highlights the interdependent nature of the leader-follower relationship. What was particularly of note was the distinction between male and female followers in their willingness to support female leaders. Some female participants demonstrated preferences for male leadership even if they understood female leaders to be competent. This suggests a deeply ingrained gender bias that leads to potential “Queen Bee” dynamics (Derks *et al.*, 2016).

The study finds that female leaders who demonstrated assertiveness, empathy, and expertise, and fostered professional development generally received stronger followership. This seemed to be regardless of gender biases. This suggests that while gender expectations create additional hurdles for female leaders, competence and positive leadership traits can transcend some biases (Pearce, 2018; Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019).

Prior leadership experiences significantly shaped followers' expectations and judgements of female leaders. This created a comparative dynamic that female leaders were measured against. These dynamics often reflected male-dominated leadership prototypes, creating additional scrutiny for female leaders who must not only perform effectively but also manage perceptions related to their gender (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019).

Theoretical frameworks including Social Role Theory (Koenig & Eagly, 2014), Implicit Leadership Theory (Hopton & Han, 2020), Implicit Followership Theory (Sy, 2020), and Social Cognitive Theory (Bussey & Bandura, 2014) provide valuable lenses for understanding these complex dynamics. Together, they illustrate how deeply embedded social norms, cognitive prototypes, and learned behaviours create a challenging landscape for female leaders to navigate, particularly in traditionally male-dominated sectors like manufacturing (Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Braun *et al.*, 2017).

In conclusion, the followership of female leaders represents a complex phenomenon shaped by gender perceptions, societal expectations, and organizational contexts. While gender biases continue to create challenges for female leaders there are pathways through which competent female leaders can gain meaningful followership support. This is true when organizations actively work to address implicit gender biases and create inclusive leadership cultures.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the followership of female leaders in the manufacturing sector in South Africa. The study examined the role of gender in the act of followership and how female leaders could gain the support of both male and female followers. Biases can influence perception and behaviour, and in the manufacturing context of an organisation, these perceptions and biases can have a significant impact due to an already male-dominated and patriarchal environment. Literature focused on Social Role Theory (Koenig & Eagly, 2014), Implicit Leadership Theory (Hopton & Han, 2020), Implicit Followership Theory (Sy, 2020), and Social Cognitive Theory (Bussey & Bandura, 2014), including gendered expectation nuances, that provided insights into how these biases could affect the behaviours of followers. At the core of all three theories lies the Intersectionality figure (Figure 2.1) which encapsulates how these perspectives collectively shape follower perceptions, behaviours, and the overall leadership-followership dynamic. The outcome of this research has provided crucial insight into how female leaders are perceived, and how that perception impacts the behaviour of both males and females, toward female leaders. There is a compelling case for understanding the followership of female leaders as women remain underrepresented in the workplace, Stats SA (2024), despite the governance and interventions implemented.

The study focussed on female leaders in the manufacturing ecosystem in South Africa. Twenty participants were interviewed, and the evidence gathered provides valuable insight into what matters for followers and how female leaders can gain the support of followers.

7.2 Main Findings

The primary research question was: "Exploring followership of female leaders in manufacturing in South Africa". Understanding followership contributes to a deeper understanding of how gender biases affect workplace outcomes and helps female leaders gain the support of their followers.

The secondary questions to guide the collection of data were:

RQ 1 – How do followers perceive their female leaders?

RQ 2 – How do followers relate their perceptions to gender expectations?

RQ 3 – How do followers demonstrate their followership of female leaders?

These questions formed the basis of the Instrument (Appendix C) that guided the interview.

Role Theory, Social cognitive theory, ILT and IFT with a gendered expectation lens was the chosen theories for this study. These theories, together with organisational dynamics and gender dynamics, significantly impact followers.

