



Mining corporate boardrooms still a male club? Experiences and challenges faced by South African women

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Synopsis

Calls for transformation in the mining sector are legislated. Whilst the composition of boards in terms of gender diversity and equal representation has improved, little is known on how women directors experience boardrooms. This research investigated the experiences of South African women in male-dominated mining boards. It questions why women remain marginalised in boardrooms, even when they are qualified as the men in their respective fields.

The experiences of South African women on male-dominated mining boards were investigated by means of a multiple case study using a qualitative research methodology. Interviews were conducted with 16 women and 12 men serving across six JSE-listed South African mining companies. The findings show that irrespective of their qualification and experience, women's contributions are often ignored, and they are assigned to more social roles. Regardless of race, all women experienced gender stereotyping. Strategies are required to ensure that board cultures embrace female talent, where women can effectively contribute to decision-making and maximize their talent. It is argued that gender and identity should be studied in relation to post-colonial history in African countries. Women have multiple, varying identities, and their experiences require a unique investigation that would enable strategies to overcome barriers, through the implementation of an appropriate diversity management programme.

Keywords

women on boards, gender, identity, intersectionality, discrimination.

Introduction

The attraction and retention of women to positions in the mining industry is still a challenge (Makgala, 2020). The segregation of women in South Africa can be traced back to decades of colonialism followed by apartheid, which in combination with the system of mining exploration, largely excluded women from partaking in economic activities and meaningful occupations (Rungan, Cawood, and Minnit, 2005). Mining is a male-dominated space with deeply ingrained gender roles (Lahiri-Dutt, 2012). Mining played a major role in establishing gender roles and positions of power and influence in the South African economy. Since 2002, the industry has been forced by quota legislation (the Mining Charter) to transform its gender composition to include women at all levels, from underground to boardrooms. The recommendations of the Mining Charter suggest that female talent should be developed and nurtured in areas such as geology and mining engineering to improve female representation in these fields.

Despite the moral and business imperative, only a few companies have made significant strides in improving the number of women at board level, while many have no women, or only one or two woman board members (Moraka, 2018). Due to the slow progress, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) has established a policy for gender representation as part of their listing requirements to extend pressure on compliance. As it stands, mining companies have just between 12–19% female representation on their boards. This may imply that there is some resistance to greater representation of women.

In the South African and African context there is little research that explores how women experience being board members, and in particular the reception given to women who are recruited to male-dominated company boards. The purpose of the research reported here was to question why women remain marginalized on mining boards, to understand the experiences of women post recruitment, and how their identities affect their contribution to decision-making in boardrooms. Against this background, the project sought to determine the challenges that women of different races face in male-dominated sectors in a post-apartheid and post-colonial environment. Moreover, appropriate research methodologies or approaches added value in studying the conditions of women as intersectionality issues are considered.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognizes the importance of studying gender identities in a triad of 'race-class-gender', and

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regards how the triad impacts and intersects (Dlamini, 2013). In the same light, Patricia Hill Collins called for the realization that race, class, and gender are interrelated structures of oppression (Collins, 1998). To study oppression by considering intersectionality, Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) proposed that post-colonial theory, graphically depicted in Figure 1 as a conceptual frameworks, should apply a meso-level analysis to consider the unique socio-historical, political, economic, and cultural context in which to study gender and identity.

Intersectionality offers a dimension in that the research opportunity should take cognisance of the traditional roles men and women play, and how these roles affect gender identities and social constructions. It has thus become imperative for a diverse country, such as South Africa, to recognize that gender intersects with class, race, and ethnicity, and therefore requires intersectional analysis (hooks, 1981; Collins 1998; Dlamini, 2013, 2016; Nag, Arena, and Jones, 2022) to understand how this affects gender studies and the experiences of women (Nag, Arena & Jones 2022; Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009).

Exploring intersectionality is a suitable approach to understanding the construction roles of men and women in a unique South African context (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009), and to study how these constructions have changed, or not, in boards of directors. A research gap signifies that little attention has been paid to women's experiences in management (Nienaber and Moraka, 2016), the experiences of women in leadership positions (Dlamini, 2016; Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009), and women on boards (Moraka, 2018). The minimal representation of women on mining boards has provided the opportunity to investigate why women remain marginalized in leadership positions and why those appointed are not deemed to be contributing to the effectual change of board compositions. Intersectionality sees the social construction of identities as being affected by the uniqueness of each country and its cultural expectations. In the case of boards, social identity theory has been applied to gain an understanding of board dynamics and how different members relate to others from diverse groups.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory (SIT) provides a benchmark for the study of board dynamics and how each member of the group may integrate with or disengage from other board members. SIT (Tafel and Turner, 1979) holds that group members compare themselves with others along demographic lines, and that the extent to which they identify with the group depends on how much they have in common with other members.