7.2.1 South African Context

South Africa has had a clear and executable transformation strategy since the abolishment of apartheid in 1990. The need to advance women and people of colour was recognised, leading to legislation that would help to bring this advancement into action by way of the law. This is included in legislation such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE), Employment Equity (EE), and Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA). The purpose of this legislation was to effectively recognise, address and correct previous injustices to women by actively supporting and encouraging their advancement. South Africa currently lags on the goal of the transformation of women, with less than 15 women occupying C-suite roles. SDG 5, as defined by (UN, 2023), has the outcome of achieving gender equality by empowering women and girls and ensuring human rights and dignity are the minimum requirements for all citizens.

7.2.2 The Manufacturing Context

Manufacturing contributes 12.9% to gross domestic product and is an employer of 1.6 million people, as stated by Stats SA (2024). The manufacturing sector is regarded as a critical employer in the United Nations (UN, 2023) and various sector-specific initiatives, giving this sector focus. The manufacturing context also brought a unique set of roles and expectations, in part, because it is traditionally male-dominated and has a hierarchal structure (Teruel *et al.* (2025) stated. In manufacturing, a dire need exists for equal representation of women at all levels (Turban *et al.* (2019), to foster diversity, create competitiveness and drive innovation.

7.2.3 Key Findings of the Research

7.2.3.1 How Do Followers Perceive Their Female Leaders?

The study revealed that followers' perceptions of female leaders are influenced by their conceptualisations of effective leadership. This aligns with Eagly and Karau's (2002) Social Role Theory, which emphasizes the impact of societal expectations on how leaders are perceived. In this context, competence and expertise emerged as significant, especially among male followership, whilst using the influence of ILT (Braun *et al.*, 2017). ILT suggests that individuals hold mental prototypes of ideal leaders, often skewed towards traditionally masculine traits such as technical proficiency and strategic acumen. However, the importance of emotional intelligence and a balanced leadership approach is evident and valued by both male and female participants. This underscores the multi-dimensional understanding of effective leadership, moving beyond purely task-oriented traits to include relational skills (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014).

The potential impact of accelerated organisational transformation without leader competence was raised. The credibility of a leader is likely to be tarnished if they are perceived to be lacking competence in their role. This is true regardless of gender. The study also highlighted that prior leadership experiences can contribute to how a "good leader" is defined. This confirms that followers will compare new leaders to past leaders (Bussey & Bandura, 2014). This is important as it has the consequence of slowing down Diversity and inclusion as historical leadership has been skewed towards males, perpetuating the view that a manager must look like a male. (Bussey & Bandura, 2014, Braun *et al* 2017; Campbell, 2023)

7.2.3.2 How Do Followers Relate Their Perceptions to Gender Expectations?

The effects of the 'double bind' phenomenon are described by Social Role Theory (Koenig & Eagly, 2014), where female leaders are negatively perceived for exhibiting masculine and feminine traits noted by participants. When this is aligned with Braun *et al.*'s (2017) ILT, which demonstrates how male-skewed leader prototypes influence perceptions, creating a mismatch between follower expectations and female leader behaviour. The 'Queen Bee' syndrome, as discussed by Derks *et al.* (2016), and the negative effects of implicit bias exaggerate these setbacks faced by female leaders in the manufacturing workplace.

The research highlights how workplace culture reinforces gender-based expectations and biases, as noted by Simpson (2020). This emphasises the need for organisations to address implicit biases as a means of fostering inclusivity. Additionally, the findings suggest that followers associated strategic decision-making with male leaders while associating detail-oriented tasks to female leaders. This emphasises the notion that gender stereotypes are still very prevalent in modern workplaces despite some advancements towards equality (Je *et al.*, 2022)

7.2.3.3 How Do Followers Demonstrate Their Followership of Female Leaders?

Aligned with Heilman's (2012) work on gendered behaviour in the workplace, the study indicates that female followers value support and professional development. There may be issues regarding micromanagement and rigidity when women lead women. Badura *et al.* (2018) highlight there is a link between follower behaviour to leadership actions. Followers indicated that competence and trust are essential for fostering positive followership, as followers adapt their behaviour based on the leader's style (Lemoine & Blum, 2013).