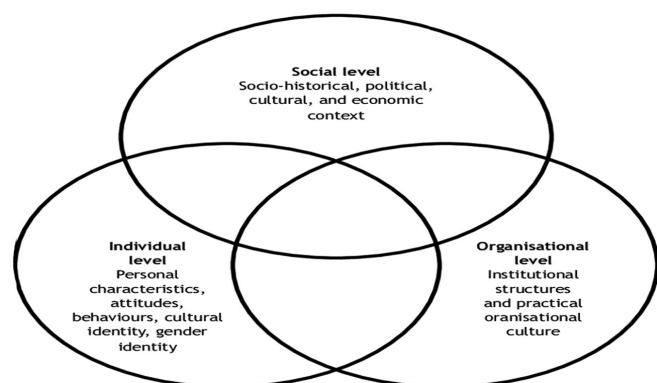


Figure 1—Meso-level framework for studying gender in Africa (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009, p. 61)

Gender is one salient feature that is associated with different groups and is used to place persons into different categories (Rothbart and John, 1985). However, race and class are paramount to categorize people or form the basis of their identities, and cannot be separated from gender (Dlamini, 2016; Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009). SIT further argues that in-group members are expected to have shared interests and objectives, and therefore cooperative behaviour should follow (Joshi and Jackson, 2003). The assumption of SIT is that male board members may demonstrate similar behaviour consistent with their individual interests. Consequently, out-groups, such as female board members, may easily be marginalized within the group, and the majority (male board members) may have a stronger influence by virtue of their greater number (Asch, 1955). Torchia, Calabró, and Huse (2011) maintain that members of the out-group, usually women, may be referred to as tokens, and as members of the out-groups or tokens, women may be doubted, or even mistrusted. As a result of such labelling, female directors may feel uncomfortable, isolated, and full of self-doubt (Mathisen, Ogaard, and Marnburg, 2013) and not able to exert much influence in the boardroom. According to SIT, there will typically be a tendency to listen more to the majority's (in-group) views and reject the ideas that come from minority representatives (out-group). The same as 'who has a voice and who not', and the fact that people identify with people like themselves, in line with SIT.

In efforts to deal with their out-group status, some women may build alliances with other directors (Huse and Solberg, 2006) or simply disengage. Since out-group tendencies are hard to break, as women are generally separated from the inner circle, for example, decisions are made before meetings, on the golf course, or at a dinner party with just the 'boys' attending. This makes it difficult for women directors to influence board decisions (Konrad, Kramer, and Erkut, 2008:154).

Research methodology

Studies on women in leadership positions or on boards have predominantly followed quantitative research methods in a quest to determine the financial impact of gender diversity (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009). Qualitative research was regarded as suitable for this study, as it aimed to investigate the challenges and experiences of women serving on mining boards. As substantiated by Scott (2010, pp. 234–235), qualitative research is important for understanding people's experiences of discrimination in particular settings and for probing women's own interpretations and understanding of their situations. Qualitative research is also invaluable for exploring the policy contexts that influence the opportunities and constraints that shape people's lives. Thus, qualitative research can help inform the way that quantitative researchers (some of whom are feminists) interpret what they write. The research method undertaken in this study comprised in-depth interviews, and the approach was a qualitative methodology using a multiple case study design, where women and men from different mining companies formed part of the sample.