The research further demonstrated that positive female leadership and an enabling environment increase the likelihood that a follower will choose to subordinate to a female leader in the future. The importance of creating supportive and inclusive environments where female leaders can thrive is further emphasised. Bjugstad *et al.*, 2006 assert that leadership is the outcome or the output of an organisation, and Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) state the importance of leadership and organisational performance. Conversely, without that, Guntner *et al.*, (2021) states that follower resistance can result in destructive or misaligned leaders' behaviour (Sy, 2015)

7.2.4 Overall Finding

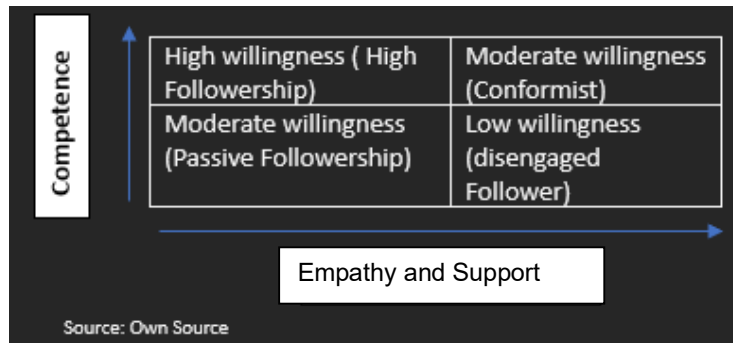
Followers were more aligned with empathetic leadership, this provokes a thought of an evolving of leadership characters. While empathy has always been important, the impact on followers is noteworthy.

Female followers demonstrated more resistance to female leaders than their male counterparts, indicating a complex dynamic within a team led by a female. Braun *et al.*, (2017) indicate an increased resistance towards female leaders. The findings of this research corroborate this resistance that comes from both males and females and is

aligned with Shen & Joseph, (2021) that state female leaders face greater scrutiny. This is further collaborated by Pandey *et al.* (2021) with a comparison of corrupt male and female leaders, where followers stay and challenge a corrupt female leader, but choose to be nonconfrontational or a corrupt male leader.

Male followers, on the other hand, expressed a willingness to support female leaders, provided they, the followers received the necessary support and recognition. (Alvesson and Blom (2019). Technical prowess and competence significantly enhanced female leaders' authority and followership, while their absence diminished both. The research showed that when a leader strikes the right balance between empathy and strong leadership traits, the follower almost always develops a connection to this leader, and followers would go so far as to say they would choose this leader or move to a job where they could report to this person. While empathy has always been essential to leaders, as stated by (Ye *et al.*, 2019) it has been confirmed as an essential leadership trait in this study of followership.

7.2.4.1 Proposed Behaviour Model



The model explores various types of behaviour that may arise from the followership. The core theoretical frameworks examined in this literature review are Social Role Theory, Cognitive Development Theory, and Implicit Leadership and Followership Theory (Followership Theories). These three theories provide the foundation for understanding how followers perceive and engage with leadership with a focus on female leaders.

- Competence represents the leader's demonstrated ability to perform their job effectively, make sound decisions, and possess the necessary expertise.
- Empathy and Support. This represents the leader's ability to understand and respond to the needs of their followers, build trust, and create a supportive environment.

7.3 Contribution of the Study

Within operational roles in the manufacturing sector, male followers were more inclined to make allowances for female leaders due to perceived work-life balance challenges. However, this 'grace' period often resulted in diminished authority for the female leader. The research identified distinct patterns in the leadership traits valued by each sex. Male followers prioritised competence, equality, and interpersonal dynamics, while female followers emphasised emotional regulation, empowerment, development, and mentoring. This study contributes to the gendered approach of followers to a female leader.

These findings underscore the importance of understanding and addressing different follower demographics' unique expectations and needs. The research showed that competence was defined as a criterion that a female leader must have; the lack of it also creates frustration, and when manipulation or disingenuous behaviour is used to mask this, followers, both male and female no longer support the leader. Both males and females mentioned conflict resolution, empathy, gender neutrality and good leadership equality, indicating an alignment they shift beyond gender. The study raised the nuances of male and female followers and how the approach of a male leader may elicit a different response from that of a female leader, highlighting the need to understand this, enabling female leaders to gain more support from followers.