Stanley (1990, p. 12) suggests that every possible method available should be used for investigating the state of women in marginalized societies. Qualitative methods are particularly favoured for their in-depth interview strategy, which is believed to achieve an 'equal' relationship between the researcher and the respondent (Letherby, 2015). In-depth interviews allowed the respondents to share their experiences in their own words (Stanley and Wise, 1983); becoming actively involved in the research process, thereby reducing the power imbalance between the interviewer

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and interviewee (Stanley and Wise, 1983). Various researchers have further noted the significance of in-depth interviews, which encourage different questions that place women's voices at the centre of the research (Hesse-Biber, 2014) and ensure that research is undertaken *for women*, rather than *about* women (Oakley, 1981). Research placing women at the centre of development allows the methodology and the research process to be transparent and ensures that the findings are clearly presented and open to critical analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Sampling and respondent selection

A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used to select companies and participants in this research. This strategy was useful as it enabled the researcher to use own judgement in the selection process (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Eisenhardt's (1989, p. 545) recommendation of cases (companies) between four and ten was used as a guideline for ensuring representativity of the population. To eliminate the difficulties of an unmanageable study in generating theory and ensuring empirical grounding (Perry, 2001, p. 313) six listed mining companies were selected. JSE-listed mining companies are leaders globally in terms of representations of women on boards (PWC, 2014). Thus, listed mining companies provided sound sources of information to include the best and worst performers that could be contrasted and compared in a quest for vigorous theoretical replication and thorough insight.

Three listed mining companies with three or more women on their boards were regarded as data-rich cases from which collect best-practice results (see Patton, 1990). The other three mining companies with no, one, or two women directors were considered as contrast cases. This multiple case study design allowed comparison of results within and contrasts between these two groups (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012).

The average size of a mining company board in South Africa is eight, and for this research three to six board members per company were interviewed. Board Chairs and CEOs granted permission for their boards to partake in the research. The selection criteria were based on availability of board members in the chosen companies and snowballing sampling was used to secure access to members. Informed consent was obtained for each respondent to partake in the research (Hesse-Biber, 2014) and anonymity and confidentiality of their responses were assured. The multiple-case study approach is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 2.

Profile of respondents

A total of 16 women participated in the study (11 Black, 1 Indian, 2 White, and 2 Mmxed race) and 12 men (6 Black, 1 Indian, 3 White, and 2 mixed race). The total racial and gender profile consisted of 17 Blacks (women = 11, men = 6), 2 Indians (1 woman and 1 man), 5 Whites (women = 2, men = 3) and 4 mixed race (women = 2, men = 2) (Tables I and II).

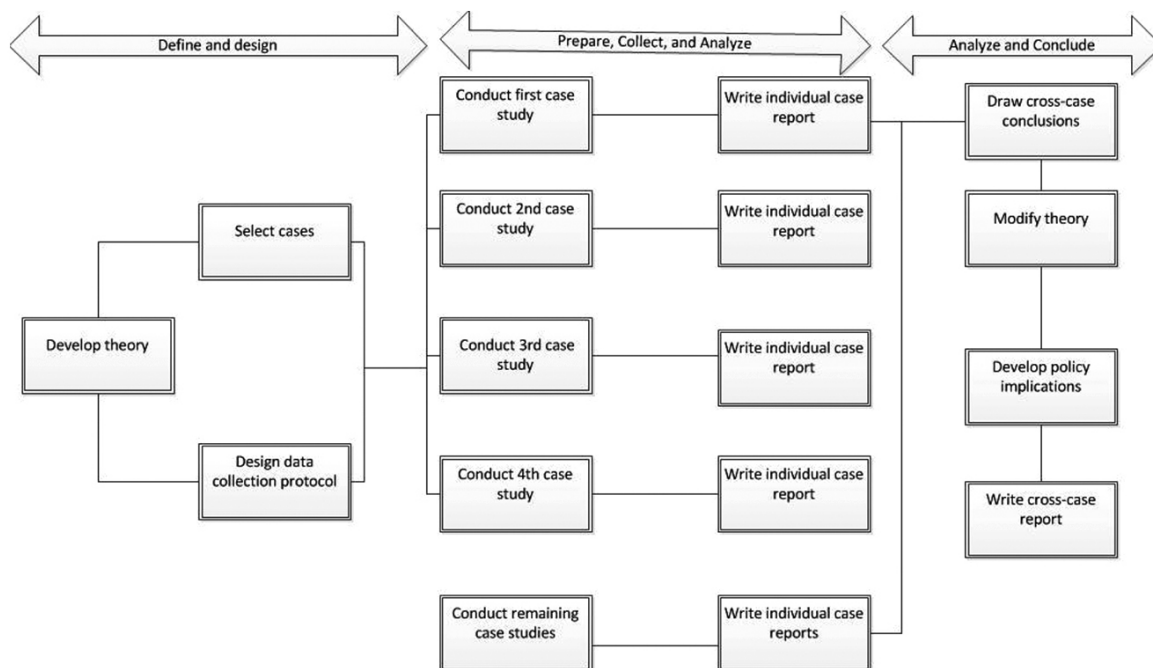


Figure 2—Representation of multiple cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014)

Race	Women	Field of expertise	Males	Field of expertise
Black	11	Finance (4), Legal (2), Business (5)	6	Business (4), Finance (2)
Indian	1	Finance	1	Finance
White	2	Finance (1), Business (1)	3	Engineering (1), Finance (2)
Mixed race	2	Finance (1), Business (1)	2	Business (1), Legal {1}

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Table II

Position profile of respondents

Positions	Race and gender
Board Chair	3 men (Black), 2 women (mixed race, Black)
Chief Executive Officer	4 men (2 White, 1 Indian, 1 Black]
Independent Non-Executive Director	9 women (8 Black, 1 White), 2 men (Black, mixed race)
Senior Executive	3 women (2 Black, 1 White), 1 man (mixed race)
Executive Director	2 women (Indian, mixed race) 2 men (Black)

Data analysis

Data analysis adhered to the measures of trustworthiness prescribed for qualitative research, which implies ensuring the dependability, credibility, construct validity, transferability, and conformability of the findings, data, and research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The interview transcript data was interpreted through thematic coding exercising member checking, which entails categorizing, analysing, and recording themes by organizing the data, and in describing it in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Coding was used to assign codes into categories and the respondents' answers were clustered into a limited number of categories (Cooper and Schindler, 2008, p. 424).

The coding process followed Hesse-Biber's (2014, p. 320) suggestion of the necessity of co-coding research to preserve conventional objectivity, while at the same time giving a voice to women or any oppressed groups. The co-coding process involved having others, who were not involved in the study hypothesis, code the responses (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 320). An independent qualitative analyst, who is a professor in psychology and nursing, a different field to that of the authors, whose expertise is in business management and sociology, became involved in co-coding the data from the nine initial interviews, which resulted in coding triangulation using two coding methods. Some coding was done electronically in Atlas.ti, while during the qualitative analysis, the transcripts were manually coded, after which they were independently studied and general themes were formulated.

All 28 interview transcripts were uploaded into Atlas.ti for thematic coding and to identify emerging themes. This process was done both electronically and manually, in conjunction with a peer-coding partner as explained earlier.

The main objective of thematic coding was to formulate brief expressions of sufficient accuracy to remain grounded in the text, and sufficient constructs to provide a conceptual understanding. The development of themes was grouped collectively relating to the conceptual connections. A theme is an expression of the latent content of text whereby a condensed meaning unit, a code, or a category can fit into more than one theme (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004, p. 107). This phase involved identifying patterns in the emerging themes and creating a structure that would be necessary to identify converging ideas. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants, in accordance with research ethics, when reporting quotes in the findings and discussion session.

Findings and discussion

It was found useful to employ the thematic structure of the meso-level framework of Nkomo and Ngambi (2009), as discussed earlier, to present the themes. This model was not discussed with any interviewees, and the structured questions for each interview were not drawn from the framework. The personal experiences of female and male leaders were investigated using their experiences post recruitment to the boardroom. The framework illustrated in Figure 3 confirms that the themes that emanated from the analysis did not contradict the meso-level framework.

Social levels

Nkomo and Ngambi's (2009) proposed that social issues be considered in studying gender and identity and that the socio-historical, political, cultural, and economic context of a country be included. This was found to be of importance in the current study, as the themes that emerged were strongly ingrained with patriarchal