7.4 Recommendations

7.4.1 Develop Inclusive Leadership Development Programs.

It is recommended that organisations and industry bodies, particularly those in manufacturing create programs that focus on developing both technical and relational leadership skills, including emotional intelligence with the overarching awareness of the different needs of male and female followers, As recommended by Kelly, (1998) and Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., (2022)

Gender dynamics and inclusive communication inclusion in induction and change management extend to but are not limited to, onboarding of employees, refresher training for existing employees and developing organisation-based awareness programs. These

as noted above must take note of the gender dynamic between female followers and female leaders.

The leadership of organisations needs to provide mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for female leaders to support their development and advancement, especially in manufacturing spaces. These will work together with the awareness and intervention programs detailed.

7.4.2 Shifting organisations culture

Organisations can create a culture shift that sustains environments where followers feel safe to provide honest feedback and challenge the status quo. Organisations must provide safe spaces such as town halls, forums and independent coaching on transparency. This can be done by encouraging leaders to develop EQ skills in followers as recommended by Jian,(2022) to value and understand diverse perspectives. This culture shift and awareness will significantly benefit leaders and followers.

Male leaders and organisational leadership alike must be encouraged to hone in on their EQ skills to be more attuned to address the 'Double Bind'. In supporting work-life balance and addressing the challenges female leaders face in navigating conflicting expectations, a work environment that supports female leaders will emerge and enable female leaders to cultivate and keep the support of followers.

7.5 Areas for Future Study

To continue the focus on the South African context using the constructs of Followership and gender. This will not only increase the research on the followership of women within the South African context but also provide insight into the effects that the history of South Africa on the followership of women. This research could also focus on understanding the intersectionality of race and gender within the South African context. The exploration of the intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity, and age with followership, will provide greater insights into the gendered responses of followers.(Cicchello et al., 2021)

Tracking and understanding the shifts in leader-follower supportive relationships over time as recommended by Tabassum & Nayak, (2021) will provide insights into the significant and milestone moments in this relationship, and if there is a difference in these relationships between male and female leaders and followers alike.(Kelly, 1998)

Future studies could examine how followership dynamics evolve and if females from the manufacturing sector progress more or less in their careers.

Investigate the organisation dynamics further and explore how different industries, organisational cultures, and geographical locations influence the followership of female leaders. (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022)

Followership types and leadership types. Whilst some follower types have been established, a further study on followers and leadership styles to further understand the the relationship between follower types and leadership types.

7.6 Study Limitations

While the findings were rich and deep, the topic of gender and followership is sensitive and personal. In particular the study focus and perceptions. This may have resulted in the participants holding back or not being fully transparent. This would be especially important from a gender perspective.

The researcher was female and in senior leadership, this could have created a limitation on how the participant shared information. There might have been a potential impact of the researchers' race, age sex. It was critical that the researcher maintained a neutral position and captured all responses. The interview guide provided the guardrails that the study needed.

The study was limited to manufacturing and South Africa. This may limit some of the recommendations as they seek to address the female leadership-followership paradigm in South Africa.

7.7 Study Conclusion

This study has looked at the dynamics of followership and female leaders in the manufacturing sector. This involved looking at, gender expectations, gender perceptions, and behavioural demonstrations of gender perceptions. The findings reveal several significant insights that contribute to the literature, to help understand the follower-leader relationship through a gendered lens. These findings have significant implications for female leaders and organisations looking to create more equitable, inclusive, and diverse environments. By understanding the relationship between gender perceptions, gender expectations, and subsequent behaviours, organisations can develop strategies to

address these identified biases. In addressing these biases, organisations can create diverse supportive cultures through the recognition of diverse leadership styles that filter out gender biases, resulting in more support from followers, both male and female.

Workplaces that foster inclusivity, recognise diverse leadership styles, and challenge implicit biases create environments where female leaders can foster meaningful followership support (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Teruel *et al.*, 2015).