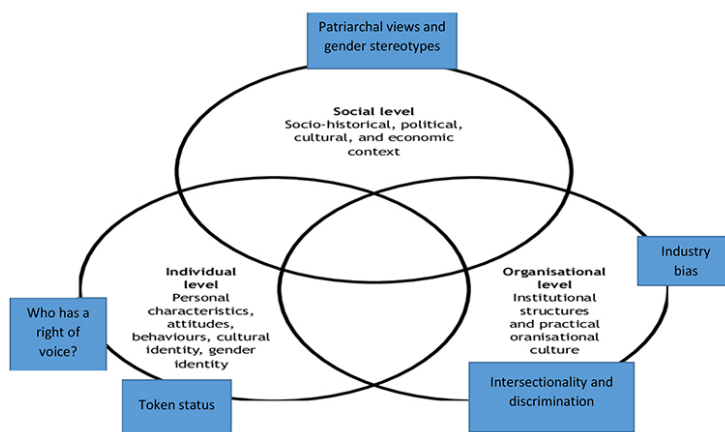


Figure 3—Thematic analysis within the meso-level framework

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views and gender stereotypes. Mining, historically, was (and still is) largely male-dominated, thus women are likely to be confronted with stereotyping and this must be investigated (Moraka and Jansen van Rensburg, 2015). At board level, where woman leaders are expected to contribute at a cognitive and strategic level, it was found that the stereotypes of gender and race also existed. The extent of those stereotypes is discussed in theme 1 below, which is related to the position of women at a social level.

Theme 1: Patriarchal views and gender stereotypes

Patriarchal views and gender stereotypes are reported in the context in which men positioned women in terms of their professional skills, *inter alia* what they could or could not do (Lari, Al-Ansari, and El-Maghraby, 2022). Stereotypes imply that women may be expected to perform only certain roles in society. Cotterill, Jackson, and Letherby (2007) affirmed the probability that women in male-dominated professions were likely to face a 'double-bind' position. Data supports this, as women are expected to be efficient professionals with a high level of expertise but are simultaneously expected to act 'womanly' by demonstrating feminine compassion, care, and support, while showing subordination to male board members. The double-bind position reaffirms the arguments of the social role theory, which holds that men and women would act according to the stereotypes and beliefs associated with the social roles they occupy (Eagly, 1987; Lari, Al-Ansari, and El-Maghraby, 2022). However, not all women conform to the attributes of the stereotypical expectation of feminine qualities. For example, at the time of the interview, Olivia (Black female) did not intend to marry and have a family and did position men as in need of care, which she was not willing to provide.

'I am not married; I don't have children. In life you make choices, and you must embrace the consequences of those choices and like I always say that I hardly have time to go do my nails, where am I going to get the time to look after a human being who depends upon me, because men can be like babies. I find that in relationships and marriages it's mostly the woman who sacrifice a lot. She must dim her life somewhat so that she doesn't blind the man, chase the man away and I'm not sure if I'm prepared to do that, with the children, with kids as I say, I'm selfish with my time and my career because I'm just growing so much, and I don't want to sacrifice the opportunities to grow' (Olivia).

Regardless of Olivia's position on choosing a career and remaining unmarried, it was clear that the men on boards who participated in the study still expected women to maintain stereotypical views and accept stereotypical roles. The quote below by Kate (Black female) explains how men in boardrooms perceive women in terms of societal role expectations.

'The woman is either the cleaner or the PA. Men in boardrooms have never experienced a woman in power or in [an executive] position. They tend to think we're good for HR and others, not in a technical role, not in a mining engineering role, not in an accounting role, not in a legal role' (Kate).

Jago and Vroom (1982) cautioned on the different expectations related to the behaviour of men and women in boardrooms. It was found that men held women to their expectations, although they did not expect the same from themselves. The quote below by John (Indian male) clearly demonstrates that women were considered 'good' if they contributed to effective team management, while also behaving in a womanly manner. Yet their contributions in boardrooms was mainly overlooked.

'Their ability to deal with crisis is much better, I notice. They are quite calm. They are very good managers of their teams, and they stand by their teams, and they fight for the team, and they are more prone to speak their minds' (John).

While the assertions made by John may be regarded as the inherent strengths of women, these expectations reinforce the stereotypical roles that men are rational, aggressive, dominant, and confident, while women are emotional (Diekmann and Schneider, 2010; Hochschild, 1990). This undermines the ability of women to be regarded as confident and able to contribute at a cognitive level. The following quote from Busi, a Black woman, shows that the responsibilities of and expectations from women differ from those of men on boards. Furthermore, she demonstrates that women have socially constructed responsibilities which they are expected to execute, but it can be 'cautioned' that these responsibilities stereotypically define women as emotional, and therefore, not rational.

'Even on the health and safety side there's kind of ideas we bring forward other than the ideas around safety that have to do with technical aspects of safety. [Women] bring a more humane aspect of safety, how you get your board into safety consciousness by the miners and so on' (Busi).

These findings demonstrate that women are often associated with the social role they occupy, and are expected to accept their 'talent', which further reduces their board presence as value-adding members. Commonly, despite the male participants reporting that they expect women to display their talent in the boardroom, most women felt that their contributions were ignored (as discussed later). Women faced a double bind, because irrespective of being assertive (which men said they expected from them) or less assertive, they were assessed negatively. Letherby (2015) opined that women should be regarded as value-adding board members, and not just because of the roles associated with stereotypical gendered emotion and work. The results demonstrated that women are placed in contradictory role expectations, which may ultimately affect their personal and professional lives should they fail to even attempt the two simultaneously.

Individual levels

Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) recommend that gender studies in Africa should consider individual identities, such as personal characteristics, attitudes, behaviours, and cultural and gender identity. Although unique characteristics were identified in each board member in the sample, similar characteristics were identified among the male members (even between White and Black males), consistent with the SIT. Despite their race, male board members appeared to display similarities in thinking, attitudes, and behaviours. Combined with these attitudes was the board composition that had men as the majority (the in-group), which automatically rendered women as an out-group. Thematic description demonstrated that most women were appointed as tokens to boardrooms. Most Black women believed their appointment to be a response to legislation, and the disregard of their talent reinforced their belief of being categorized as token appointees.

Theme 2: Token status

Regardless of their numerical representation in companies, even in companies with a critical mass (three or more women), the thematic analysis demonstrated that women across cases, particularly Black women whose quotes appear in this theme, had similar experiences

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and feelings regarding tokenism, which was confirmed by how men related to them and treated them on boards.

Khanyi, a Black woman, provided evidence of how women are labelled token appointees. She explained how male directors dismissed their skills and contributions because men put women on these boards to increase numerical representation.

'They don't care about your skills ... but for me I believe I need to put that away because I've got a skill and I've got a contribution to make not because I am just a woman' (Khanyi).

A Black female, Grace, mentioned that she did not even know why she was chosen for the appointment, although she possessed extensive experience on boards (10 years). By implication, she felt that she was not suitably and appropriately qualified for a position in the mining sector.

'I was quite upfront to them to say I don't know what made you guys decide to get a candidate of my stature because I'm not going to lie to you and say I understand your business, I don't. But I will try my level best to do what I can ...' (Grace).

It was found that SIT acted as an enabler of token appointments to boards, mainly so that men can retain their in-group status. According to tokenism theory, if any board appoints one or two directors especially to comply with legislation, this can be regarded as tokenism (Arfken, Bellar, and Helms, 2004; Branson, 2007). The underlying argument of tokenism is that it is hard to believe that the appointment of just one woman is made so that she was able to contribute (Broome, 2008).

The literature suggests that tokens on boards face various challenges, such as being ignored and their contributions being dismissed by the men (Glass and Cook, 2016). This was reported by Grace, a Black woman, who described that despite her 15-years' board experience, she still felt undermined on boards, where her opinions and suggestions were disregarded in meetings, and she felt that she was there to tick a box.

'I felt that the was that tendency of condescending, where two members of the board who are the executive board members feel that the board is there just rubber stamp what they've done and what they are doing. When you then start questioning things then it becomes an irritation. When you come up with suggestion, there is no follow-through on the suggestion. All those kinds of things and I felt frustrated every time there was going to be a board meeting because I truly feel that we are not taken seriously as board members and there is this element to [ensure that] we've ticked the box. We have black people in the board, it's not really a business imperative. I didn't see us adding value and that became the key factors that made it possible for me to say I just don't care at this point but I'm not going to see myself sitting in this board forever' (Grace).

These assertions describe in a powerful way the lack of talent recognition of women, poor talent management, and how appointing women as tokens enables men to hold power as dominants and upholds their ability to influence decisions and retain power and influence (Penner, Torro-Tulla, and Huffman, 2012). It thus become obvious that the attitudes of men in boardrooms affects the retention of female talent, talent that is disregarded.

Theme 3: Who has a right of voice?