This study on followership and female leadership provided insights into how followership is developed and nurtured. By unpacking the perceptions and biases towards women leaders, organisations themselves can develop mechanisms to eliminate these gender biases and nurture the followership of female leaders to foster diversity in the workplace and create support of female leaders that can lead to an ecosystem supportive of female leadership.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in the Study

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Chapter 9: Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in the Study

Invitation to Participate in Research on Gender Bias and Followership in Management

From: Tracy Moonsamy <tracymoonsamy@beier.co.za>

To: shiraz.dawood@smiths.co.za, vvelayudam@toyota.co.za

Date: 11/7/2024 7:34 AM

Hi

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Tracy Moonsamy, and I am currently pursuing a Master's degree at The Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). As part of my thesis on followership and gender bias, I am conducting research to explore how reporting to female managers impacts the professional journeys of individuals in management positions, particularly in manufacturing and related industries.

If you report or have reported to a female manager I would like to invite you to participate in a one-hour interview. During this interview, we will discuss your experiences reporting to a female manager and how this dynamic has influenced your career development and perspectives on leadership.

The interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you, and all information shared will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your participation will provide valuable insights for my research and contribute to a broader understanding of gender dynamics in management roles.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please feel free to reply to this message, and we can arrange a time for the interview. Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to the possibility of learning from your experiences.

Warm regards,
Tracy Moonsamy

Chapter 10: Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter

I am conducting research, "Exploring gender in Followership". Our interview is expected to last approximately 45 minutes and will help us understand Followership.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission to:

- The interview is to be recorded;
- The recording may be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement;
- Verbatim quotations from the interview may be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation;
- The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed and
- All data is to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please get in touch with my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Vaneshree Moonsamy (Tracy)

Email: tmoonsamy@beier.co.za

Phone: +27 82 440 2677

Research Supervisor name: Dr Lisa Kinnear

Email: lisa.kinnear@twimsafrica.com

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 11: Appendix C: Interview Guide

The purpose of this study is to explore the followership of women in the workplace.

In most situations, there are followers and leaders. For there to be a leader, there must be a follower. It is possible to be both a leader and a follower.

I would like you to reflect deeply on your role as a follower, on how you felt, and how your leaders' leadership style impacted and affected you.

There are no right and wrong answers, and I assure you of my intention to understand your experience.

I reiterate confidentiality and your anonymity. To adequately capture this interview, I request your permission to record this interview.

Note to myself to remain impartial, to explore and understand.

Name	
Age	
Sex	
Qualification	
No of years at the organisation	
Years in the current position	

Research Questions	Data Collection
RQ 1 – How do followers perceive their female leaders?	When have you been led by a woman at work? What position did you both hold at the time? What did you value about her leadership style? What did you find difficult about her leadership style?
RQ2 – How do followers relate their perceptions to	How did you feel about being led by a woman? What did you experience as unique in her leadership style? What did you experience as surprising in her leadership style?

gender expectations?	How do you think her leadership style was influenced by being a woman?
RQ3 – How do followers demonstrate their followership of female leaders?	<p>Can you describe the dynamic between you and your female leader?</p> <p>How did you respond to the leadership style of your female leader? Can you give examples?</p> <p>How do you think you related differently to your leader because she was a woman?</p> <p>What do you think you did that made it easier for your leader to lead?</p> <p>What do you think you did that made it difficult for your leader to lead?</p> <p>How do you feel about being led by a female leader in the future?</p>

Chapter 12: Appendix D: Ethics Approval

GIBS ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM 2024/25

G. APPROVALS FOR/OF THIS APPLICATION

When the applicant is a student of GIBS, the applicant must please ensure that the supervisor and co-supervisor (where relevant) has signed the form before submission

STUDENT RESEARCHER/APPLICANT:

29. I affirm that all relevant information has been provided in this form and its attachments and that all statements made are correct.

Student Researcher's Name in capital letters: VANESHREE MOONSAMY

Date: 02 Oct 2024

Supervisor Name in capital letters: L KINNEAR

Date: 02 Oct 2024

Co-supervisor Name in capital letters:

Date: 02 Oct 2024

Note: GIBS shall do everything in its power to protect the personal information supplied herein, in accordance to its company privacy policies as well the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013. Access to all of the above provided personal information is restricted, only employees who need the information to perform a specific job are granted access to this information.