Efforts to conduct research for women and other marginalized groups with the aim of finding the subdued groups' voices and investigating ways of thinking that have been undervalued by

dominant, patriarchal forms of knowledge, while encouraging social change and justice (Hesse-Biber, 2014) are imperative. Findings demonstrate that the way of thinking of men on boards was generally intended to silence women's voices and undermine their talent (Moraka, 2018). The women participants reported on how important it was to them for their contribution to count in boardroom decisions. According to Mary (a Black woman), the dismissal of the voice of women was apparent. The disregard of women's inputs to board decisions contributed to low morale and their confidence was affected by the culture of resistance.

'It is just people being undermined; that happens a lot. That is a big problem because there are undertones in the boardroom, some people are more respected than others and some people when they speak, they are not respected. Some views are more important than others. The bullies win more than the people that are not bullies. Women who are not confident cannot succeed in the boardroom, so confidence as a big thing. If you do not have it, it is a big thing for you as a person because of the nuances and the undertones. There are people, directors who are extremely dominant. All the boards, there are directors who dominate more than others. You're going to find that in everybody, because [when] you speak, they don't know what you were going to talk about and then they just chop you down. They do that, they undermine you and they cut you to sizes' (Mary).

Findings affirm that, on boards, men have the privilege of voice, and silence women by being unreceptive to their contributions. This is still the case 30 years after Eagly (1987) reported that although women were recruited to boards, they were still denied their voice, which affected their retention as board members. Afrikaans-speaking (White) men seemed to be the most powerful, most dominant, and influential individuals in boardrooms. This explains why Black women felt like they had to earn the trust of White men. Although Black men also ignored the talent of women, for most Black women, working hard to earn the trust of White men was paramount to being accepted as members of the in-group (men – who were dominantly White). Helen, a Black female explains this:

'In a mining space – it is a boy's club. Sometimes it is difficult for them to accept they are wrong coming from a Black woman who is not a miner. Those guys have been in that industry for 50 years and they feel there's nothing you can tell them. You also come from an environment that was oppressive to women. African culture is not supportive of strong women' (Helen).

These findings demonstrate that women who break the glass ceiling only find another layer of unreceptive behaviour from men, who can exercise their right of voice and remain dominant. While women are there as token members, men have the autonomy to use their power (Eagly, 1987; Motshegwa, 2013).

Organizational levels

Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) proposed that organizational levels of studying gender and identity should encompass institutional structures, and practical organizational structures.

Theme 4: Industry bias as an excuse to delay transformation

We found that the organizational outlook of each mining company was linked to the overall industry history as a male-dominated space. Another revelation was that the mining industry's historical legacy was used purposively to delay transformation, inferring that little representation of women on boards was to be expected and that no attention was given to talent management.

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'It's a male-dominated space and white male, for that matter. That did not bother me because for as long as I remember being in private space, I have always been one woman, 13 men. It's always been like that; I just believe that most top positions in the country are still male dominated. Ask me why, I can't tell you, but that's the nature of the beast' - (Grace).

While findings suggest that boards of mining companies are similar to others in terms of composition, Caroline (mixed-race) and Mary (Black woman) took it further, explaining that the mining sector is preconditioned with its own indoctrinated mind-set that influences how women behave and face performance pressures from a hostile environment.

'We swear, we could shout at each other across the table' (Caroline).

'The culture is male and steep[ed] in all traditions. When I came here, I became very confused because to a very large extent I felt my brain was clouded by the environment. It was not even clouded; it was polluted' (Mary).

It was found that women were deeply affected by the culture of mining, which impacted mostly the confidence of Black women and influenced their ability to effectively utilize their talent. Indeed, many studies have proved that the confidence of women entering previously male-dominated industries would be affected (Budhwar and Sparrow, 2002; Mathisen, Ogaard, and Marnburg, 2013). However, this does not explain how and why they were affected.

Theme 5: Intersectionality and discrimination

Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) found that while African women in leadership positions are substantially affected by gender-related social and structural organizational hurdles in their careers, they are also affected by race. Conversations with respondents in this research showed that race, class, and gender intersect and affect women and men in different ways. Much has been reported on Black women's experiences, more than women of any race, regarding subtle discrimination, and sometimes overt discrimination. A Black woman, Busi, reported that White women had closer relationships with other White board members (including men). Busi believes that these relationships provided White women with an edge over Black women. It could then be assumed that White women did not experience race discrimination, but experienced gender discrimination and stereotyping.

'The relationship that the white board members have [with] the white executives, they have very robust kind of special relations, whereas I know them very well, I have a good relationship with them, but they will not invite me to their home'. (Busi).

Black women felt they worked harder than any other group to earn respect from their colleagues. According to Juliet, Black women face these challenges regardless of the industry in which they are appointed. Findings demonstrate that Black women's identities were still subjected to different expectations and stereotypes. It was also noted that the confidence of Black women was negatively affected in the process.

Various scholars (hooks, 1981; Collins, 1998; Dlamini, 2016; Hekman, 2015; Nag, Arena, and Jones 2022) have reported that Black women have not yet experienced freedom and equality, and consequently, even if they are appointed to boards, they are still exposed to inequalities even though they are suitably qualified for the job. These findings support a strong suggestion that Black women face triple oppression as a result of their gender, race, and class (Collins, 1998; Dlamini, 2017).

Contribution, limitations, and future research

This article contributes in three ways, namely theoretically, methodologically, and through its implications for management. Theoretical contributions are made to research on women on boards, particularly in Africa, an area which is sorely lacking (Nienaber and Moraka, 2016). The investigation into the experiences of women in leadership positions shows that the talents of women, regardless of their qualifications and experience, are not optimally used. This adversely affects their confidence, and they are classed as minorities where their voices are limited, or are forced to become congruent to the men who are in the majority, in fear of marginalization. The theoretical contribution of this article highlights that women are also categorized in classes, and race plays a big role, although all women are affected by gender stereotyping.

Stanley (1990) recommends that the situation of women in a patriarchal society should be studied using every means possible. As such, this study adopted an approach that presents the unique methodological contribution of investigating women's issues, considering how South African history has affected gender identities and behavioural patterns. Indeed, the historical domination of the mining industry by men would affect how male leaders relate to women. Indeed, it was found that among all races, Black women cited perpetual inequalities, which they attributed to their race, gender, and class.

In practice, regarding managerial implications it can be suggested that the representation of women on mining boards should be improved. The pool of women ready to serve on boards is available, and opportunities should be made available for women to apply for board positions. This research showed that women want to contribute, they want to be valued and feel like they are contributing.

This research suffered from several limitations. Firstly, with Black board members formed most of the sample, with limited participation from other racial groups. Had more White, Indian, and mixed-race women participated in the study, other interesting findings could have been established. Care was taken not to assume that women on all boards face similar prejudice. Thus, future research should focus on the experiences of White women and of other races who did not comment about the extent of prejudice in boards.

Conclusion and recommendations

Low female representation on boards across the world suggests that the talents of women are untapped, and this may leave societies impoverished (Nienaber and Moraka 2016). This article shows that although a few women are recruited to South African mining boards in the pursuit of balanced representation, women still face structural inequalities, as well as gender discrimination. These women are merely token appointees to satisfy the pressure for inclusion which is required by legislation. A rhetorical statement that the industry has been historically male-dominated, and that it is to be expected that women would face gender stereotyping, perpetuates the industry bias and inequalities.

The inequalities are further perpetuated by social expectations, which determine gender-role stereotypes, whereby the expectations are higher for women. A double-bind position women face is that they are expected to be experts as well as emotional beings, yet their expertise is ignored. The intersectionality of gender, particularly with race, was evident in this study where male counterparts regarded Black women as part of the lower class on boards. These factors further pressurized Black woman directors to assimilate to

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the male culture, specifically to earn the respect of White males, and this validation-seeking made them feel that they had to work harder than the rest, again perpetuating inequalities.

It is suggested that the barriers to the development and retention of women on boards can be eradicated through a comprehensive gender diversity management programme that encompasses 'an equality culture' related to the recruitment, development, and retention of directors. The culture of equality should be reinforced in the following manner.

1. Women should be appointed on merit and not to satisfy social pressures
2. Women should insist on be 'heard' in board decisions and should participate in recruitment to ensure the entry of more women
3. There should be a focus on the development of female board members where they are empowered post-recruitment. Retention gets a lot of attention when development is planned, so that women can overcome the barriers that exclude them from participating
4. Diversity workshops should be held to encourage the acknowledgement of varying viewpoints and differences in race and culture
5. Women's support programmes should be established
6. Identity and self-mastery workshops should be held where each individual board member may recognize their strengths and have the confidence to contribute to boardroom decision-making.

It is also important for individual board members to view all women as value-adding members in the boardroom.

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