Decision:

Approved

REC comments:

Approved

Date: 21 Oct 2024

Chapter 13: Appendix E: List of Codes

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adaptability ● Ambiguity ● Confidence ● Directness ● Independence ● Authenticity ● Good Leadership traits ● Poor Leadership traits ● Neutral ● Observation ● Intellectual superiority 	Leadership Traits	Leadership Perception and Evaluation (Helps to answer Research Questions 1)	Leadership Attributes & Competency RQ1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Competence ● Intelligence ● Means and ability 	Competence		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experience ● Strategies/Strategic 	Experience		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expertise 	Expertise		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Detail orientated ● Effective leadership 	Effectiveness		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional development ● Individuality 	Professional development		

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gender bias ● Gender general 	Gender Bias	Gender-Based Perceptions	Gender Dynamics in Leadership (RQ1 & RQ2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gender dynamics ● Manipulation ● Gender Stereotypes 	Gender Dynamics		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discrimination ● Female leadership ● Feminism ● Gender empowerment 	Female Leadership		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equality ● Inequality ● Neutrality 	Equality		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Less understanding ● Physical appearances ● Imposter syndrome 	Gender bias in the workplace		

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication ● Interpersonal dynamics 	Communication	Relationship Management	Interpersonal Dynamics (RQ3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trust ● Friendship ● Integrity ● Privacy 	Trust		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respect ● Reciprocity ● Admiration 	Respect		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supportive relationships ● Assistance ● Encouragement ● Family influence ● Positive relationships ● Validation 	Supportive Relationships		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional relationships ● Relationships ● Relationship dynamics ● Boundaries 	Professional Relationships		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mentorship ● Advice ● Feedback ● Role models ● Clarification ● Seeking feedback ● Access to information 	Mentorship		

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Safe conversations 	Emotional intelligence	Emotional Competencies	Emotional and Social Intelligence (RQ3 and RQ1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empathy ● Caring ● Understanding 	Empathy		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-awareness ● Need for support ● Reflection ● Reserved 	Self-awareness		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emotional challenges ● Frustration ● Fear ● Identity 	Emotional regulation		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social relationships 	Social dynamics		

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ambition ● Assertive 	Assertiveness	Behavioural Responses	Workplace Behaviour and Adaptation (RQ3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Flexibility 	Adaptability		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conflict resolution ● Positive perception ● Problem-solving ● Challenges ● Caution 	Conflict Resolution		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teamwork ● Efficiency 	Teamwork		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal trait ● Perceptions ● Perspective 	Collaboration		

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Authoritarian ● Prior leadership 	Authority	Organizational Hierarchy	Power and Authority Dynamic (RQ2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Power dynamics 	Power dynamics		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hierarchy ● Escalation 	Hierarchy		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decision making ● Long term impact ● Responsibility ● Delegation ● Structured 	Decision-making		

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Career Advancement ● Competitiveness ● Excitement ● Expectations ● Job satisfaction 	Career Advancement	Growth and Learning	Personal and Professional Development (RQ3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional growth ● Maturity ● Networking ● Progression ● Striving for improvement 	Professional growth		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Growth ● Learning ● Requesting clarification ● Productivity ● Questioning 	Learning		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Skills development ● Skills ● Training ● Transition ● Employee development ● High expectations 	Skills development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experience-based learning ● Emulation ● Influence of past experiences ● Personal experience 	Experience-based learning		

Code	Sub Category	Description	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Workplace dynamics ● Organizational dynamics ● Value of institutional knowledge ● Duties ● Work ethic 	Workplace dynamics	Organizational Context	Workplace Culture and Environment (RQ3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organizational culture ● Organizational support ● Values 	Organizational culture		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work-life balance 	Work-life balance		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cultural factors 	Cultural factors		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diversity ● Inclusivity ● Racial Prejudice or bias 	Diversity and inclusion		